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Land off Northcote Hill, (Phase I and II), Honiton

Landscape Visual Appraisal

On behalf of **Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd.**

Project Ref: 333102063 | Rev: - | Date: Feb 2025

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Published Landscape Character Assessment Extracts

1 Introduction

1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 Stantec's specialist Landscape Planning and Design group (Stantec) was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd. in February 2025 to provide Landscape and Visual advice to inform the potential for residential development ('the Proposed Development') at land north and south of Northcote Hill (the 'Site'), and to provide a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) summarising this advice.
- 1.1.2 The principal elements of the LVA are an analysis of the landscape context of the Site, including landform, vegetation, transport features and settlement pattern; identification and summaries of relevant landscape planning policy; analysis of published landscape character assessments encompassing the Site; an appraisal of the character of the Site itself; and a description of the visual characteristics of the Site in its context in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.1.3 The LVA process has been used to develop a series of landscape development principles based on a robust analysis of the landscape and visual characteristics of the Site and its context, with the aim of avoiding or reducing adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity and optimising beneficial change in the landscape and in views. The methodology used for the LVA is drawn from principles of good practice in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

2 Site Context

2.1 Location

- 2.1.1 As shown in **Figure 1**, the Site is located on the eastern edge of Honiton, on land to the north and south of the roadway of Northcote Hill.

2.2 Topography

- 2.2.1 As shown in **Figure 2**, The River Otter in the vicinity of the Site has formed a deep river valley with slopes that rise up dramatically from the valley floor at approximately 90 metres (m) Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to form plateau ridge tops which lie at over 200m AOD. The Otter valley is broadly aligned in a south-west to north-east direction with several side valleys, notably to the north. This creates a more irregular pattern in this area, whereas on the south-eastern side of the valley, the ridge line runs broadly parallel to the course of the River Otter.
- 2.2.2 On the south-eastern valley flanks, several small streams flow south-east to north-west and reinforce the regular pattern of the valley flank. The stream in the eastern extent of the Site, however, flows in a north and north-easterly direction before turning north-west to join the River Otter. This creates a north-north-easterly orientated localised ridgeline in the centre of the Site, with an east-facing slope; and a bowl in the eastern part of the Site, that is distinct from the more regular topographical pattern along the valley flanks to the south-west.
- 2.2.3 The small side valley flowing out of the eastern bowl of the Site is contained by a ridgeline to the north-east, on which is situated Higher Northcote Farm. This valley and ridgeline provide containment to existing development in Honiton and the valley terminates the alignment of the north-north-easterly ridgeline extending through the centre of the Site.

2.3 Settlement

- 2.3.1 Honiton has developed along the line of an ancient Roman road, which now forms the High Street. The roadway was formed to the south of the river and the flood plain, following the even slopes of the southern valley flank. Modern communication routes including the Exeter-London A30 and South-West Mainline railway also follow a similar alignment. In addition, the route of high voltage cables on pylons extends along the Otter valley, entering from the east via the side valley in which the eastern part of the Site is located.
- 2.3.2 The settlement of Honiton grew in a linear pattern along this corridor, as well as extending south onto the lower slopes of the Otter valley up to approximately 160m AOD, creating a wave like pattern on the north-western facing slopes following the regular undulations in the landform, including a more marked extension south into the valley of The Gissage stream, approximately 2.1km to the south-west of the Site. The settlement extends approximately 4.2km along the valley flanks, reaching north-east as far as the north-eastern extent of Otter Valley Park, which is contained by the stream flowing from the eastern part of the Site. It is noted that development in the northern part of the Site (Phase 1), flanking Otter Valley Park is subject of 'Resolution to approve subject to conditions and completion of a S106' from East Devon District Council Planning Committee in September 2023. To the south-west, the ongoing linear development pattern is being continued by development west of Hayne Lane.
- 2.3.3 Land use is varied surrounding the Site. To the immediate north-west, Otter Valley Park comprises residential park homes. Commercial and residential development adjoining Monkton Road connects Otter Valley Park to the rest of the settlement to the south-west. Commercial uses on the High Street lie approximately 780m from the Site, just to the west of the junction of the High Street with the A35 King's Road/Axminster Road.

- 2.3.4 The southern part of the Site includes an extensive tree nursery with associated built forms. The wider landscape to the north, east and south of the Site comprises open agricultural fields and occasional farmsteads, albeit communication routes are key features, including the A35, which links Honiton with the central south coast, including the significant urban areas of Poole and Bournemouth.

2.4 Designations

- 2.4.1 There are no designations for landscape quality of value within the Site. However, immediately to the north, east and south lies the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB); and further to the south lies the East Devon National Landscape. The National Landscape boundaries are drawn tightly around the south-eastern edge of Honiton, with the exception of land within the Site and land to the south-west, between Hale Farm and the railway line. This reflects the established pattern and influence of the settlement of Honiton and major communication routes on the lower slopes of the valley flank. It is noted that the fact that development in Honiton extends to the boundaries of the National Landscapes means that such development is not, in principle, deemed inappropriate in their setting. Details of the National Landscape Management Plans can be found in Section 3.
- 2.4.2 There are no heritage assets (listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments) within the Site or in its immediate vicinity.
- 2.4.3 The Site does not lie within a Conservation Area. Honiton Conservation Area at its nearest point to the Site is approximately 720m to the west of the Site.

2.5 Public Rights of Way and Access

- 2.5.1 As shown in **Figure 1**, the network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in the landscape around the Site is largely limited to a number of PRoWs on elevated land to the south of the Site. A single PRoW, Honiton 13, extends through the Site in a broadly north-south alignment linking Northcote Hill to Perrie Hale along the nursery track. This PRoW extends further south-west and connects with the wider network of PRoWs.

3 Landscape Character

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 Landscape Character Assessment is a descriptive approach which seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. This approach ensures that account is taken of the different roles and characters of different areas, following principles set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and (PPG).
- 3.1.2 The extent of Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in the vicinity of the Site, as featured in published assessments, is illustrated in **Figure 3**.

3.2 National

NCA 147: Blackdowns

- 3.2.1 The site and surrounding landscape are situated within National Character Area (NCA) 147: Blackdowns. The key characteristics of the Blackdowns NCA of relevance to the Site and Study Area comprise the following:

- *“Long, flat-topped Greensand ridges create distinctive landscape features offering far-reaching views. Narrow, steep-sided valleys with a strong sense of enclosure dissect the ridges and contrast with the broad, open valley of the River Axe with its flood plain (...);*
- *A landscape drained by small streams radiating out from the ridges into rivers with relatively short courses south to the sea. Springs emerge from the interface of the Greensand and clays.*
- *Densely-wooded, steep scarp slopes with both ancient oak woodland, carpeted in bluebells and primroses, and conifer plantations which extend onto the ridges. Across the valleys a strong hedgerow pattern with hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands exists with carr woodland along some watercourses. The combination of these woodlands and their location gives the perception that the area is relatively well wooded;*
- *A mainly pastoral landscape with small, irregular fields of medieval origin on the slopes and in the smaller valleys. Across the wider valleys and flood plains there is a transition to larger fields and the occurrence of some arable. Regular modern and Parliamentary enclosure fields of medium and large scale feature on the Greensand ridges; ...*
- *Beech-topped hedgebanks, many now grown out, characterise the Greensand plateaux, with wider historic banks in the upper farmed valleys and more species-diverse Devon hedgerows (for example, beech, sycamore, ash, hazel, blackthorn and gorse)*

with flower, fern and moss-rich banks on the lower slopes;

- *A mosaic of diverse semi-natural habitats: chalk grassland to unimproved acidic grassland; ancient oak woodland to carr woodland; springline mires to estuary mudflats;*
- *A very strong time-depth across the area, evident in bronze-age barrows in elevated positions on the ridges; iron-age hill forts on upper valley slopes; Roman roads including the Fosse Way; ruined castles and abbeys; and Second World War defences;*
- *An ancient dispersed settlement pattern with clustered hamlets and villages at road or river crossings, along springlines or at the mouth of rivers and estuaries. Farmsteads scattered throughout, nestled in dips or along springlines, with a noticeable occurrence of beech shelterbelts;*
- *Strong local vernacular reflecting the geology: cob and thatch, grey limestone buildings, sandstone buildings with slate roofs and red brick detailing, Beer stone churches, and the locally distinctive chert (flintlike nodules) with red brick detailing and slate roofs;*
- *The ridges are characterised by straight roads with verges and featuring beech avenues. These descend abruptly to sinuous lanes tightly enclosed by hedgebanks;*
- *An area offering opportunities to experience tranquillity, outstanding natural beauty in three designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and recreation, particularly along the South West Coast Path National Trail and the East Devon Way regional route” (p.6).*

3.2.2 Within the Statements of Environmental Opportunity section of the NCA profile, a number of landscape management guidelines are identified including:

- *“(…) SEO 2: Protect and manage the tranquil, enclosed valleys and the network of streams, springs and associated semi-natural habitats set within a farmed landscape, for the maintenance and enhancement of livelihoods, public enjoyment and ecosystem services;*
- *SEO 3: Protect and manage the open, exposed character of the ridgetop plateaux and the associated rich cultural heritage. Plan for the restoration and extension of semi-natural habitats and promote and create opportunities to enhance public understanding and enjoyment.*

- *SEO 4: Protect the relatively unsettled, rural character of this nationally important landscape, maintaining open skylines and historic settlement form. Reflect the local vernacular and geodiversity in new development and encourage provision of high-quality green infrastructure” (pp. 16-20).*

3.2.3 An additional landscape management opportunity is also proposed, which seeks to:

- *“Maintain and strengthen the wooded character of the area; manage the network of species-rich hedgerows; manage and extend semi-natural woodland, particularly on steep scarp slopes...” (p.20).*

3.3 County

Devon Landscape Character Assessment (2013)

3.3.1 As shown in **Figure 3**, the character area encompassing the Site and study area in the county-wide landscape character assessment is identified as Character Area: Blackdown Hills, which includes the following characteristic features:

- *“Elevated plateau underlain by clay-with-flints fringed by steep slopes of Upper Greensand;*
- *Landscape drained by streams and springs radiating out from the plateau area and draining into the Culm or Otter valley;*
- *Higher ground sparsely wooded with characteristic beech hedgebanks and some pine shelterbelts;*
- *Steep scarp slopes that are densely wooded – ancient oak with bluebells and primroses; and some conifer plantations which extend onto the ridges;*
- *Regular modern and Parliamentary fields of large and medium scale on the plateaux, reflecting late enclosure of common land, contrasting with smaller curving fields of medieval origin on valley slopes;*
- *Low narrow earthbanks with hedges on plateaux; with wider historic banks in the upper farmed valleys; and more species-diverse Devon hedges (e.g. beech, sycamore, ash, hazel and gorse) with flower, fern and moss-rich banks on lower slopes;*
- *Mainly pasture (often improved) and dairy farming with some mixed farming on heavy brown soils;*
- *Remnant areas of gorse, heathland and bracken on the plateau; ancient semi-natural and broadleaved woodlands on the scarp slopes; semi-improved and unimproved acidic and neutral grassland and springline*

mires (including carr woodland) occurring mainly on the scarp slope and in the upper farmed valleys;

- *Bronze Age barrows in elevated positions on ridges; former castle sites in prominent locations at the ends of narrow ridges overlooking valleys; ancient settlement remains; remains of Cistercian abbey at Dunkeswell, all lending strong time-depth;*
- *Clustered hamlets and villages at road crossings and spring lines. Farmsteads scattered throughout, nestled in dips with beech shelterbelts;*
- *Straight roads with verges on narrow ridges descending abruptly and steeply to sinuous lanes defined tightly by close hedgebanks;*
- *Very distinctive building tradition that uses local cherts (flint-like nodules occurring occurs within greensand) with red brick detailing and slate roofs;*
- *Strong overarching perceptions of tranquillity and remoteness in many areas” (DCC¹)*

3.4 Local

East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

3.4.1 Fiona Fyfe Associates in conjunction with Countryside and Robin Lines Landscape prepared the East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment (EDBHLCA) on behalf of Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, East Devon AONB and the Blackdown Hills AONB. The 2019 EDBHLCA supersedes the 2008 assessment.

3.4.2 The Site falls within Landscape Character Type (LCT) 3A: Upper Farmed and Wooded Slopes and provides the following description:

“This LCT occurs in the eastern half of the Study Area, and also immediately north of Exeter. It sits between the wooded scarps and the gentler, more settled, lower valleys. This is an ancient and settled landscape, containing patchworks of irregular fields, woodland, winding lanes, scattered farms and small villages, often with square-towered churches. There are several small parklands and estate villages, and a high density of archaeological and historical sites. This creates a timeless quality and strong sense of history. Its pleasing compositions and distinctive landscape patterns created by hedgerows, trees and irregular fields inspired early C. 20th abstract artists. The Upper Farmed and Wooded Valley Slopes is relatively small in scale with an intimate feel. There are many attractive views within this LCT, and it also forms the foreground of views from higher land above.” (p.46)

3.4.3 Key characteristics include:

¹ Sourced from Devon County Council Planning, (<https://new.devon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policies/landscape/devon-character-areas/east-devon-area/blackdown-hills>), Accessed 10/01/2019

- *“Undulating upper valley slopes on Greensand, below the scarp slopes or plateaux. Small V-shaped valleys on upper slopes.*
- *Deciduous woodland and copses, especially on upper slopes. Hedgerow trees (mostly oak and ash) and some parkland trees add to the green and lush appearance.*
- *Well-treed pastoral farmland, with some arable cultivation on lower slopes. Small to medium-size fields with irregular boundaries. Associated with traditional Devon smallholdings.*
- *Rich concentration of archaeological sites from all periods, but with many surviving medieval features including field patterns, churches, farms, villages and lanes.*
- *Wide, species-rich hedges with many hedgerow trees. Grassland, stream and woodland habitats add to rich biodiversity.*
- *A dispersed settlement pattern of isolated farms and small villages. Villages are often nucleated around a church, and contain local stone (chert) and cob buildings. Some are estate villages.*
- *Very winding narrow lanes, many sunken with high banks and flower-rich verges.*
- *An intimate and intricate landscape with wider views often confined by vegetation. Where views occur, they contain distinctive patchwork patterns of fields.*
- *Relatively remote and tranquil with little obvious modern development.*
- *Association with the early C.20th Camden Town school of artists in Blackdown Hills.”*

3.4.4 The assessment includes sections within each LCT titled *“What Makes this Landscape Special”* in which the following statement is made in reference to landscape matters for LCT: 3A:

“Exceptionally high scenic quality, with landscape patterns visible from surrounding higher ground, and viewpoints within the LCT. This quintessential Devon landscape continues to inspire visitors and artists, and there is a sense of dropping-down into wide vistas. Dark skies are characteristic at night” (p.47).

3.4.5 Within the assessment a further additional section titled *“Forces for change acting on this LCT”* includes the following of relevance to landscape and visual matters:

“Past and current forces for change

- *Development pressure, particularly around Honiton.*
- *Linear growth of settlements along valleys.*
- *Need for additional housing, including affordable housing for local people.*
- *Increased size of farm buildings, and changing patterns of farming resulting in a smaller number of larger holdings. Traditional farm buildings becoming redundant or changing in character.*
- ...
- *Damage to banks alongside narrow lanes by wide/ fast vehicles (including farm machinery), and unnecessary signage on village approaches affecting the character of rural lanes.*

Future forces for change

- ...
- *Light pollution, particularly bright lights in farm yards/ buildings.*
- *Upgrading of roads (particularly the A30) increasing their visibility in the landscape.*
- *Continued development pressure.”*

3.4.6 The EDBHLCA provides Landscape Guidelines under three headings – Protect, Manage and Plan.

“Protect

- *The historic fabric of the landscape, and its settings, including (for example) churches, houses, farms, estates and archaeological sites.*
- *Historic farm buildings, exploring alternative uses for redundant buildings which retain their external appearance.*
- *The distinctive patchwork field patterns, associated with traditional Devon smallholdings and often dating back to the medieval period.*
- *The character of rural lanes, resisting pressure for unnecessary signage, particularly at the entrance to villages.*

Manage

- *Hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote traditional hedgerow management techniques, and repair gaps in degraded hedgerows.*
- *Woodlands, aiming to promote age and species diversity, using traditional techniques (e.g coppicing) where possible. Link woodland blocks with copses and tree belts to improve habitat resilience. Encourage the planting of deciduous edges to conifer plantations. If necessary replace lost ash trees, using best practice guidance to identify locally-appropriate species.*
- *Grassland sites, promoting appropriate grazing to control scrub and maintain unimproved grassland, flushes and wildflower meadows.*

Plan

- ...
- ...
- *Carefully consider the impacts of proposed development on upper slopes, as these sites are often particularly visible in wider views.*
- *Retain the pattern of small-scale settlements constructed of local materials.*
- *Improve integration of new development into the wider landscape, specifically through characteristic landscape features such as hedges, earth banks and small woodlands.*
- *Where new dwellings are required, they should be carefully sited with regard to the traditional settlement form. For example, avoid linear development up the valley side above a nucleated village.*
- *Where appropriate, look to enhance the Public Rights of Way network in order to connect existing routes and create circular trails.*

...”

Relevance of East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment (March 2019) to the vicinity of the Site

- 3.4.7 The EDBHLCA focuses on the Landscape Character Types which, as noted within the report ‘are generic types of landscape which can occur in different places’ (p.11). For this reason, the absence of geographically specific distinctive characteristics is noted. This undermines the robustness of the assessment where there are distinct variations within the Landscape Character Types (LCTs), especially with regard to the influence Honiton exerts on landscape character in its immediate vicinity within the type LCT 3A. To understand how development pressures in different parts of each LCT, notably in the vicinity of Honiton, should be managed, there should be clear distinction made between different geographic areas of the LCTs. This is

typically provided in the Landscape Character Assessment process through the use of Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) to subdivide the LCTs as relevant.

- 3.4.8 The Study Area includes *“the whole of East Devon District ... plus the entirety of the Blackdown Hills AONB”* (p.4). The urban areas in this Study Area have also been highlighted within Map 3 as *“7. Main cities and towns”*. Although the report does not explicitly exclude the urban areas from the assessment of adjoining areas, the exploration of the influence of such urban areas is limited. For instance, in the case of LCT 3A, Honiton is mentioned under Forces for Change but the assessment provides no further characteristics associated with the urban area. This is a fundamental omission in the document as the settlement of Honiton and its associated infrastructure and transport networks is substantial and, importantly, the combination of these factors exerts considerable influence on the adjoining landscape, not least as a result of the location of Honiton in a valley floor, widely visible from the surrounding area. Page 14 of the document states that:

‘Therefore, if a site or area is close to a boundary, it is important to understand the characteristics and guidelines for each of the nearby LCTs/ DCAs, and to take them into account.’

- 3.4.9 This is a sensible and appropriate approach. However, this approach has not been applied to the interrelationship of the urban areas with their adjoining LCTs. The lack of any robust analysis of the interplay of the urban area with the surrounding landscape hinders the proper management of change in the landscape in these areas.
- 3.4.10 Some of the key characteristics recognised within LCT 3A, although generic, are reflected in the Site and its surroundings, such as *‘undulating upper valley slopes’*, *‘well-treed pastoral farmland’* and *‘very winding lanes’*. However, some others such as *‘a dispersed settlement pattern of isolated farms and small villages’* and *‘relatively remote and tranquil with little obvious modern development’* have limited relevance to the Site or its setting at the fringes of Honiton. The proximity to Honiton and infrastructure including pylons, rail line and the A30 and A35 major roadways results in a perception of urban influence, including built form, movement and noise. This urban influence is also inconsistent with the description of this area as being *‘remote and tranquil’*. It is noted that the county-level character assessment recognised the influences of urban development and infrastructure in this vicinity.
- 3.4.11 Dark skies are noted as being characteristic and making this LCT special. However, the Site and its surroundings, being situated near the urban settlement of Honiton, along with the corridors of the A30 and A35 and passing trains along the Exeter-London Waterloo mainline, are subject to these light source influences, which detract from the perception of dark skies in the vicinity of the Site and the fringes of Honiton.
- 3.4.12 The assessment recognises the pressure for housing around Honiton within LCT 3A, however the management and planning guidelines do not suggest a strategy on how to manage such development requirements. This would be a critical addition to the document to inform the expansion of the settlement, which is substantial and a focus for development in the area.
- 3.4.13 Overall, the EDBHLCA provides generic information on the Landscape Character Type, however for the purposes of planning for future development, it lacks more geographically-specific information and is therefore of limited relevance to the Site and its setting at the fringes of Honiton.

4 Policy

4.1 National

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

4.1.1 Paragraphs 131-141 focus on achieving well-designed places and promoting good design of the built environment. Paragraph 135 states:

‘Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a. Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b. Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c. Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d. Establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e. Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f. Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.’*

4.1.2 Paragraph 136 relates to trees and states:

‘Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.’

4.1.3 Paragraph 139 is concerned with the quality of design and states:

‘Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design,

taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a. *development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b. *outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings...'*

4.1.4 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 187 sets out that:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

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

...'

4.1.5 Paragraph 188 states:

'Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework⁵⁸; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.'

Planning Practice Guidance

4.1.6 To support the policies of the NPPF, the Government has produced Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

4.1.7 Under the heading of Natural Environment, sub-headings 'Landscape' and 'Green Infrastructure' sections of the PPG were updated in July 2019.

4.1.8 Paragraph 5 of 'Green infrastructure', focuses on the way in which natural capital green infrastructure can add to communities including, "...enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes...". Paragraph 6 states:

'Green infrastructure can help in:

- *Achieving well-designed places;*

- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change; and*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.'*

4.1.9 Under the sub-heading 'Landscape', paragraph 37, PPG supports the use of landscape character assessment as a tool for understanding the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identifying the features that give it a sense of place, as a means to informing, planning and managing change. PPG makes reference to Natural England guidance on landscape character assessment.

National Design Guide

4.1.10 The National Design Guide focuses on the following 10 characteristics:

- Context (enhances the surroundings);
- Identity (attractive and distinctive);
- Built form (a coherent pattern of development);
- Movement (accessible and easy to move around);
- Nature (enhanced and optimised);
- Public Spaces (safe, social and inclusive);
- Uses (mixed and integrated);
- Homes and Buildings (Functional, healthy and sustainable);
- Resources (Efficient and resilient); and
- Lifespan (made to last).

4.2 Local Planning Policy

4.2.1 East Devon District Council (EDDC) Local Plan 2013-2031 was adopted in January 2016. EDDC are currently in the process of preparing the new East Devon Local Plan (2021-2040). The new local plan went through a Draft Local Plan Consultation (Reg. 18) in May and June 2024 and as of February 2025 is undergoing a Local Plan Consultation (full Reg. 19).

East Devon District Council (EDDC) – East Devon Local Plan (adopted January 2016)

4.2.2 The East Devon Local Plan sets out the Council's spatial planning strategy to cover the period up to 2031. The Local Plan is separated into Strategic Policies and Development Management Policies. The following policies and extracts are of relevance to landscape and visual matters.

4.2.3 Strategic Policy 3: Sustainable Development, states:

"(…) a) Conserving and Enhancing the Environment - which includes ensuring development is undertaken in a way that minimises harm and enhances biodiversity and the quality and character of the landscape. This includes reducing the risk of flooding by incorporating measures such as

sustainable drainage systems. Developers should maximise the proportion of their developments that take place on previously developed land (···)”

4.2.4 Strategic Policy 5: Environment, states that:

“All development proposals will contribute to the delivery of sustainable development, ensure conservation and enhancement of natural historic and built environmental assets, promote ecosystem services and green infrastructure and geodiversity (...).”

4.2.5 Strategic Policy 7: Development in the Countryside, states that:

“The countryside is defined as all those parts of the plan area that are outside the Built-up Area Boundaries and outside of site specific allocations shown on the Proposals Map. Development in the countryside will only be permitted where it is in accordance with a specific Local or Neighbourhood Plan policy that explicitly permits such development and where it would not harm the distinctive landscape, amenity and environmental qualities within which it is located, including:

- 1) *Land form and patterns of settlement.*
- 2) *Important natural and manmade features which contribute to the local landscape character, including topography, traditional field boundaries, areas of importance for nature conservation and rural buildings.*
- 3) *The adverse disruption of a view from a public place which forms part of the distinctive character of the area or otherwise causes significant visual intrusions.”*

4.2.6 Strategic Policy 23: Development at Honiton, states:

“Honiton will see a moderate scale of development through the Local Plan. Working with our partners in Honiton we will focus development on the existing urban fabric and particularly improvements to the existing town centre to help sustain a vibrant and economically active town, meeting its own needs and those of the wider countryside. Honiton’s aspiration is to remain compact enough to minimise car travel and not to extend into a ribbon development (...).”

4.2.7 Strategic Policy 46: Landscape Conservation and Enhancement and AONBs, requires that:

“Development will need to be undertaken in a manner that is sympathetic to, and helps conserve and enhance the quality and local distinctiveness of, the natural and historic landscape character of East Devon, in particular in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Development will only be permitted where it:

- *conserves and enhances the landscape character of the area;*
- *does not undermine landscape quality; and*
- *is appropriate to the economic, social and well being of the area.*

When considering development in or affecting AONBs, great weight will be given to conserving and enhancing their natural beauty and major development will only be permitted where it can be shown that it cannot be reasonably accommodated elsewhere outside of the AONB. The current

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans, the East Devon and Blackdown Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and East Devon District Landscape Character Assessment & Management Guidelines 2008 and the Devon County Council Landscape Character Areas Assessment should be used in design and management considerations”

4.2.8 Strategic Policy 48: Local Distinctiveness in the Built Environment, states:

“Local distinctiveness and the importance of local design standards in the development process will be of critical importance to ensure that East Devon’s towns and villages retain their intrinsic physical built qualities. Where towns or villages are or have been despoiled we will seek to have qualities reinstated through good design. Use of local materials and local forms and styles will be essential to this distinctiveness (...)”

4.2.9 Strategic Policy 49: The Historic Environment, states:

“The physical and cultural heritage of the district, including archaeological assets and historic landscape character, will be conserved and enhanced and the contribution that historic places make to the economic and social well-being of the population will be recognised, evaluated and promoted (...)”

4.2.10 Development Management Policy D1: Design and Local Distinctiveness, states that:

“Proposals will only be permitted where they:

- 1. Respect the key characteristics and special qualities of the area in which the development is proposed.*
- 2. Ensure that the scale, massing, density, height, fenestration and materials of buildings relate well to their context.*
- 3. Do not adversely affect:*
 - The distinctive historic or architectural character of the area.*
 - The urban form, in terms of significant street patterns, groups of buildings and open spaces.*
 - Important landscape characteristics, prominent topographical features and important ecological features.*
 - Trees worthy of retention.*
 -”*

4.2.11 Development Management Policy D2: Landscape Requirements, states that:

“Landscape schemes should meet all of the following criteria:

Existing landscape features should be recorded in a detailed site survey, in accordance with the principles of BS 5837:2012 ‘Trees in Relation to Construction’ (or current version)

Existing features of landscape or nature conservation value should be incorporated into the landscaping proposals and where their removal is

unavoidable provision for suitable replacement should be made elsewhere on the site. This should be in addition to the requirement for new landscaping proposals. Where appropriate, existing habitat should be improved and where possible new areas of nature conservation value should be created.

Measures to ensure safe and convenient public access for all should be incorporated.

Measures to ensure routine maintenance and long term management should be included.

Provision for the planting of trees, hedgerows, including the replacement of those of amenity value which have to be removed for safety or other reasons, shrub planting and other soft landscaping.

The layout and design of roads, parking, footpaths and boundary treatments should make a positive contribution to the street scene and the integration of the development with its surroundings and setting”

4.2.12 Development Management Policy D3 – Trees and Development Sites states that:

“Permission will only be granted for development, where appropriate tree retention and/or planting is proposed in conjunction with the proposed nearby construction”

East Devon Local Plan (2021-2040) – Local Plan Consultation (Full Reg. 19) (February 2025)

4.2.13 The emerging Local Plan is at the Local Plan Consultation stage (Full Reg. 19). Once completed and adopted this will replace the existing Local Plan (2016). Draft policies relevant to landscape, visual and design matters are detailed here.

4.2.14 Strategic Policy SP01: Spatial strategy, states:

‘New development will be directed towards the most sustainable locations in East Devon, by:

...

C. Promoting significant development at the Main Centres of Axminster, Honiton, Ottery St Mary, Seaton, and Sidmouth to serve their own needs and that of the wider surrounding areas;

....’

4.2.15 Strategic Policy SD03: Honiton and its development allocations, lists sites/areas identified on the Policies Map which are allocated for development and which include the Site. The policy states:

‘Land south of Northcote Hill – north of the railway (GH/ED/39a)

This site is allocated for a total of 100 homes and will form a medium-scale residential extension on the eastern side of Honiton. Vehicular and pedestrian/cycle access improvements would be required. The development will need to maximise opportunities for localised improvements/contributions to enhance sustainable travel modes.’

'Land south of Northcote Hill – south of the railway (GH/ED/39b)

This site is allocated for a total of 100 homes and will form a medium-scale residential extension on the eastern side of Honiton. Parts of the site are on more elevated ground and development will need to be sensitively planned to avoid adverse impacts on the nearby Blackdown Hills National Landscape area. Vehicular and pedestrian access improvements would be required, incorporating Northcote Hill into development. The development will need to maximise opportunities for localised improvements/contributions to enhance sustainable travel modes.'

4.2.16 Strategic Policy DS01: Design and local distinctiveness, states:

'New development, including the refurbishment of existing buildings should be of a high quality design and locally distinctive. Proposals should clearly respond to local policy and guidance including Neighbourhood Plans and Design Guides / Briefs / Codes... For proposals in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, reference should be made to the Blackdown Hills AONB Design Guide For Houses; within the East Devon National Landscape, reference should be made to East Devon AONB Planning Guidance. Proposals should also be in accordance with the principles of the National Design Code and Building for a Healthy Life, and any other local design guidance.

.... Proposals will only be permitted where they:

A. Respect the key characteristics and special qualities of the area in which the development is proposed;

B. Ensure the appearance of buildings, including scale, massing, density, height, fenestration, and materials, relate well to their context;

C. Do not adversely affect:

1. The distinctive rural, historic or architectural character of the area;

2. The urban form, in terms of significant street patterns, groups of buildings and open spaces;

...

E. Have due regard for important aspects of detail and quality and should incorporate:

1. Attractive, secure layouts with safe and convenient access for the whole community, including disabled users, and incorporating appropriate measures to reduce the potential for crime and antisocial behaviour;

...

3. Well-defined, accessible, and overlooked routes for people and vehicles to ensure security;

4. Appropriate lighting to oversee public spaces and reduce crime opportunities;

5. The promotion of ownership and community responsibility by clearly defining public and private areas;

6. *Appropriate activity levels to maintain safety and reduce fear of crime at all times;*

7. *Well-designed security features to support passive, safe design;*

8. *Necessary and appropriate street lighting and furniture and, subject to negotiation with developers, public art integral to the design;*

...

10. *Appropriate soft landscape (greening) measures and open space provision to enhance amenity and biodiversity value;*

...

...'

4.2.17 Strategic Policy DS04: Green and blue Infrastructure, states:

'Development in East Devon will deliver high quality multi-functional Green and Blue Infrastructure in accordance with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. All major development proposals must:

A. Demonstrably meet the 5 Natural England Green Infrastructure Principles;

B. Provide a robust Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan which clearly demonstrates how it accords with Natural England's GI Framework and will contribute to nature recovery and restoration of wildlife rich habitats; is integrated with and connects to the surrounding landscape; and provides multi-functional Green Infrastructure which incorporates and enhances natural ecosystems functions including landscape and water quality, biodiversity, food production (including orchards and allotments), increased canopy cover, sustainable drainage and climate change mitigation/adaptation;

C. Enhance and promote the health and wellbeing of residents through the provision of high quality publicly accessible natural green/blue space and connected cycling/walking infrastructure;

D. Enhance existing habitats and provide new wildlife spaces and corridors that enhance biodiversity and provide green links, open space and biodiversity enhancement areas;

E. Maximise beneficial outcomes for residents and visitors to encourage use of the GI network and to enrich the cultural identity of the area;

F. Contribute to the achievement of excellent ecological status of rivers and watercourses, through enhanced natural flood storage, capture of run-off and restoration of soil health; and

G. Clearly demonstrate how proposed Green and Blue Infrastructure will be managed and maintained.

...'

4.2.18 Strategic Policy OL01: Landscape features, states:

‘East Devon’s landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where the applicant is able to demonstrate through a proportionate Landscape Appraisal that it will protect and enhance valued landscape attributes and special features and qualities that contribute to the character of East Devon’s landscapes, in particular where it would not harm the distinctive landscape, amenity and environmental qualities within which it is located, including:

A. Land form and patterns of settlement;

B. Important natural and manmade features which contribute to the local landscape character, including topography, traditional field boundaries, trees and woodlands, areas of importance for nature conservation and rural buildings;

C. The adverse disruption of a view from a public place which forms part of the distinctive character of the area or otherwise causes significant visual intrusions; and

D. Aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity, wildness and dark skies.

All development in the countryside should have regard to the most up to date Landscape Characterisation Assessments as a basis for understanding, maintaining and enhancing local distinctiveness and landscape character as well as up to date strategy and guidance for trees and woodlands.

...’

4.2.19 Strategic Policy OL02: National Landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), states:

‘The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Landscapes (NL’s) in East Devon:

A. Development in a NL, or outside but affecting its setting or appearance, will only be permitted where it avoids harm and contributes to the protection, conservation and enhancement of the special qualities, character and natural beauty of the NL (including the coastline, where relevant);

B. Major development in a NL will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest; and East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2042 – Regulation 19 Plan – February 2025 200

C. Any relevant National Landscape Management Plans will be a material consideration in decision making. This policy will also apply to the Heritage Coast.

...’

4.2.20 Strategic Policy OL04: Areas of strategic visual importance, states:

‘Development proposals will only be permitted where they preserve the visual integrity, identity and scenic quality of the district, in particular by conserving and enhancing key views and views of local landmarks, including those identified in Neighbourhood Plans.

The following view types are considered to be particularly important:

- A. Landmark views to and from viewpoints and tourism and recreational destinations, including the coast, woodland and open countryside;
- B. Views from publicly accessible areas which are within, to or from settlements which contribute to the viewers' enjoyment of the local area;
- C. Views from public rights of way and other publicly accessible areas;
- D. Night-time views of dark skies, particularly where lighting is to be introduced in areas of low existing light pollution; and
- E. Views which include or otherwise relate to specific features relevant to East Devon and its special qualities, such as key landmarks, heritage assets (either in view or the view from) and biodiversity features. Development proposals should conserve and enhance sequential views, and not result in adverse cumulative impacts within views.

...'

4.2.21 Strategic Policy PB08: Tree, hedges and woodland on development sites, states:

'Retention of existing trees and hedges

Where trees are present on a development site proposals will need to be designed, and schemes implemented, in a manner that retain good quality and healthy woodland, trees and hedgerows. This is to specifically include protection of : ancient woodland; ancient and veteran trees; those with visual amenity value; those that support wildlife (such as some appropriate U category trees as part current BS 5837112) or provide habitat connectivity; those which positively contribute to local landscape character, the historic environment or the significance of a heritage asset and its setting; and rare or unusual species of trees. These protected assets will need to be incorporated into the overall design and landscape scheme, within public spaces where possible.

Where justifiable and unavoidable tree and hedge losses occur, there will need to be adequate compensation for on the development site or on publicly accessible land in accordance with the minimum compensation requirements for trees listed in the Table below. This replacement policy also applies to trees with Ash dieback (or any other future serious tree pest or disease) on development sites.

...'

4.2.22 Strategic Policy PB09: Monitoring requirements for new planting schemes, states:

'Appropriate measures to ensure that new planting schemes are implemented in accordance with the approved details and to secure their long-term management and maintenance will be required including arrangements for monitoring. For major developments this will also require the placement of a financial bond by the developer prior to the commencement of construction, equal to 25% of the calculated planting cost for the scheme, or agreed phase, to be released on fulfilment of the following to the satisfaction of the planning authority:

- A. *Within 1 month of the completion of planting works, the issue of a signed certificate by the developer's landscape architect or other appropriately qualified/ experienced professional consultant confirming that the planting works have been overseen by them and completed in accordance with the approved details.*

B. For years 1-5 thereafter, the issue of an annual inspection report by the developer's landscape architect confirming that maintenance of the scheme has been carried out in accordance with the approved details and identifying any plant failures or other defects that require rectification together with a program for their implementation at the earliest opportunity. The annual certificate shall also confirm the satisfactory rectification of any defects identified during the previous year's inspection.'

Greater Exeter Strategic Plan Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2019)

4.2.23 As part of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) there was a Call for Sites in 2017 for which the Site was submitted (ref no: GH/ED/39). Although East Devon Council has withdrawn from the GESP, the HELAA assessment for the Site remains extant.

4.2.24 In terms of landscape the suitability assessment states:

'Landscape sensitivity: High. The site is outside but abuts the Blackdown Hills AONB, which wraps around the eastern end of Honiton and is in close proximity to the East Devon AONB which starts further up Tower Hill. Parts of the site have significant intervisibility with the Blackdown Hills AONB to the north of the A30, where they would highly likely be visible from key vantage points such as Dumpdon Hill. However, the site may be seen in the context of the existing settlement, A30 and A35 to an extent. Natural England advised that the site may struggle to meet the NPPF exception test in terms of impact on the AONB, as better options for development exist elsewhere. The site is bounded and crossed by hedgerows and trees which may be of landscape importance. There are various ProWs in the wider landscape context, one of which crosses the site. Some are highly likely to offer views of the site. Requires further visual assessment.'

4.2.25 Rather than offer a robust assessment, the above speculates on the visibility of the Site from a range of locations, and the importance of landscape features within the Site but does not provide any further detail. The document does however recognise that the Site is set in the context of existing development, which is fundamental to understanding the potential of the Site for development.

4.2.26 In this respect, an up-to-date visual appraisal is provided in Section 6, below, which explains that whilst the Site is visible from certain locations on the elevated land to the north, it is seen in the context of the existing settlement and major roadways.

4.3 National Landscapes

East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape) Partnership Plan 2019-2024

4.3.1 The current East Devon AONB (now National Landscape) Partnership Plan sets out the management strategy for a period of five years including long term objectives and actions. The five yearly review of the plan was to be completed by March 2024 but this deadline has been extended by Defra to 2025 as a result of anticipated significant changes to operations and functions as a result of the Landscape Review (Glover Review).

- 4.3.2 The Site does not fall within the East Devon National Landscape, however, it lies approximately 375m to the north-west of the National Landscape at its nearest point.
- 4.3.3 The Special Qualities of the National Landscape include the following of relevance to the vicinity of the Site:
- “...Elevated fingers of land extend from the Blackdown Hills to the north, their height and linearity accentuated by cathedral-like beech avenues; woodlands clad their sides, flowing down steep sided goyles to infiltrate the tranquil and often intimate agricultural valleys below.*
- This contrasts with the broad flat floodplains of the Axe and Otter which cut into the area, drawing their life from tributaries deep within the valleys of the undulating hinterland. The human engagement, use and management of this land since pre-historic times has guided the pattern and shape of the settlements, field patterns, woodland and heath, creating a landscape of significant scenic beauty that is the basis for its agricultural and tourism economy....”*
- 4.3.4 Strategic aims and policies of relevance have been outlined here. Strategic aim 1: Place – To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. One of the key objectives identified for this strategic aim relates to Landscape Character and Historic Environment which requires:
- “improved coordination and influence in the management of the distinctive landscape and historic environment features of the AONB, to ensure they are maintained, enhanced, understood and appreciated.” (p.8)*
- 4.3.5 Policy L1 supporting Strategic aim 1 notes:
- “L1 Support the development and delivery of environmental schemes and projects aimed at maintaining and improving the landscape character, historic environment and local distinctiveness of the AONB.” (p.23)*
- 4.3.6 Strategic aim 2: Encourage and support sustainable economic development, social engagement and recreational activity that conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the AONB. The key objective in relation to planning and development for Strategic aim 2 states:
- “Planning development and policy protects the special landscape character and tranquillity of the AONB and will enable appropriate forms of social and economic development that are compatible with the landscape, so conserving and enhancing the environment.” (p.9)*
- 4.3.7 Policies supporting Strategic aim 2 include:
- “P1 Encourage the development of guidelines to support high quality sustainable development which complements and respects the AONB landscape and historic character.*
- P2 Provide advice and support on planning policy and development to enable the special qualities of the historic and landscape character to be protected, conserved and enhanced.” (p.37)*
- 4.3.8 Appendix 1 of the East Devon AONB (now National Landscape) Partnership Plan sets out the special qualities categorised by the Devon Landscape Character Areas. The Site lies within the character area Blackdown Hills and the special qualities of the AONB linked to this area are:

- *“Distinctive, unspoilt, and very exposed skylines often looking over the crowns of woodland on the steep greensand slopes.*
- *High scenic quality reflected in the area forming part of the Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONBs.*
- *Outstanding views across East Devon and the Otter valley.*
- *Sense of isolation and remoteness, enhanced by exposure of the plateau; tranquillity provided by the dense woodland of the greensand scarps.*
- *Many CWSs and SSSIs including ancient seminatural woodland, semi-improved and improved acidic and neutral grasslands and spring line mires.*
- *Picturesque villages with traditional buildings linked by narrow winding lanes; many listed buildings.”*

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape) Management Plan 2019-2024

- 4.3.9 The current Blackdown Hills AONB (now National Landscape) Management Plan sets out the management strategy for a period of five years including long term objectives and actions. The five yearly review of the plan was to be completed by March 2024 but this deadline has been extended by Defra to 2025 as a result of anticipated significant changes to operations and functions as a result of the Landscape Review (Glover Review).
- 4.3.10 A public consultation on a new Management Plan for 2025-2030 finished on the 4th March 2025. The plan is due to be adopted by relevant local authorities in spring/summer 2025.
- 4.3.11 The 2019-2024 remains extant as of March 2025.
- 4.3.12 The site does not fall within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, however it lies immediately adjacent to its boundary.
- 4.3.13 The current management plan sets out the policy framework for the enhancement and conservation of the National Landscape over the period 2019-2024. The plan identifies the special qualities of the National Landscape and provides a summary on page 26 and 27. The special qualities relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development include:

“Landscape quality

- *...Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows*
- *Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter, Culm rivers*
- *Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields and woodland*

- *A settled landscape with a strong sense of time depth containing farms and small scattered villages well related to the landscape*

Scenic quality

- *The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors*
- *Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys*
- *A well wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees*
- *Pattern of regular, large scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes*
- ...
- *Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high hedged winding single tracked lanes in the valley*
- ...

Natural heritage features

- *The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area*
- *Distinctive spring line mires located around the upper slopes of the valleys*
- ...
- *Ancient, species rich hedges with many hedgerow trees and flower rich banks; colourful displays of primrose and bluebells in spring*
- *A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by hedgerows support a thriving dormouse population*
- *Streams and rivers are home to otters, beavers, lamprey and the vulnerable white clawed crayfish*
- ...

Cultural heritage

- ...
- *Hillforts are prominent features on the ends of the plateau ridges*

- ...
- *A landscape that has inspired artists from the early 20th century Camden Town Group to the Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers of today”*

4.3.14 The management plan also sets out a number of management policies of which the following are relevant to the Site and landscape and visual matters:

‘LC1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the AONB based on landscape character underpinned by comprehensive and up-to-date evidence bases that are also made widely available to decision makers and others

...

LC3 Promote high levels of peace and tranquillity with dark night skies by minimising noise, intrusive development and light pollution

LC4 Support local distinctiveness

LC5 The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the AONB will be protected

LC6 The deeply rural setting of much of the land adjoining the AONB boundary forms an essential setting for the AONB and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character ’ (p.39)

...

‘FLM5 Support and promote initiatives that encourage sensitive environmental management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, particularly those that conserve ancient woodland and veteran trees, orchards and restore the original broadleaved character of plantations on ancient woodland sites

FLM6 Give careful consideration to the landscape and visual impact of new woodland planting schemes ’ (p.52)

4.3.15 In relation to planning and development the management plan notes that that aim is to ensure:

“...all development is in harmony with the landscape and in keeping with the strong local architectural style of the Blackdown Hills. New buildings are designed and built to the highest sustainable standards and affordable housing is available where needed”. (p.56)

4.3.16 The management plan further highlights that:

“The layout, form and density of all new developments need to reflect the historic rural grain of the AONB. ...

Location and context are important; development should respect the importance of the setting of the AONB, ..., maintaining the existing pattern of fields and lanes, the integrity of the hedgerows as well as open agricultural vistas, and enhance the sense of place.

Development proposals in or affecting the AONB should avoid sensitive locations that will impact on the special qualities of the AONB - notably views - including prominent locations on the northern scarp slope, on

skylines and hilltops, the open plateaux and ridgelines, and undeveloped valley slopes.” (p.58)

4.3.17 The management objective with regards to planning and development (Objective PD) highlights the need

“To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills by ensuring that all development affecting the AONB is of the highest quality, sensitive to landscape setting and conserves its wildlife, historic character and other special qualities” (p.60)

4.3.18 Policies relating to Objective BD and relevant to landscape and visual matters include:

“PD2 All necessary development affecting the AONB will conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by:

- Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment,*
- Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale,*
- Reinforcing local distinctiveness, and*
- Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity*

...

PD4 Support the provision of affordable housing to meet identified local needs in locations with access to employment and local services, ensuring that developments are appropriately scaled and sited to respect landscape and settlement character, and avoiding impacts on nature conservation and historic interests” (pg.60)

Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025-2030: Consultation Draft, January 2025

4.3.19 The draft management plan sets out the policy framework for the enhancement and conservation of the National Landscape over the period 2025-2030. The plan identifies the special qualities of the National Landscape on page 16. The special qualities relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development remain unchanged from the 2019-2024 plan.

4.3.20 The management plan also sets out a number of management policies, some of which are the same as the previous plan. Those of which differ from the previous plan and are of relevance to the Site and landscape and visual matters are the following:

‘Landscape, natural resources and natural capital

PL1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape according to landscape-led principles, based on landscape character, underpinned by a sound understanding of the area’s rich stock of natural and cultural capital assets and its value to society in terms of the flow of goods and services. (p24)

...

Planning, development and infrastructure

PL16 All necessary development affecting the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by:

- *Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment.*
- *Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale.*
- *Reinforcing local distinctiveness.*
- *Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity.*

What makes a view? (2013)

4.3.21 The document What makes a view? (WMV) was published in September 2013 on behalf of Blackdown Hills AONB (now National Landscape) under 'Planning Guides' and describes:

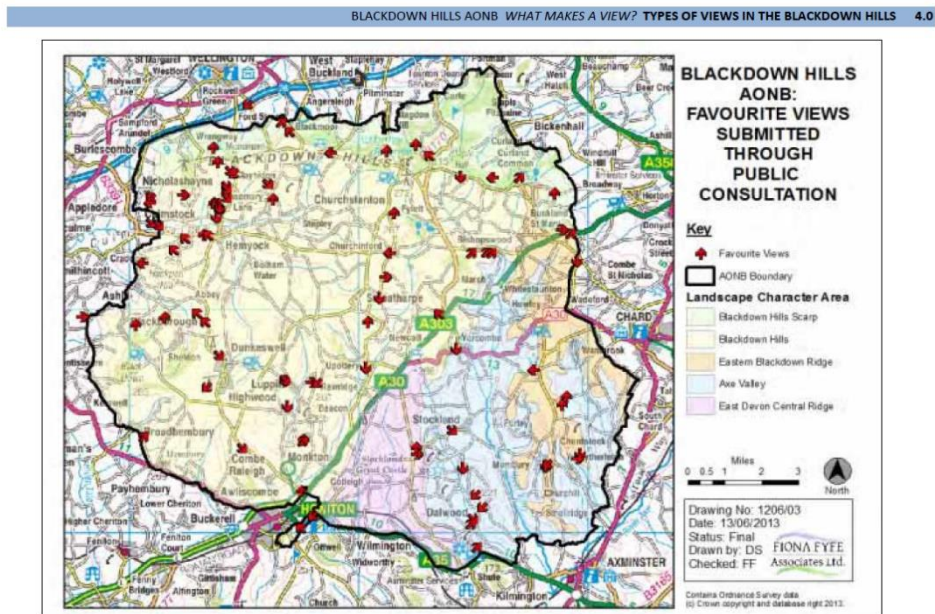
"...the views within the Blackdown Hills AONB: where they occur; how they are experienced; how they are portrayed; how they relate to landscape character; and the forces for change currently acting on them."

4.3.22 WMV identifies the various types of views in the Blackdown Hills AONB (now National Landscape). Under the view type 'Official viewpoints' WMV notes that many of these views are:

"...located near OS trig points, including Culmstock Beacon and Dumpdon Hillfort, and are only accessible on foot. Many of these isolated sites with outstanding views also have a strong sense of history, having been used as defensive or look-out sites. The Iron Age hillforts at ... Dumpdon and Hembury all have commanding views over the surrounding landscape..."
(p.18)

4.3.23 Under the view type 'Passive enjoyment of the scenery' WMV notes that:

"some of the views from the main roads are stunning, such as ... the view west from the A35 east of Honiton." (p18)



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Fiona Fyfe Associates

September 2013

Extract from WMV showing the favourite views as per public consultation.

4.3.24 However, the specific locations of these viewpoints have not been detailed within WMV.

4.3.25 WMV notes the key characteristics of the views associated with the Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Area that is in near proximity to the Site include:

- *“Ever-changing views of valleys and ridges with their patchwork of fields and woodland.*
- *Within the LCA, views contrast between the regular enclosures and straight roads of the plateaux/ridges, and the winding lanes and irregular enclosures of the valley sides.*
- *A relatively settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth. Most views contain farms and small, scattered villages (many with stone church towers) nestling into valley sides. Hillforts (eg Dumpdon Hill) are prominent features at the ends of ridges.*
- ...
- *A relatively self-contained LCA in terms of its views, with other LCAs generally only visible from its edges.*
- *LCA visible as a wooded and incised plateau that forms the skyline in long views from high ground in central Devon.*
- *Eastern side of the LCA visible from the East Devon Central Ridge and Axe Valley LCAs; northern edge visible from the Blackdown Hills Scarp LCA.*

- ...
- *Strong cultural associations with the Camden Town group of artists, who painted landscapes here in the early 20th century, experimenting with the semi-abstract treatment of field patterns and topography.*
- *Contrast in feel between open and exposed plateau, and enclosed and intimate wooded valleys. Valleys generally have a strong sense of tranquillity and timelessness.*
- *Seasonal change resulting from extensive deciduous woodland and hedgerows.*
- *An attractive and appreciated landscape containing many favourite views.” (p.35)*

4.3.26 Relevant views to the Site of the selected public consultation responses to the question ‘Where is your favourite Blackdowns view?’ includes “Lay-by near entrance of Manor House School, east of Honiton...” (p.40) and from “Combe Hill looking towards Honiton...” (p.40).

5 Site and Visual Appraisal

5.1 Site Appraisal

- 5.1.1 The Site, comprising approximately 28.28 ha and the surrounding environment were visited most recently in March 2025. **Figure 4** and **Site Appraisal Photographs A - H** illustrate the existing features and character of the Site. The locations from which the Site Appraisal Photographs were taken are shown on **Figure 4**.
- 5.1.2 The Site is situated on the lower valley slopes of the Otter valley. The western extent of the Site is on the north-west facing slopes similar to the rest of Honiton (**Site Appraisal Photographs E and F**). The central part of the Site comprises a ridge line as seen in **Site Appraisal Photographs C and D**. The eastern extent, beyond the ridge line, deviates from the typical north-west facing slope pattern due to the existing stream that flows through the Site in a northerly- direction. This stream turns north-west further north and adjoins the Site's north-eastern boundary near Otter Valley Park. The stream and the Higher Northcote Farm ridgeline to the north-east form a robust edge of development to the north-east of the Site and Otter Valley Park. The stream is within a bowl of landform in the eastern part of the Site (**Site Appraisal Photographs C and D**).
- 5.1.3 To the left of the view in **Site Appraisal Photograph C** lies Field House and its associated dense conifer boundary planting, which adjoins the Site. This planting stands out within the wider landscape, being incongruous alongside the native planting in this area and also provides domesticating influences on the Site. There are various hedgerows around the eastern and central areas of the Site although, unlike the wider landscape, these hedgerows are devoid of characteristic hedgerow trees. The vegetation pattern along the stream, however, is typical of the wider landscape and further provides a degree of containment where the central ridge tapers off to the north-east.
- 5.1.4 The central ridgeline creates a distinct separation between the western and eastern parts of the Site as seen in **Site Appraisal Photographs C and D**. The western extent of the Site bears a closer and stronger relationship to urbanising influences, notably at Otter Valley Park as is evident in **Site Appraisal Photograph E**. The central ridgeline provides containment to the north-west facing form of the Otter valley, typical of the wider settlement. To the east of this central ridgeline the valley form faces to the east, away from the existing settlement and towards the National Landscape, generating a closer association with the more elevated wider landscape.
- 5.1.5 **Site Appraisal Photograph G** shows the urbanising influences evident from park homes at Otter Valley Park. The park home development abuts the stream corridor abruptly to the east, failing to provide a positive interface with this natural feature. Remains of an orchard are also evident within the northern part of the Site adjacent to Otter Valley Park. The northern part of the Site (**Site Appraisal Photograph H**) is in part degraded through being used for storage of spoil/materials and abandoned vehicles/equipment. The sloping landform along with the tree lined stream provides containment to this part of the Site, which has an intimate character.
- 5.1.6 The southern part of the Site, south of Northcote Hill, includes fencing, hedging, sheds, nursery buildings, machinery and other utilitarian infrastructure within a former nursery as seen in **Site Appraisal Photograph B**. The ornamental planting, including the many conifers and the formal line of deciduous canopy trees flanking either side of the track/PRoW 13 are distinctive in the landscape as these species and pattern are not typical of the wider landscape. This part of the Site is located at a higher elevation than majority of the Site, however the vegetation encloses the view and provides a separation from the wider countryside.

- 5.1.7 Development in Honiton to the west and north-west is clearly perceived from the south-western extent of the Site, as seen in **Site Appraisal Photograph B**. The pylons running through the Site and beyond, the ornamental planting and the various areas of development in the vicinity, reinforce and strengthen the western part of the Site's association with urbanising elements and the existing settlement.

5.2 Visual Appraisal

- 5.2.1 A set of representative areas likely to obtain views towards the Site were identified from analysis of the likely Zone of Theoretical Visibility, based on topography. Those areas highlighted as being from where views of built form within the Site may be obtained, were then visited in a visual appraisal exercise most recently undertaken in March 2025, to check the actual visibility of the Site, accounting for localised screening from vegetation and built form, as relevant.
- 5.2.2 The visual appraisal was undertaken from publicly accessible viewpoints within the surrounding landscape, primarily roads and footpaths, to determine the approximate extent of the area from which the Site is visible from the eye level of a person standing on the ground.
- 5.2.3 In summary, there is no visibility of the Site at all from the elevated plateau to the south-east and views from the south-eastern slopes of the Otter Valley are extremely localised, including from north-east of the Higher Northcote Farm Ridge which largely screens views. The elevated land masses of St Cyre's Hill to the north-west and Dumpdon Hill to the north, frame the area from which the Site is visible between them. Within this area, variations in landform and woodland cover provide localised containment of outward views. Very limited views are available from the southern flanks of Dumpdon Hill. Woodland belts characteristic of the plateau edges create further containment of views out from elevated land, notably on the summit of Dumpdon Hill and St Cyre's Hill. Views from the valley floor are screened by built form in the settlement and vegetation.
- 5.2.4 In order to represent the nature of identified views, **Site Context Photographs 1–15** were selected from those photographs taken during the visual appraisal fieldwork. These locations are representative of different types of visual receptors but primarily include pedestrians and residents. The locations from which these photographs were taken are shown on **Figure 5** which also provides an indication of the visibility of the Site from the surrounding area in winter conditions, being the scenario of maximum visibility. In summer, when deciduous vegetation will be in full foliage, the degree of visibility will be reduced.
- 5.2.5 Partial views are obtained from the north both adjoining the Site and at near distances to the north of Otter Valley Park (**Site Context Photographs 1, 3 and 4** respectively). From Tunnel Lane, views of the Site are limited to the low-lying slopes to the north of the railway line beyond the hedgebank with hedgerow tree boundary. **Site Context Photograph 3** adjoins the Site to the north, however, even at such close proximity, due to the low elevation of the location, views of the Site are restricted to the northern extents and Middle Northcote Farm can be seen alongside the park homes at Otter Valley Park. The majority of the Site is obscured by the landform pattern and the intervening vegetation.
- 5.2.6 Further north at the junction of PRoW Honiton 19 with the A30 (**Site Context Photograph 5**), within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, views continue to be restricted due to the low-lying location of the viewpoint and the intervening park homes at Otter Valley Park. Middle Northcote Farm is also seen from this location but glimpses of the western slopes of the Site are heavily filtered by the branches of the trees, which would reduce visibility further in summer. Beyond the Site, the incongruous belt of conifers around Field House can be seen, to the right of which the signage flanking the A35 at a bend in the road in the vicinity of Tower Cross is prominent.

- 5.2.7 From the south-east within the National Landscape, along Northcote Hill (**Site Context Photograph 2**) there are partial views of the Site across the eastern bowl to the central ridgeline. The marked elevation of the central ridgeline reinforced by the line of hedgerow obscures the western part of the Site. The formal tree line at the nursery is also seen within this view and is perceived as accentuating the containment provided by the ridgeline extending through the central part of the Site.
- 5.2.8 Further south-east, **Site Context Photographs 6 and 7** located on higher elevation also within the National Landscape, provide expansive views of the wider landscape, of which the Site forms a small part. Parts of the eastern extents of the Site and north-western part of the eastern bowl are screened by the conspicuous cluster of conifers at Field House. Even at a higher elevation the western slopes of the Site continue to be screened by the central ridgeline. The line of trees at the nursery is distinctive and reinforces the sloping landform pattern. Honiton can be seen in the distance extending westwards. Pylons and overhead cable lines dominate the views from the south-east.
- 5.2.9 Views from the south within the National Landscapes afford partial views of the Site. The strong, dense boundary vegetation along the Site's southern boundary largely obscures the Site, notably from lower elevations (**Site Context Photograph 6**). The view from **Site Context Photograph 8** across the wider Otter Valley is expansive, however the intervening robust boundary vegetation screens the eastern extents of the Site. Where the western slopes of the Site are visible, they are seen in the context of other built development that extends from west to east as part of the wider settlement pattern of Honiton. This view is representative of that from What Makes A View in the vicinity of the former Manor House School (although hedgerows now prevent a view out from that location).
- 5.2.10 **Site Context Photograph 10** is a long-distance view from a lower elevation on the western flank of the Otter Valley, from where top of the central ridgeline of the Site can be seen in the distance. Vegetation within the nursery extends down part of the ridgeline before ending abruptly at Northcote Hill. As a result, Field House and its associated conifer boundary vegetation is seen in and amongst the many pylons and overhead cables that dominate this view. On the right hand side of this view, Honiton can be seen along the lower valley slopes extending north-eastwards towards the Site as well as onto the rising landform to the south-east.
- 5.2.11 In long-distance views from the vicinity of Combe Raleigh, which lies to the north-west of the Site (**Site Context Photograph 10**), the rising ground of the East Devon National Landscape forms the backdrop and skyline within this view. The Site is seen in the distance in between the built development along Monkton Road and Otter Valley Park. Field House to the far east of the Site is seen amid its boundary planting of substantial conifers. The flow of the central ridgeline down to the north-eastern extent of development at Otter Valley Park can be seen. The line of pylons reflects the Otter Valley corridor as a focal and further influences the Site. Further north-west from Limer's Cross (**Site Context Photograph 15**) the Site is seen adjacent to the development at Otter Valley Park and again, the flow of the central ridgeline down to the north-eastern extent of development at Otter Valley Park can be seen, albeit this ridgeline appears denuded of canopy vegetation next to the trees associated with a former nursery to the right. Beyond the central ridgeline, the eastern slopes rise prominently in the vicinity of Field House towards the rest of the National Landscape, appearing distinct from the western slopes of the Site which form part of the wider landform pattern containing the settlement of Honiton.
- 5.2.12 The long-distance view from PRow Combe Raleigh 10 within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (**Site Context Photograph 11**) provides expansive views towards the Site and Honiton, which can be seen to extend along the valley floor and lower slopes, including in the form of Otter Valley Park. The western slopes of the Site are at a similar elevation and orientation as the development in Honiton as seen in the right hand side of the view. Field House is seen further west, beyond the bowl in the eastern area of the Site which is clearly perceived.

- 5.2.13 In the view from the southern slopes of Dumpdon Hill (**Site Context Photograph 12**) the East Devon National Landscape ridgeline forms the skyline. Honiton is seen clearly extending along the lower slopes of the valley flank, creating a wave like pattern following the contours. Honiton continues along the valley floor towards the east up to Otter Valley Park which can be seen below the Site. The Site is seen in the context and pattern of the built development at Honiton, as well as the major routeways of the A35 and A30, on which traffic is clearly visible. The vegetation pattern following the alignment of the central ridgeline within the Site, notably within the nursery area to the south, contains the Site from the upper slopes beyond. Also, in combination with planting associated with the stream corridor to the east and north, the vegetation helps the visual flow of the landform, downhill from the nursery round and back to Otter Valley Park.
- 5.2.14 In views from the north-west near Fordhill Cottages (**Site Context Photograph 13**) the Site is glimpsed in the distance, however, much of it is obscured by the intervening landform of the ridgeline at Higher Northcote Farm and associated vegetation. The Site is seen in the context of Otter Valley Park on the lower slopes and Honiton in the distance. From further north-east (**Site Context Photograph 14**) the Site is barely perceptible due to the distance from the Site and screening provided by Higher Northcote Farm ridge.

6 Landscape and visual development principles

6.1.1 On the basis of the above analysis of baseline conditions, it is considered that there is potential for sensitive development of the Site, that responds to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, East Devon National Landscape and other landscape character and visual sensitivities, based on the following opportunities and constraints and development principles, as also illustrated on **Figure 6**:

- The central ridgeline provides a clear distinction between the eastern and western parts of the Site.
- The western part of the Site has a stronger relationship with the existing settlement of Honiton, including because of the north-west facing landform pattern in this area which is similar to the pattern on which Honiton has continued to develop.
- Honiton lies on the lower valley slopes and follows the contours of the landscape, rising up to approximately 160m AOD. The edge therefore forms a wave-like pattern in the landscape that is kept distinct from the National Landscape by the consistent approach to development extent along the north-west facing landform in combination with vegetated boundaries.
- Development in the western part of the Site would continue the established expanded linear pattern that exists within Honiton and is set within the extents of existing development as far north-east as Otter Valley Park, where it is truncated by the stream corridor and Higher Northcote Farm ridge. The eastern bowl lies outside this established pattern and has a more rural character and association with the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, notwithstanding the domesticating influence of Field House and its associated conifer planting.
- For these reasons, development should not exceed the established development edge at Otter Valley Park nor should it exceed the 160m AOD contour on the north-west facing slopes of the western part of the Site.
- Owing to the landform in the eastern bowl appearing distinct from this pattern, it should be retained as an open space that will provide a suitable setting for the National Landscape. There is potential for this to be a locally characteristic intimate and naturalistic open space, providing public access to the landscape at the settlement edge, allowing locally-characteristic long panoramic views out over the valley to the wider National Landscape setting.
- This sensitive approach to development extent related to landform, reflecting the approach set out in published character guidance, would maintain and reinforce the legibility of settlement pattern within Honiton, which has a well-established close relationship with the National Landscapes. However, the retention of land in the eastern part of the Site as open space would provide a more sensitive buffer to and interface with the National Landscape in this vicinity.
- Built development should reduce to a lower density at the northern extent of the of the central ridge where it opens towards the stream corridor, to provide a more sensitive edge to the wider landscape. Planting along the edge following the stream corridor would further soften and assimilate the development into the landscape and set-back of development would also allow a better relationship with the locally characteristic stream corridor than is evident at Otter Valley Park.
- Minimise visual impact in views from upper slopes of adjoining National Landscapes by integrating development with the existing patterns of landform and vegetation.

- Reinforce and extend the belt of vegetation perceived to flow from Otter Valley Park, along Tunnel Lane and the stream corridor, and up to the nursery. The reinforced vegetation will enhance the landform pattern and follow the landform flow, to wrap around the development. This would allow for the re-establishment of the vegetation pattern typical of this area, which is denuded of canopy trees on the central ridge of the Site; and assist in softening the built edge. This planting would need to be sensitive to required offsets from overhead cables but would have potential to soften the influence of these infrastructure features in the landscape, both locally and as perceived from the wider National Landscape setting.
- Development to this extent and contained by landform and structural planting, would demonstrate a sensitive approach to the special qualities of the adjoining National Landscapes, notably: the elevated panoramic views out, the well-wooded character and the mosaic of connected green infrastructure features.
- There is potential for woodland planting on the central ridge to reflect published character guidance for small woodland blocks.
- Reinforcement and extension of such vegetation in the vicinity of the former nursery will soften the formal, ornamental quality of the lines of planting, as seen from the wider landscape.
- There is potential to enhance the locally characteristic wet woodland character near the stream in the north-eastern area of the Site and further enhance the tree-lined streams characteristic of this landscape.
- There is potential to retain and reinforce the hedgerows on Site, albeit on the western slopes the hedgerows are denuded of canopy trees in contrast to other boundary vegetation in the vicinity. Where hedgerows may be lost to development blocks, there is potential to introduce a similar pattern reflecting local-characteristic curving valley flank alignments, by means of new tree planting within the streetscape that also follows this pattern and potential for new Devon hedge banks to the eastern edge of some of the development blocks.
- Potential to introduce a new green corridor along the existing pylon route which would largely remain open, with potential for low-level planting, including in the form of hedgebanks, to break up the dominance of the cables and pylons, providing low-level focal points and an intimate scale in the landscape. Any planting and orientation and position of the housing blocks should de-emphasise the dominance and regularity of alignment of the cable route.
- Potential to use clumps of trees to break up the linear division of landscape by the South-West Mainline railway line and assist in integrating it into the landscape.
- There is opportunity to reinforce the wooded structure, in particular at the south-eastern extent near Field House, with native canopy species typical of this area to diminish the prominence across the wider landscape of the conifers at Field House.
- There is potential to retain and restore the area of remnant orchard as part of a community space between existing and proposed development at Otter Valley Park and to introduce locally characteristic orchards in other parts of the Site.
- On the basis of the above points, development within the Site, owing to the sensitive approach to the existing landform and proposed reinforcement of this containment through structural vegetation, would appear, in the three dimensions of the markedly elevated setting of Honiton, a coherent extension of the existing pattern in the vicinity

of Otter Valley Park, following the wave pattern of development along the southern valley flanks.

7 Summary and conclusion

- 7.1.1 The Site lies at the eastern edge of Honiton which extends along the lower south-eastern flanks of the Otter Valley. This valley is deep and includes a regular pattern of perpendicular side valleys to the south-east. At the eastern edge of the Site, this pattern is disrupted by a side valley which flows in a north and north-easterly direction before turning north-west to join the River Otter. This creates a north-north-easterly orientated localised ridgeline in the centre of the Site, with an east-facing slope; and a bowl in the eastern part of the Site, that is distinct from the more regular topographical pattern along the valley flanks to the south-west.
- 7.1.2 As a result, the long-established pattern of major communication routes and settlement in Honiton is defined by landform and is therefore arranged along the lower southern valley flanks, as well as extending up these slopes in a wave-like pattern that follows the regular undulations in landform. Development extends approximately 4.2km along the valley and typically up to approximately the 160m AOD contour to the south-east. In the vicinity of the Site, residential park homes at Otter Valley Park extend as far as the stream corridor forming the north-eastern edge of the Site, which lies approximately 780m to the north-east of the town centre. Furthermore, it is noted that development in the northern part of the Site (Phase 1), flanking Otter Valley Park is subject of 'Resolution to approve subject to conditions and completion of a S106' from East Devon District Council Planning Committee in September 2023.
- 7.1.3 The vegetation pattern in the vicinity of the Site is largely formed of dense hedgerows and belts along stream corridors, including often near-continuous extents of mature canopy trees; and complements the landform in providing containment to the landscape.
- 7.1.4 The landscape surrounding the Site is designated as lying within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and further to the south lies the East Devon National Landscape. The National Landscape boundaries are drawn tightly around the south-eastern edge of Honiton, with the exception of land within the Site and land to the south-west, between Hale Farm and the railway line. This reflects the established pattern and influence of the settlement of Honiton and major communication routes on the lower slopes of the valley flank. It is noted that the fact that development in Honiton extends to the boundaries of the National Landscapes means that such development is not, in principle, deemed inappropriate in the setting of the National Landscapes.
- 7.1.5 Relevant planning policy focuses on themes including: locally-distinctive design, including with regard to landform and settlement patterns; protecting National Landscapes and their settings; integration into development of green infrastructure, particularly of a naturalistic character; and avoidance of visually prominent development.
- 7.1.6 Published character assessment focuses on: the qualities of the plateau and valley landscape pattern; streams draining off the hills in v-shaped valleys into the main river valleys; the influence of urban development and infrastructure in the vicinity of Honiton (noted at a county, but not district level of assessment); the well vegetated pattern, including hedgerows, trees, irregular fields and small copses; and views over the landscape, albeit a sense of intimacy and containment in the side valleys.
- 7.1.7 Published character guidance of relevance focuses on: protection and enhancement of tranquil valleys with streams; reinforcing the wooded character of the area, including a diversity of age, species and structure; management of grassland, including as wildflower meadow; avoidance of development on upper slopes of the valley flanks and development that doesn't reflect settlement form in relation to topography; and integration of development through features including small woodlands.

- 7.1.8 The Site comprises distinct areas: the north-west facing slopes and the nursery land, which lie to the north-west of the central ridgeline of the Site and are closely associated with the existing settlement; the eastern bowl of the Site, which is structurally separated from the settlement and its associated influences by the central ridgeline and is more closely associated with the wider landscape; and the northern stream corridor which is contained and intimate and, in conjunction with the ridgeline at Higher Northcote Farm to the north-east, forms the settlement edge at Otter Valley Park.
- 7.1.9 Views of the Site are limited from low-lying elevations on the valley floor and from the wider landscape to the north, north-east and east, by intervening landform, vegetation and limited PRow routes. In summary, there is no visibility of the Site at all from the elevated plateau to the south-east and views from the south-eastern slopes of the Otter Valley are extremely localised, including from north-east of the Higher Northcote Farm Ridge which largely screens views. The elevated land masses of St Cyre's Hill to the north-west and Dumpdon Hill to the north, frame the area from which the Site is visible between them. Within this area, variations in landform and woodland cover provide localised containment of outward views. Very limited views are available from the southern flanks of Dumpdon Hill. Woodland belts characteristic of the plateau edges create further containment of views out from elevated land, notably on the summit of Dumpdon Hill and St Cyre's Hill. Views from the valley floor are screened by built form in the settlement and vegetation.
- 7.1.10 Where views are obtained, from the south-east, the central ridgeline and eastern bowl of the Site are perceived. From the south, the north-western slopes of the Site are just perceived, where existing boundary vegetation allows, in the context of existing development in Honiton. From long-distance locations to the west, north-west and north, the Site is typically perceived in the context of existing development in Honiton, extenuated along the lower valley flanks. There is a clear distinction in these views between the slope of the central ridgeline falling towards the northern stream corridor and Otter Valley Park; and the eastern bowl of the Site, which appears distinct and, in the eastern corner of the Site, protruding from the landform pattern that contains the wider settlement.
- 7.1.11 On the basis of the above analysis of baseline conditions, it is considered that there is potential for sensitive development of the Site, that responds to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, East Devon National Landscape and other landscape character and visual sensitivities, based on the following opportunities and constraints and development principles.:
- The central ridgeline provides a clear distinction between the eastern and western parts of the Site.
 - The western part of the Site has a stronger relationship with the existing settlement and development here would continue the established expanded linear pattern that exists within Honiton.
 - Honiton lies on the lower valley slopes and follows the contours of the landscape, rising up to approximately 160m AOD, forming a wave-like pattern in the landscape.
 - Development in the western part of the Site would continue the established expanded linear pattern that exists within Honiton and is set within the extents of existing development as far north-east as Otter Valley Park, where it is truncated by the stream corridor and Higher Northcote Farm ridge.
 - The eastern bowl lies outside this established pattern and has a more rural character and association with the Blackdown Hills National Landscape therefore it should be retained as an open space that will provide a suitable setting.
 - This sensitive approach to development extent related to landform, reflecting the approach set out in published character guidance, would maintain and reinforce the

legibility of settlement pattern within Honiton, which has a well-established close relationship with the National Landscapes.

- Minimise visual impact in views from upper slopes of adjoining National Landscapes by integrating development with the existing patterns of landform and vegetation.
- Reinforce and extend the belt of vegetation perceived to flow from Otter Valley Park, along Tunnel Lane and the stream corridor, and up to the nursery. This would allow for the re-establishment of the vegetation pattern typical of this area; and assist in softening the built edge.
- Development to this extent and contained by landform and structural planting, would demonstrate a sensitive approach to the special qualities of the adjoining National Landscapes, notably: the elevated panoramic views out, the well-wooded character and the mosaic of connected green infrastructure features.
- There is potential for woodland planting on the central ridge to reflect published character guidance for small woodland blocks.
- There is potential to enhance the locally characteristic wet woodland character near the stream in the north-eastern area of the Site.
- There is potential to retain and reinforce the hedgerows on Site. Where hedgerows may be lost to development blocks, there is potential to introduce a similar pattern reflecting local-characteristic curving valley flank alignments, by means of new tree planting within the streetscape that also follows this pattern; and potential for new Devon hedge banks to the eastern edge of some of the development blocks.
- Potential to introduce a new green corridor along the existing pylon route which would largely remain open, with potential for low-level planting, including in the form of hedge banks. Any planting and orientation and position of the housing blocks should de-emphasise the dominance and regularity of alignment of the cable route.
- Potential to use clumps of trees to break up the linear division of landscape by the South-West Mainline railway line and assist in integrating it into the landscape.
- There is potential to retain and restore the area of remnant orchard as part of a community space between existing and proposed development at Otter Valley Park and to introduce locally characteristic orchards in other parts of the Site.
- On the basis of the above points, development within the Site, owing to the sensitive approach to the existing landform and proposed reinforcement of this containment through structural vegetation, would appear, in the three dimensions of the markedly elevated setting of Honiton, a coherent extension of the existing pattern in the vicinity of Otter Valley Park, following the wave pattern of development along the southern valley flanks.