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# Arden Green: Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review

Prepared on behalf of David Wilson Homes Mercia

21st April 2020



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Figure 1: Site Context Plan

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Site Appraisal Photographs A-E

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A.1: Extracts from Published Landscape Character Assessments

Appendix A.1: Extracts from Published Green Belt Reviews



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) were commissioned by David Wilson Homes Mercia to undertake an initial Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) with Green Belt Review (GBR) and assessment of the opportunities and constraints to development on land south of Whitlock's End and north of Tidbury Green in Solihull District, (referred to as 'the Site') to inform a robust rationale for the development of a concept masterplan for residential and mixed-use development and associated infrastructure (the 'Proposed Development'). This document contains a robust assessment of the landscape and visual opportunities and constraints, paying particular attention to local planning policy and landscape character.
- 1.2 The extents of the Site are demonstrated as outlined by the red line boundary on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** and **Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan**. The Study Area corresponds to the area shown on **Figure 1**.
- 1.3 The objectives of this document are to provide a robust background to the identified opportunities and constraints on the site from a landscape and visual perspective and to explain the rationale behind the masterplan in terms of the landscape character of the Site and its surroundings, the landscape and visual qualities of the Site and its function within the wider landscape context (the 'Study Area'). The work undertaken includes an assessment of the existing landscape features, a visual appraisal of the Site and its immediate surroundings context, planning policy context and landscape character baseline.
- 1.4 The document is supported by the following plans:
- Figure 1: Site Context Plan
  - Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan
  - Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan
  - Figure 4: Landscape Character Plan
  - Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan
  - Site Appraisal Photographs A-E
  - Site Context Photographs 1-9
- 1.5 At the time of writing, it was not possible to visit the Site due to the Government restrictions on only essential travel being undertaken relating to the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result of both these restrictions and the Landscape Institute's Professional advice on not undertaking site visits until advised otherwise, the assessment was undertaken using extensive desktop mapping resources, as well as publicly available photography sources such as Google Streetview and Bing Maps birds eye photography. Use was also made of previous photography relating to the Site and experience of working on nearby sites in Tidbury Green and Earlswood.

A site visit would be recommended at the appropriate time to verify the findings of this report and to take photography in accordance with Landscape Institute guidance. However, the quality of the digital resourcing available and our knowledge of the area give rise to a level of robustness in relation to the findings of this report.



## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### Methodology for Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 2.1 The methodology employed in carrying out the LVA of the Proposed Development has been drawn from the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd Edition<sup>1</sup> (2013) also referred to the 'the GLVIA3'. The aim of these guidelines is to set high-standards for the scope and content of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) and to establish certain principles that will help to achieve consistency, credibility, transparency and effectiveness throughout the assessment.
- 2.2 The GLVIA3 sets out the difference between Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). Whereas an LVIA seeks to assess the predicted effects of a known and fixed scheme, an LVA is a tool to identify the baseline conditions of the site from which it can then inform the iterative design process of the scheme layout, rather than undertaking an assessment of a final proposal.
- 2.3 The assessment of landscape and visual effects, in common with any assessment of environmental effects, includes a combination of objective and subjective judgements. It is, therefore, important that a structured and consistent approach is adopted to ensure that the assessment undertaken is as objective as possible.
- 2.4 A landscape appraisal is the systematic description and analysis of the features within the landscape, such as landform, vegetation cover, settlement and transport patterns and land use which create a particular sense of place. A visual appraisal assesses visual receptors, which are the viewers of the landscape, and could include locations such as residential or business properties, public buildings, public open space and Public Rights of Way (PRoW).
- 2.5 A desktop assessment of the Study Area was undertaken, including an assessment of landscape character, landform, landscape features, historic evolution, policy and designations.
- 2.6 The Study Area has been confined to an area approximately 3km from the Site. This distance from the Site was chosen based on existing features such as landform and vegetation, settlement morphology and land use patterns. This is considered a sufficient area to establish the landscape and visual baseline and to allow the appraisal of the Site and its context.

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

- 2.7 A brief description of the existing land use of the Study Area is provided and includes reference to existing settlement, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape value and sensitivity, and an indication of key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors, which are then considered in the visual appraisal.
- 2.8 The Site has been considered in terms of the following:
- i) Landscape Character  
i.e. landform, vegetation cover, land use, scale, state of repair of individual elements, representation of typological character, enclosure pattern, form/line and movement
  - ii) Visual Influence  
i.e. landform influences, tree and woodland cover, numbers and types of residents, numbers and types of visitors and scope for mitigating potential for visual impacts
  - iii) Landscape Value  
i.e. national designations, local designations, tranquillity / remoteness, scenic beauty and cultural associations

#### **Methodology for Green Belt Review**

- 2.9 The Site was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the recently published NPPF dated February 2019, Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, which are:
- *"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas*
  - *To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another*
  - *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*
  - *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns..."*
- 2.10 The fifth purpose of the Green Belt *"to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"*, has been scoped out of the assessment as the Council is considering greenfield sites and, therefore, should the Site be brought forward for development, it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for development.
- 2.11 The NPPF states in Paragraph 136 that *"once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan"*.

- 2.12 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are *"their openness and their permanence"*. In defining new boundaries to the Green Belt, it must be ensured that these characteristics are not diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a direct result of development. An assessment is made of the openness of the Green Belt in the vicinity of the Site and to what extent its removal could have on the perception of openness in the remaining designated area.
- 2.13 In addition, the relationship of the Site to existing elements, such as built form, roads, railways and rivers, as well as visual barriers, such as ridgelines and areas of notable vegetation is set out. This assists in the assessment of the Site in relation to the existing Green Belt and consideration of potential development in relation to the openness of the remaining Green Belt and the permanence of Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.14 Where relevant, these factors, on top of consideration of the contribution of the Site as existing to the Green Belt, are then used to determine the degree of harm to the Green Belt, resulting from the Proposed Development, accounting for the mitigation by design approaches taken (and beneficial uses as set out in paragraph 141 of the NPPF if the Site remains within the Green Belt).

*Assessment in relation to the characteristics of the Green Belt*

- 2.15 The table below sets out the assessment criteria used within this LVAGBR to assess the contribution that the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt.

**Table 2.1: Purposes of the Green Belt – Assessment Criteria**

Purpose	Criteria
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>Considerable - Development of the land would be strongly perceived as sprawl, as it is not contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in an incoherent manner.</p> <p>Some - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl, as it is partially contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a moderately incoherent manner.</p> <p>Limited - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl to a limited degree, as it is largely contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a broadly coherent manner.</p> <p>None - Development of the land would not be perceived as sprawl as it is well contained by robust physical features and/or is entirely set within the existing coherent settlement pattern.</p>
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	<p>Considerable - Development would result in the physical unification of two (or more) towns</p> <p>Some - Development would substantially reduce the physical or perceived separation between towns</p> <p>Limited - Development would result in a limited reduction in the physical or perceived separation between towns</p>

	None - Development would not physically or perceptually reduce the separation between towns
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>Considerable: No built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a strong urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Some: Built or engineered forms present but retaining a perception of being predominantly undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a moderate urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Limited: Built or engineered forms present and a minimal perception of being undeveloped and or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a limited urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>None: Built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently developed and/or urban in character. Development would not result in urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p>
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<p>Considerable: Strong physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town. May be within or adjoining the historic part of a town.</p> <p>Some: Partial physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town, whilst not adjacent to it.</p> <p>Limited: Weak physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p> <p>None: No physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p>

**Table 1.2: Definitions**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Brownfield	See 'Previously Developed Land'
Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that differentiates one area from another.
Coalescence	The physical or visual linkage of large built-up areas.
Countryside	In planning terms: land outwith the settlement boundary. In broader terms: the landscape of a rural area (see also rural)
Defensible Boundary	<p>A physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.</p> <p>The NPPF states at Paragraph 139 f) that "local authorities should define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent".</p> <p>With regard to physical boundaries, these would include roads, railway lines, rivers, streams, or canals, large woodland or strong tree belts, or significant topographical features.</p>
Encroachment	<p>Advancement of a large built-up area beyond the limits of the existing built-up area into an area perceived as countryside either physically or visually.</p> <p>Any development on greenfield sites would inevitably lead to physical encroachment, whether the land is within the Green Belt or not. Encroachment into the countryside takes into consideration the landscape character context, and the urbanising features present as well as the potential visual encroachment into the countryside.</p>

Green Infrastructure	A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
Greenfield	Land (or a defined site) usually farmland, that has not previously been developed.
Large Built-Up Area	An area that corresponds to the settlements identified in the relevant Local Plan, including those inset from the Green Belt.
Merging	This relates to the physical or visual linkage of large built up areas i.e. the coalescence of settlements or the erosion of the gap between settlements. Interlying physical barriers, intervisibility between towns / settlements and the potential for coalescence are all taken into consideration. (see coalescence)
Neighbouring Town	Refers to settlements identified within the relevant Local Plan and those within the neighbouring authorities' administrative boundary that abut the Green Belt.
Open space	(NPPF definition) All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.
Openness	Openness is taken to be the degree to which an area is primarily unaffected by built features, in combination with the consideration of the visual perception of built features. In order to be a robust assessment, this should be considered from first principles, i.e. acknowledging existing structures that occur physically and visually within the area, rather than seeing them as being 'washed over' by the existing Green Belt designation.
Previously Developed Land	(NPPF definition) Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or has been occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill purposes where provision for restoration has been made through development control procedures; land in built-up areas such as private gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments and land that was previously-developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time.
Sprawl	The outward spread of a large built-up area in an incoherent, sporadic, dispersed or irregular way. Unrestricted sprawl could also be defined as areas where large expanses of land are being used for a relatively small amount of development. Sprawl also considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well the Site relates to the existing built form of the area (how well contained the Site is).</li> <li>• How well the existing boundary performs in containing development. Where strong boundaries are formed by roads, rivers and railway lines, with smaller country lanes performing a more limited role.</li> <li>• The impact of encroachment on the countryside. Where sites that are surrounded on more than one side by development (i.e. where the landscape is less open), this impact is more limited.</li> </ul>

### 3.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT AND APPRAISAL

3.1 This appraisal is supported by the following visual material:

- Figure 1: Site Context Plan
- Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan
- Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan
- Figure 4: Landscape Character Plan
- Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan
- Site Appraisal Photographs A-E
- Site Context Photographs 1-9.

3.2 Due to the current restrictions on site visit relating to the COVID-19 outbreak, it was not possible to visit the Site in person. However, a number of Site Appraisal and Site Context Photographs have been obtained from digital Google Streetview imagery and serve to illustrate the existing character and features of the Site, as well as its relationship to the surrounding landscape. The locations of the Site Context and Site Appraisal Photographs are shown on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan** and **Figure 3: Site Appraisal Plan** respectively, and panoramas are included as part of the illustrative material. It is important to note that images taken for Google Streetview are slightly higher than the industry standard eye level of 1.6-1.8m and may show views above hedgerows that would not be possible to obtain by a person at street level. However, they still demonstrate the characteristics of the landscape and the visual openness (or otherwise) of the Site and its surroundings.

#### Site Description and Location

3.3 As shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** the Site is located south of the settlement of Whitlock's End and north of Tidbury Green in Solihull. The northern boundary of the Site is marked by native tree and hedgerow planting, separating the Site from an area of scrub land with dilapidated buildings south of Houndsfield Lane, as seen on **Site Appraisal Photograph E**. The western boundary is marked by native planting before land rises to meet the railway embankment, as seen on **Site Appraisal Photograph B**. The southern boundary is marked by a strong hedgerow with trees, separating the Site from further pastoral land to the south. The eastern boundary is marked by dense native planting along Tilehouse Lane and the gardens of properties facing Tilehouse Lane, as seen on **Site Context Photograph 4**.

3.4 The Site originally comprised a series of small pastoral fields, separated by native hedgerows and trees, as is typical of this area. In its more recent history, the Site has been increasingly developed as Tidbury Green Golf Course. As part of the development of the Site as a golf course, much of the original field pattern was removed with some of the original pattern of

hedgerows and trees retained between greens and new areas of non-native hedgerows planted along the new access road, Lake Drive, as seen on **Site Appraisal Photographs C and D**.

- 3.5 Within the past year, the golf course activity use has ceased. The centre of the golf course, excluded from the Site boundary, contains the club house building and, until 2017, a covered driving range. This latter building has since been demolished and the land is currently being developed for a small number of detached housing plots, see **Site Appraisal Photographs A and B**.
- 3.6 As shown on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan**, the Site slopes west to the shallow valley of the River Cole, which passes north to south through the Site. A large pond is situated to the east of the river course. To the immediate west of the Site, the land rises up to the embankment of the Tyseley to Earlswood branch North Warwickshire line of the Great Western Railway (GWR).

### **Settlement Pattern and Land Uses**

- 3.7 The local landscape comprises rural pasture between frequent sprawling villages and hamlets. The settlement of Whitlock's End comprises houses spreading north and east from the junction of Houndsfield Lane with Tilehouse Lane. The historic centre of Whitlock's End was focussed on the junction of Tilehouse Lane and Houndsfield Lane and is now occupied by Moat House, between the Site and Tilehouse Lane. A moated site is shown on historic OS maps, situated within the south-east of the Site. Trees relating to the moat are still visible within the Site.
- 3.8 Tidbury Green, once focussed on the crossroads approximately 350m south of the Site, has extended along the surrounding roads, including east along Norton Lane and north along Tilehouse Lane. Dickens Heath New Village is situated 500m to the east of the Site. New residential development is ongoing in both Dickens Heath and Tidbury Green.
- 3.9 The land to the north of the Site forms part of Whitlock's End and, to the south, development is spreading north from Tidbury Green. Land to the west of Dickens Heath is shown as being proposed for allocation of housing as part of the Solihull Draft Local Plan Review 2016.

### **Access and Rights of Way**

- 3.10 Tilehouse Lane extends along the eastern boundary of the Site, meeting Houndsfield Lane at the north-eastern corner of the Site. Tilehouse Lane extends south through the centre of Tidbury Green, crossing with Dickens Heath Road/Lowbrook Lane in a crossroads at the historic centre of the settlement, 350m to the south of the Site. Norton Lane crosses Fulford Hall Road and extends along the southern edge of Tidbury Green. Birchy Leasowes Lane extends east from Tilehouse Lane at the eastern boundary of the Site.

- 3.11 A railway line extends approximately north to south through the Study Area, and Wythall station is located 650m to the south and Whitlocks' End Station is located 475m north.
- 3.12 A dense network of criss-crossing enclosed rural lanes extends throughout the Study Area with no clear hierarchy. There are relatively few Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in the local area with the closest being 850m to the south-west at Grimes Hill, 650m to the west on the edge of Truman's Heath, 1.5km to the south, south of Fulford Hall, and 1.3km to the south-east at Rumbush.

### **Designations**

- 3.13 The Site is not covered by any landscape designations and none exist within the Study Area. The Site is located within the Green Belt although the land immediately to the south has been removed from the Green Belt and is currently being developed. There are no Listed Buildings within or immediately adjacent to the Site. Big and Little Dickens Woods, situated 400m to the south-east of the Site, are areas of Ancient Woodland.
- 3.14 The trees along the southern edge of the Site form tree group G1 of Tree Preservation Order (TPO) 2012(986) which primarily relates to Lowbrook Farm, the development site to the south of the Site. G1 is described as comprising a mix of *Quercus robur* (English Oak) and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Ash).

### **Topography and Hydrology**

- 3.15 The landform as demonstrated on **Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan** ranges in height from a ridge of higher ground at 175m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) in the west of the Study Area, to a series of shallow stream valleys below 125m AOD in the east.
- 3.16 A tight network of shallow stream valleys extends through the area from the higher ground to the west of the Site towards the north and east but being of a shallow nature are not immediately evident in the landscape.
- 3.17 The Stratford and Avon Canal extends through the Study Area, approximately 1km to the east of the Site, but there is no intervisibility between the two, due to the intervening vegetation. A small stream extends along the rear boundaries of the properties on Norton Lane to the south of the Site, then curving around to the east and north to meet the canal.
- 3.18 The levels in the Site drop down towards the west to a shallow valley of the River Cole before rising up to the railway embankment locally and then rising up to the ridge of higher ground in the west of the Study Area. A pond is situated within the Site adjacent to the River Cole and further field ponds are situated in the east of the Site.



**Vegetation and Field Pattern**

- 3.19 The landscape comprises a patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields separated by hedgerows with mature oak trees. Patches of woodland are situated between these fields. Big Dickens Wood and Little Dickens Wood, areas of Ancient Woodland, are located to the north of the Site. This is typical of the Arden landscape.
- 3.20 The field pattern of the Site is more fragmented than the intact landscape to the south-east due to the historic land use of the Site as a golf course, but the small scale structure of fields is still visible, particularly in the south-east of the Site. New developments within Tidbury Green have been arranged around the remnant hedgerow trees.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING POLICY

### National

*National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019<sup>2</sup>*

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was first published in March 2012 has been updated and re-published in July 2018 and again in February 2019. The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, and providing it is in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan, and policies set out in the NPPF including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Green Belt.

4.2 Paragraph 38 refers to Decision making and states that:

***“Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”***

4.3 Paragraphs 124-132 focus on achieving well-designed places and seek to promote good design of the built environment. Paragraph 127 states that 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.***

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

- 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.***

4.4 Paragraph 130 states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision maker as a valid reason to object to development.

4.5 Chapter 13 is dedicated to issues of Protecting Green Belt land, replacing Planning Policy Guidance note (PPG2). The NPPF states that "the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence" (Para.133). Paragraph 134 then goes on to list the five purposes of Green Belts:

- a) *To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.***
- b) *To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.***
- c) *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.***
- d) *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.***
- e) *To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.***

4.6 The NPPF states that when defining Green Belt boundaries, that they should be clear, "using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent" (Para. 139 f).

4.7 Paragraph 138 states that:

***"when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously -developed and /or is well served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land."***

- 4.8 Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.
- 4.9 Paragraph 143 notes that, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in “very special circumstances”. Paragraph 144 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. “Very special circumstances” will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 4.10 Chapter 15 is entitled “Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment”. Paragraph 170 notes that the planning system 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 ecosystems services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.***
  - c) *maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, whilst improving public access to it where appropriate.***
  - d) *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.***
  - e) *preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans.***
  - f) *remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.***
- 4.11 Paragraph 171 states that 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 Framework; 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 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first published online in March 2014 and provides detailed guidance to support the NPPF. The PPG was last updated on 1st October 2019 and replaces the previous guidance on 'Design: Process and tools' with the National Design Guide, which sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.

4.2 Under the heading 'Planning for Well-Designed Places', Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001 of the PPG states that, as set out in paragraph 130 of the NPPF, permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Good design is set out in the National Design Guide under 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).
- Lifespan (made to last).

4.3 Further guidance is outlined within the 10 characteristics in the National Design Guide. Those of relevance to design and townscape/ landscape and visual matters include:

- C1: Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context.
- C2: Value heritage, local history and culture.
- I1: Respond to existing local character and identity.
- I2: Well-designed, high quality and attractive.
- I3: Create character and identity.
- B1: Compact form of development.
- B2: Appropriate building types and forms.
- B3: Destinations

- N1: Provide high quality, green open spaces with a variety of landscapes and activities, including play.
- N3: Support rich and varied biodiversity.
- P1: Create well-located, high quality and attractive public spaces.
- P2: Provide well-designed spaces that are safe.
- P3: Make sure public spaces support social interaction.
- L1: Well-managed and maintained.

4.4 The 'Landscape' and 'Green Infrastructure' sections of the PPG were updated in July 2019 with the following:

4.5 Under the heading of 'Green infrastructure', Paragraph 5 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..."*. This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 6, which states:

***"Green infrastructure can help in:***

- *Achieving well-designed places.*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities.*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change.*
- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment."*

4.6 Under the heading of Natural Environment, sub-heading Landscape, Paragraph 37 in the PPG supports the use of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to *"demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape"*. The PPG additionally makes reference to Natural England's guidance on undertaking landscape character assessment *"to complement Natural England's National Character Area Profiles"*.

4.7 Under the Heading of Green Belt, Paragraph 001 sets out what may form part of the consideration of the potential impact of development on openness. The PPG sets out that decisions need to be made on a case by case basis.

***"By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:***

- *openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume.*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness.*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation."*

4.8 Paragraph 002 sets out how the impact of removing land from the Green Belt may be compensated, with measures including:

- *"new or enhanced green infrastructure.*
- *woodland planting.*
- *landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal).*
- *improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital.*
- *new or enhanced walking and cycle routes; and*
- *improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision."*

### **District**

4.9 The Site is situated within the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull. The Solihull Local Plan was adopted in December 2013, but a review is currently underway in response to a legal challenge in reference to housing numbers, and the HS2 routes. A summary of the relevant policies from the existing and emerging Local Plans are included below.

*Solihull Local Plan: Shaping a Sustainable Future (December 2013)*

4.10 The policies of the Local Plan are very similar to those within the Draft Local Plan below and cover the same issues.

*Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future: Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Local Plan (November 2016)*

4.11 The following policies from the submission draft are relevant:

- **P10 Natural Environment:**
  - Protect existing and create new landscape features including woodlands, copses, hedgerows and standard trees.
  - Developers will be expected to incorporate measures to enhance and restore the landscape.
- **P14 Amenity:**
  - Safeguard important trees, hedgerows and woodland, and plant new trees, hedgerows and woodland.
  - Protect dark skies from impacts of light pollution.
- **P15 Security Design Quality:**

- New development will be expected to conserve and enhance local character, distinctiveness and streetscape quality and respect the surrounding natural, built and historic environment.
- New development will be expected to respect and enhance landscape quality, including trees, hedgerows and other landscape features of value and contribute to strategic green infrastructure.
- **P16 Conservation of Heritage Assets and Local Distinctiveness:**
  - The Arden landscape must be protected and restored.
  - Landscape, including woodlands and distinctive fieldscapes should be protected.
- **P17 Countryside and Green Belt:**
  - Development within the Green Belt must not harm the visual amenity of the Green Belt.
- **P18 Health and Wellbeing:**
  - Measures to improve health and wellbeing include the improvement of the quality of and access to the local green infrastructure network.
  - Increasing opportunities for walking.
  - Seek to retain and enhance green spaces and incorporate planting and trees.
- **P20 Provision for Open Space, Children’s Play, Sport, Recreation and Leisure:**
  - Existing facilities that make an important contribution to the quality of the environment or network of green infrastructure will be protected.

*Reviewing the Plan for Solihull’s Future: Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation*

4.12 This document was produced as a supplement to the consultation for the Draft Local Plan and is intended to be read in conjunction with the Draft Local Plan document. The document provides an update on housing need, assesses the additional sites that have been submitted since the Draft Local Plan was produced, refines the process for assessing those sites and reassesses them and produces concept masterplans for the main allocations. The document is supplemented by the following additional documents:

- Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Concept Masterplans (January 2019); and
- Solihull Local Plan Review Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation: Site Assessments (January 2019).



- 4.13 Sites were submitted through the Call for Sites, in response to the Local Plan Consultation and since that time, the document states in paragraph 63 that ***"the vast majority of sites that have been put forward [are] located in the Green Belt"***. A sequential test was devised for each of these sites against a series of criteria to determine their position in the hierarchy of sites. Issues included whether the site was brownfield, accessible or in high performing Green Belt. Sites were then assessed against factors in favour of, or against them, including whether they accord with the spatial strategy, whether they would breach a strong defensible Green Belt barrier or whether they had low landscape capacity.
- 4.14 The Site was included as Site 209 in Blythe, addressed in Chapter 6 of the above document. Blythe is described as consisting of ***"distinct villages set within, and separated by, attractive countryside and Green Belt, which gives each village a sense of remoteness"***. Tidbury Green is described as comprising ***"predominantly inter-war linear development along key roads"***.
- 4.15 The document acknowledges that Green Belt land will be required to be released as there is little brownfield land available in Blythe (para 144). Site 4 – Land to the West of Dickens Heath is proposed for allocation. Site 4 extends as far as the eastern boundary of the Site that is the focus of this LVA GBR, effectively merging Whitlock's End with Dickens Heath. This is demonstrated in the supplementary document 'Solihull Local Plan Site Allocation – Masterplans'.
- 4.16 The Site is identified in the Site Assessments Supplementary Consultation document (January 2019) as Site Reference 209: Tidbury Green Golf Course. Constraints identified on the Site include the TPO trees along the southern boundary, the Green Belt designation and the wildlife habitats. Under the heading of 'Evidence' the Site is assessed as being within a lower performing Green Belt parcel (RP72) but within Solihull Landscape Character Area (LCA) 2 which is assessed as being of very low capacity to accommodate change.
- 4.17 The Site was assessed as 'red' and therefore of lower suitability for future development.

### **Evidence Base Documents**

#### *Solihull SHELAA (2016)*

- 4.18 The Site was submitted to the 2016 SHELAA and identified as site 209. It was assessed as performing well against availability and achievability but was considered to face ***"significant suitability constraints"***. However, the suitability constraints assessed by the SHELAA do not include the consideration of potential landscape of visual effects and do not form a complete picture.

*Solihull's Countryside Strategy: First Review 2010-2020 (6 October 2010)*

- 4.19 The Strategy's stated outcomes are to control and guide future change in Solihull's countryside, in order to protect and enhance its character whilst managing and developing a prosperous economy. It aims to recognise the distinctive character of the Solihull countryside and provide a framework to new development.
- 4.20 The Strategy identified ten broad character zones, but the Site was not situated in such a zone.

## 5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

5.1 Landscape character assessment is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas. The description of each landscape character area is used as a basis for evaluation, in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management and as a basis against which to assess the character of the Site. The different layers of character are used to identify areas of land which are not reflective of wider landscape character. The extent of published landscape character areas in the vicinity of the Site are illustrated on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.

### National Character Areas (2014)

5.2 At a national level, the Site is situated within National Character Area (NCA) 97: Arden, described by Natural England as "*farmland and former wood-pasture lying to the south and east of Birmingham*". Key characteristics relevant to the Site and Study Area are as follows:

- *"Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform.*
- *Mature oaks, mostly found within hedgerows, together with ancient woodlands, and plantation woodlands that often date from the time of enclosure. Woodlands include historic coppice bounded by woodbanks.*
- *Narrow, meandering clay river valleys with long river meadows...*
- *Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large, old, oak trees often associated with isolated remnants of more extensive heathlands...*
- *Diverse field patterns, ranging from well hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands that contrast with larger semi regular fields on former deer park estates...*
- *Complex and contrasting settlement pattern with some densely populated where traditional settlements have amalgamated to form the major West Midlands conurbation whilst some settlements remain distinct and relatively well dispersed.*
- *Shakespeare's 'Forest of Arden', featured in 'As You Like It', is still reflected through the woodland cover, mature oaks, small ancient woodlands and former wood pasture."*

### County: Warwickshire Landscape Project (1987)

5.3 The Site is located within the Arden Pastures Landscape Character Area according to the above assessment. The Arden area is described as "*an area of former wood pasture and ancient farmlands*". It is further described as having "*few dramatic physical features*" but as having "*an intimate, historic character with a strong sense of unity*".

5.4 The Arden Pastures are described as *"a small scale, enclosed landscape, often pervaded by suburban influences and characterised by small fields, typically bordered by mature hedgerow trees"*. Characteristic features include:

- *"A gently rolling topography.*
- *A well-defined pattern of small fields and paddocks.*
- *Numerous mature hedgerow oaks.*
- *Permanent pasture often grazed by horses.*
- *A network of minor lanes often with ribbon development.*
- *Many place names ending in Heath."*

### **Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment**

5.5 The land to the west of the Site is situated within Bromsgrove District and Worcestershire County. The Worcestershire County Landscape Character Assessment places the landscape of the Site as being in the following:

- Regional Character Area (RCA) Arden
- Landscape Character Type (LCT) Timbered Pastures
- Landscape Description Unit (LDU) AR06: Wythall Timbered Pastures
- Land Cover Parcel (LCP) AR06b

5.6 Relevant characteristics of the Timbered Pastures LCT are as follows:

- *"Notable tree cover pattern of mature hedgerow oaks*
- *Ancient wooded character*
- *Small-scale landscape with well-defined pattern of small, hedged fields*
- *Pastoral land use*
- *Dense network of minor lanes...*
- *Variable enclosure pattern*
- *Dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and strings of wayside dwellings."*

5.7 Relevant characteristics of LDU AR06 are:

- *"regular to semi regular field pattern*
- *red brick building style*
- *thorn hedges...*
- *extensive areas of former common with geometric field pattern*
- *high density dispersal particularly associated with areas of former common*
- *generally, tree cover is well represented, patchy in places*
- *low to moderate intensity farming with a generally intact field pattern, with localised arable intensification and hedgerow loss...*

- *localised high impact of ribbon/urban development and associated urban fringe activities*
- *localised high impact of modern road development"*

### **Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2016)**

5.8 The Site is situated within Solihull Metropolitan Borough within Landscape Character Area 2: Southern Countryside within the above document, described as an area of approximately 14km<sup>2</sup> to the south of the Shirley area of Solihull. The LCA is described as being mainly rural with farms, horsiculture and scattered settlements, in contrast to the urban edge of Solihull. It goes onto state:

***"The narrow lanes, strong hedgerow structure lend an enclosed and intimate feeling to this area..."***

5.9 Key characteristics listed that are representative of the Site include:

- Undulating landform ranging from 130 to 150mAOD.
- The Stratford upon Avon canal passes diagonally through the area.
- Horsiculture and paddocks subject to overgrazing.
- Strong hedgerow boundary structure across majority of the area and a key feature.
- Main settlements of Dickens Heath, Cheswick Green, Hockley Heath and Tidbury Green.
- Narrow street structure with established mature hedgerows and associated trees, which are a key feature and lend to the intimate and enclosed feeling.

5.10 Sensitivities and pressures listed that are relevant to the Site comprise:

- Potential loss of tree cover through new development.
- Poor woodland management.
- Increased pressure for access and development.
- Pressure of coalescence, particularly between Tidbury Green and Dickens Heath.
- Decline in number of hedgerow trees due to neglect and lack of replacement.

5.11 The landscape character sensitivity has been assessed as being 'medium' and is described as a landscape with a strong sense of local connection to the place, defining landscape features and a characteristic enclosed and intimate landscape which is in good condition.

5.12 The visual sensitivity is assessed as being 'high' although this is described as consisting of mainly medium to short distance views that are 'wide-framed'. This is not born out in the site visit undertaken by Barton Willmore which suggested a very tight visual envelope due to the frequent hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The overall sensitivity has been assessed in the document as being 'high'.

- 5.13 The landscape value has been assessed as 'medium' as the landscape is locally distinctive and containing valued characteristics. The overall landscape capacity has been assessed as being 'very low' in accordance with the methodology set out within the document.
- 5.14 Despite this, the document states that:

***"The area is likely to be able to accommodate only very restricted areas of new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness of the area."***

### **Site Level Character Assessment**

- 5.15 The Site contains the remnants of parts of the historic small enclosed field pattern that is so distinctive of the Arden area, but the majority of the hedgerows within the Site have been cleared and new stretches of non-native coniferous hedgerow added around the access to the golf course facilities. As such, the strong Arden character of the area has been eroded in the Site, making it less sensitive to change than areas to the east and north-east.
- 5.16 There is development within and immediately abutting the Site, particularly in the north and north-east, creating a perceptual and physical link with Whitlock's End to the north. The strong planting along the southern and south-eastern boundaries create a perceptual separation from Tidbury Green to the south.

### **Guidance**

- 5.17 The following are the key areas of published guidance which should be used to inform the proposed masterplan design.

*National Character Area 97: Arden*

Strategic Environmental Objectives

- 5.18 SEO 1: Manage and enhance the valuable woodlands, hedgerows, heaths, distinctive field boundaries and enclosure patterns throughout the NCA, retaining the historic contrast between different areas while balancing the needs for timber, biomass production, climate regulation, biodiversity and recreation.
- 5.19 SEO 2: Create new networks of woodlands, heaths and green infrastructure, linking urban areas like Birmingham and Coventry with the wider countryside to increase biodiversity, recreation and the potential for biomass and the regulation of climate.

### Landscape opportunities

- Conserve, enhance and restore the area's ancient landscape pattern of field boundaries, historic (including farm) buildings, moated sites, parkland and pasture and reinforce its well wooded character.
- Protect and manage woodlands, particularly ancient woodlands and wood pasture to maintain the character of Arden.
- Manage and restore hedgerows and restore parkland, ancient trees and stream side trees plus manage and replace hedgerow trees.
- Create new green infrastructure with associated habitat creation and new public access on former mining sites and close to urban populations in the West Midlands Green Belt.

#### *Warwickshire Landscape Project (1987)*

5.20 The Site is situated within the Arden Pastures landscape character area according to the above document. A key feature of this landscape type is described as "the sense of enclosure provided by the abundance of mature hedgerow trees. The density of trees reflects the generally intact pattern of small pastoral fields."

5.21 The management strategy for this area is to conserve and enhance the small-scale enclosed character of the landscape.

5.22 The landscape guidelines are as follows:

- Maintain the wooded character of mature hedgerow and roadside oaks.
- Conserve and enhance tree cover through natural regeneration of hedgerow oaks.
- Conserve historic pattern of small hedged fields.

#### *Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment – Timbered Pastures*

5.23 Landscape guidelines for the Timbered Pastures include the following:

- conserve the density of hedgerow oak trees
- conserve, and restore the small scale pattern of hedged fields
- maintain the distinctive density of ponds
- seek opportunities to reintroduce the character of unenclosed commons through creative design
- conserve the distinctive pattern and character of narrow, winding lanes
- seek opportunities to enhance tree cover along highways

*Solihull Borough Landscape Character Assessment – LCA 2: Southern Countryside*

5.24 The document has set out a series of recommendations for future management of the landscape of LCA2.

## Guidelines and Strategy

5.25 To protect the characteristic landscape pattern of the area:

- Retain strong hedgerow structure and planting of individual trees along field boundaries, particularly in and around Fulford Hall Estate.
- Tree planting in the vicinity of Tidbury Green and Dickens Heath is described as being important to their setting and approaches.
- Resist coalescence of settlements to preserve landscape character.
- Resist loss of field boundaries and retain irregular pattern.
- Proactively manage existing woodland and plant new woodland to fit with landscape pattern.
- Positively manage roadside hedgerows.
- Promote understanding of the heritage features in the area and their contribution to landscape character:
- Protect the landscape setting of Dickens Heath.
- Protect existing woodland around Dickens Heath. Plant new woodland to diversify age structure.
- Manage access for recreation at the urban edge.
- Promote enhancement of the footpath network.
- Explore opportunities to improve public enjoyment of the area.



## 6.0 VISUAL BASELINE

6.1 At the time of writing this assessment, it was not possible to visit the Site to undertake a full visual appraisal, due to the Government restrictions in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak. A combination of techniques have thus been used to appraise the potential visibility of the Site and any new development, including the use of photography previously undertaken on site, Google Streetview and Bing birds eye photography. This has been supplemented by the knowledge of the area around the Site having assessed other sites within the locality. A series of **Site Context Photographs (1-9)** have been obtained using digital Streetview photography and these are included within the illustrative material accompanying this LVAGBR. The locations of the **Site Context Photographs** are shown on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**.

### Visual Context

- 6.2 The landscape of the area surrounding the Site is generally level at approximately 150mAOD, dropping approximately 10m into the valley of the River Cole at approximately 140mAOD. As such, there are no elevated views towards the Site (with the possible exception of those from the adjacent railway line). The level nature of the landform means that intervening layers of vegetation and built form have a strong impact on the visual permeability of the area, providing physical and visual containment and thus reducing views towards the Site.
- 6.3 There are no PRoW in close proximity to the Site or crossing it and, therefore, all publicly accessible viewpoints from where the Site may be visible relate to the surrounding network of roads as set out below.

### Likely Views

#### *Tilehouse Lane*

- 6.4 Tilehouse Lane is strongly enclosed by mature vegetation on leaving the north of Tidbury Green as it passes the Site, creating a strong sense of separation of the Site from the road, particularly during summer months, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 4**. The fields to the east of the Site and Tilehouse Lane, however, are more open visually, with clear views from Tilehouse Lane towards Big Dickens Wood, although the edge of Dickens Heath is screened behind the layers of vegetation. To the north of the junction with Birchy Leasowes Lane, views into the Site and the grounds of Moat House are more open to the west (**Site Context Photograph 1**) although views to the east from this point are curtailed by the small scale field pattern and its associated hedgerows and mature trees, suggesting limited visibility to the Site from the east. When travelling south from Whitlock's End, development is evident as far south as

Houndsfield Lane and the north-east of the Site has a visual connection to the settlement here, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 1**.

*Houndsfield Lane*

- 6.5 Houndsfield Lane is contained to the south by strong vegetation and intervening buildings, preventing views into the south of the Site during summer months, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 9**. This effect is likely to reduce during winter months and some intervisibility may be possible. East of the railway line, Houndsfield Lane is also strongly contained by vegetation and views towards the Site are likely to be blocked by the intervening railway embankment and associated vegetation, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 8**.

*Birchy Leasowes Lane*

- 6.6 On travelling west along Birchy Leasowes Lane, it is possible to gain clear views across the fields to the west towards the Site, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 2**. However, the strong mature tree planting along the southern part of the eastern boundary of the Site reduces visually permeability, preventing views in the summer months. The northern part of the Site is obscured behind the intervening layers of vegetation, including the foreshortened hedgerow along Birchy Leasowes Lane itself.

*Dickens Heath Road*

- 6.7 Open views north-west are possible from Dickens Heath Road due to the trimmed hedgerow along the northern edge of the road, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 3**. The southern part of the Site is obscured behind the intervening built form and vegetation, including the nursery opposite the Site on Tilehouse Lane. Views into the eastern and north-eastern parts of the Site are unlikely, even during winter months, due to the layering of the intervening vegetation.

*Norton Lane / Lowbrook Lane*

- 6.8 No views towards the Site are predicted from these roads due to the existing and emerging intervening development in Tidbury Green, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 5**.

*Lea Green Lane*

- 6.9 Lea Green Lane is strongly vegetated as is characteristic of the area, reducing views across the surrounding countryside to the east, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 6**. Where vegetation along Lea Green Lane is not present, longer distance views are curtailed by the intervening layers of vegetation and built form, as shown on **Site Context Photograph 7**. In

any case, it is considered unlikely that views into the Site would be possible due to the railway embankment extending along the western boundary of the Site.

### **Summary of the Visual Appraisal**

- 6.10 The visual appraisal demonstrates that the Site has a limited and localised visual envelope. Views toward the Site are possible from Birchy Leasowes Lane, Dickens Heath Road and short stretches of Lea Green Lane. However, vegetation along the Site boundaries reduces visual permeability, particularly in summer months. Filtered views into the south-east of the Site from Tilehouse Lane will be possible during winter months and views are open into the north-east of the Site year around. Filtered views may be possible into the north of the Site from the eastern part of Houndsfield Road during winter months.

## 7.0 GREEN BELT REVIEW

7.1 This chapter includes a summary of the published Green Belt Reviews that include the Site before an assessment of the contribution of the Site to the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF, in accordance with the methodology set out in Chapter 2. Extracts from the published Green Belt Reviews are included in Appendix A.2.

### **Published Green Belt Reviews**

#### *Solihull Green Belt Review (2012)*

7.2 This was a high-level document, concentrating on the land on the edge of Solihull around the Cole Valley and Chelmsley Wood. It does not include the area of the Site.

#### *Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment (2016)*

7.3 The above assessment divided Solihull Metropolitan Borough into a series of Broad Areas and smaller Refined Parcels, the latter being situated adjacent to built-up areas. Each Refined Parcel and Broad Area was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF.

7.4 The Site is located within Refined Parcel RP72, an area of land extending between Tilehouse Lane in the east and the railway line in the west with the southern boundary of the parcel following the southern boundary of the Site. It therefore comprises an area greater than that of the Site. This area was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

7.5 Refined Parcels were given a score of 0-3, with a score of 0 meaning the Refined Parcel does not perform against the purpose and 3 meaning the Refined Parcel is higher performing against the purpose. The scores for RP72 'Land between Houndsfield Lane and Tilehouse Lane, east of railway line' were as follows:

- 1) 1
- 2) 2
- 3) 1
- 4) 0

Total. 4

7.6 The highest scoring criterion was 2, preventing towns from merging. A score of 4 places the Refined Parcel among the lower of the potential scores, the highest of which was 12. As a result, it is considered that the Site does not perform highly against the first 4 purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF.

*Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area (HMA) Strategic Growth Study: Greater Birmingham and the Black Country (February 2018)*

7.7 This document comprises a four-stage process to identify potential housing land supply to meet the identified demand. These stages comprise: attempts to increase density through use of policy, identification of non-Green Belt land, identification of previously developed Green Belt land and, should a shortfall still remain, undertake a strategic Green Belt Review of all of the land within the HMA to identify further sites.

7.8 The strategic review of Green Belt sites was based on the assessment of the performance of the strategic areas against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF. The strategic areas were assessed as to whether they made a 'principal contribution' or a 'supporting contribution'. Figure 27 on page 167 identifies the area of the Site as being in area S28 and as making a supporting contribution, rather than a principal contribution.

7.9 The assessment resulted in the identification of six 'Areas of Search' for new settlements and six for urban extensions, together with three Areas of Search for employment uses. In addition, a number of areas were identified where 'proportionate dispersal' might be appropriate, i.e. small-scale developments of approximately 500-2,500 dwellings. The corridor of the railway line passing Tidbury Green to the west is identified as a potential area of search (NS5) for a new settlement, with the area to the north identified as a suitable location for proposition dispersal (PD5) (see Figure 77 on page 191).

7.10 Chapter 8 of the document sets out the strategic Green Belt Review that was undertaken as part of the overall assessment process. The Site is situated within Green Belt parcel S28 for the purposes of analysis. This parcel covers all of the land from the south of the built edge of Birmingham as far south as the M40, from the railway line in the west to the M42 in the east, an area of approximately 2000ha. The overall study area was divided into six 'sectors' which were also assessed for their landscape character and settlement pattern. Parcel S28 is situated within the north-eastern corner of the 'South Sector'.

7.11 The analysis of the sector notes the *"higher occurrence of small scale settlements, clusters of dwellings and ribbon development associated with the Hollywood, Dickens Heath and Cheswick Green part of the sector"*. It goes on to state the:

***"Settlement pattern away from the conurbation and within the rural farmland is relatively well dispersed with many discrete clusters of dwellings and villages and frequent farmsteads and wayside dwellings in more settled landscapes."***

- 7.12 Under the heading of 'Green Belt Role', the strategic function of the Green Belt within the sector is described as principally relating to the containment of the southern expansion of Birmingham and the maintenance of the separate identities of the settlements to the south. In addition, the Green Belt is described as preventing wider encroachment from the urban edge of Birmingham and from the ***"numerous settlements of various sizes located in the Green Belt"***.
- 7.13 Figure 27 on page 167 shows the majority of S28 as contributing to the protection of the countryside from encroachment and the western area (skirting south of the Site) as forming part of the strategic separation of settlements. The Site is situated just outside this latter area. The location of the strategic separation on the plan suggests that it is primarily to maintain the separation of Birmingham, Redditch and Bromsgrove.
- 7.14 Figure 36 on page 187 shows that the area of the Site provides a supporting contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt.
- 7.15 The identified parcels and strategic Areas of Search mean that this assessment cannot be usefully applied to development at a site level. The document has identified a potential strategic corridor along the railway route, linking to the stations (Area of Search NS5). The Site is situated approximately 500m from a mainline railway station at Wythall and could be argued to fall within NS5.

### **Contribution of the Site to the Green Belt**

- 7.16 Barton Willmore has undertaken their own assessment of the contribution made by the Site to the Green Belt and these findings are summarised within the following table:

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Critique</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Contribution using Solihull Methodology</b>
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	The Site is bordered by a development site to the south, by existing residential development to the north, and the railway line to the west, all of which are strong defensible boundaries. The area to the north-east is also proposed for residential development within the Draft Local Plan supplementary consultation documents. As such, the site is surrounded by existing or	None	1

Purpose	Critique	Contribution	Contribution using Solihull Methodology
	emerging residential development on three sides and a railway line to the west.		
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	<p>Without careful planning and design, there is the risk that development in the Site would effectively merge Tidbury Green with Whitlock's End to the north. The proposed development to the west of Dicken's Heath would also potentially cause merger between Dickens Heath and Whitlock's End, suggesting that the preservation of Whitlock's End as a separate settlement is not a priority for the Council. Whitlock' End is not considered to comprise an 'urban area' in the terms of the Solihull Green Belt Assessment. However, none of these settlements are 'towns' as set out in the NPPF.</p> <p>Strong vegetation along the southern part of the eastern boundary of the Site reduces views into the Site from Tilehouse Lane. Ensuring this boundary is protected and enhanced with further planting, and by keeping the development edge away from Tilehouse Lane, it will be possible to retain a strong sense of leaving Tidbury Green before entering Whitlock's End to the north.</p>	Limited	2-3
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	The Site has been historically used as a golf course since at least the 1990s and is no longer pristine open countryside. In addition, existing development exists to the south and north of the Site, and buildings occur within the confines of the Site, west of Tilehouse Lane. As such, development within the Site will not encroach physically or visually into the open countryside.	None	0
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	There is no intervisibility between the Site and a historic town.	None	0
<b>Overall</b>		Limited to None	2-3

7.17 As can be seen in the table above, the Site does not perform a strong role when assessed against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out within the NPPF. The Green Belt is not intended to prevent the merger of local villages but, rather, to keep larger settlements from merging. The Site will not cause the merger of these large settlements. Any design of development within the Site should seek to reflect the rural location of the Site and provide a

well-considered and sensitive and sympathetic positive design response to its location and character.

- 7.18 An assessment of the contribution of the Site to the purposes of the Green Belt utilising the Solihull methodology resulting in an overall score of 2-3 out of a potential score of 12, lower than the overall score of '4' for RP72, and demonstrating that the Site would not be considered to make a notable contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt within the Solihull Green Belt Review.



## 8.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

- 8.1 The opportunities and constraints identified within each chapter have been used to underpin a robust rationale for future development and the creation of a landscape strategy for the Site. This includes the following recommendations:

### **Landscape Considerations for the Site**

- 8.2 The most important features within the Site are the boundary hedgerows with their mature trees and the remaining mature trees within the hedgerows subdividing the Site.
- 8.3 The existing mature trees should be retained, subject to survey, and provision made to add new native trees, particularly oaks, to create age depth. This is to maintain the historic small-scale pattern of the landscape and the visual filtering created by the layering of the trees.
- 8.4 Non-native hedgerows should be replaced and, where hedgerows are appropriate, native hedgerows with English Oak used instead.
- 8.5 The ponds within the Site should be protected and enhanced as landscape and ecological features, together with the route of the River Cole. These should be included as part of an integrated green-blue infrastructure network.

### **Visual Considerations for the Site**

- 8.6 The Site is visually well enclosed by emerging residential development to the south and by existing residential development to the north. Short distance views into the east of the Site are possible from Tilehouse Lane where it extends along the eastern boundary.
- 8.7 Visual separation between the Site and Tidbury Green is of importance and, therefore, the southern boundary and southern part of the eastern boundary of the Site should be reinforced with new tree planting to further reduce intervisibility between the two settlement edges. This does not need to be a solid tree belt but can be regular tree planting within an area of grassland to add further layers of vegetation. Consideration should also be taken of emerging proposals for land to the west of Dickens Heath and the potential for perceptual and physical merger with that settlement to the north-east of the Site.

### **Opportunities and Constraints Arising from the Landscape and Visual Appraisal**

- 8.8 The following strategy responds to the site landscape features, policy and landscape character guidance:

### Landscape Features and Character

- Preserve the intimate landscape pattern through the retention of existing hedgerows where practicable, primarily around the Site boundaries.
- Existing hedgerow trees within the Site should be retained, subject to tree survey, and provision made for the planting of new oaks where appropriate. This is to maintain the visual enclosure of the Arden Pastures and to provide an age structure within the tree cover.
- New and historic trees should be given sufficient space as part of any masterplan design in order to allow them to reach maturity without potential harm to either themselves or the surrounding development.
- Situate access points so that impact on hedgerows and trees is kept to the minimum.
- Development should reflect the semi-rural location of the Site, whilst capitalising on the proximity to the railway station. Development on the edges should be of lower densities and allow space for canopy trees. The edges of the development should also be softened through the protection and enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees and the planting of new hedgerows with hedgerow trees.
- The routes of streams and ditches should be incorporated into an integrated green-blue infrastructure network.
- Enhance the existing water body in the west of the Site as a landscape and ecological feature.
- Housing design should reflect the locality and respond to and reinforce local distinctiveness and build upon the local palette of materials and typologies.

### Visual Issues

- Planting along the southern, western, northern and south-eastern boundaries should be enhanced to prevent views from the adjacent roads and to preserve the sense of visual separation between the settlements.

### Green Belt Issues

- Positive frontages should be encouraged along Tilehouse Lane in the north of the Site to create a relationship with Whitlock's End, but should be kept away from the southern part of the eastern boundary to ensure the perception of separation from Tidbury Green is maintained.
- Particular note should be taken of the separation of the new settlement from Tidbury Green and the reinforcement of the separation and sense of leaving and entering of the two settlements through the greening of the southern and south-eastern edge of the Proposed Development.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Any development within the Site will need to take account of the distinct Arden landscape present within the Site and the surroundings through the protection and enhancement of the distinctive landscape features, including woodland, trees, hedgerows and water courses. Any development proposals should seek to enhance these features and to ensure their protection as part of an integrated and connected green blue infrastructure network. This will both serve to protect the characteristic landscape features of the Site but also to provide visual mitigation to development proposals.
- 9.2 Hedgerows around the boundaries, and the mature trees within and around the Site should be maintained as a priority, subject to tree survey. New trees, primarily oaks, should also be planted along the historic routes of the hedgerows to maintain and enhance the characteristic intimate scale of the landscape and wooded appearance. Both new and existing trees should be given sufficient space within the proposed masterplan design to ensure that they may reach maturity without risk to themselves or the surrounding development.
- 9.3 Consideration should be given to the separation of the Site from Tidbury Green to the south to preserve the experience of leaving one settlement before entering the next. This can be achieved through the protection and enhancement of planting along the southern and south-eastern boundaries of the Site and the setting of development away from Tilehouse Lane in this area. Development should form a more positive relationship with Tilehouse Lane in the north of the Site where it abuts Whitlock's End.
- 9.4 The Solihull Green Belt Review assessed the wider Refined Parcel 72 as making a minor contribution to the prevention of sprawl and as making a greater contribution to the prevention of merger of settlements. Our own assessment has assessed the Site as making limited overall contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. It has acknowledged that the Site makes a limited contribution to the separation of settlements but that these are not 'towns' are set out in the NPPF.
- 9.5 As a result, the Site has the ability to accommodate development which is of a type and scale that reflects the existing development within the surrounding area, and which does not compromise the ability of the remaining Green Belt to serve its purpose.

