

Land at Harefield Grove, Uxbridge, Middlesex
LANDSCAPE & GREEN BELT STATEMENT

on behalf of **Comer Homes Ltd**
May 2023



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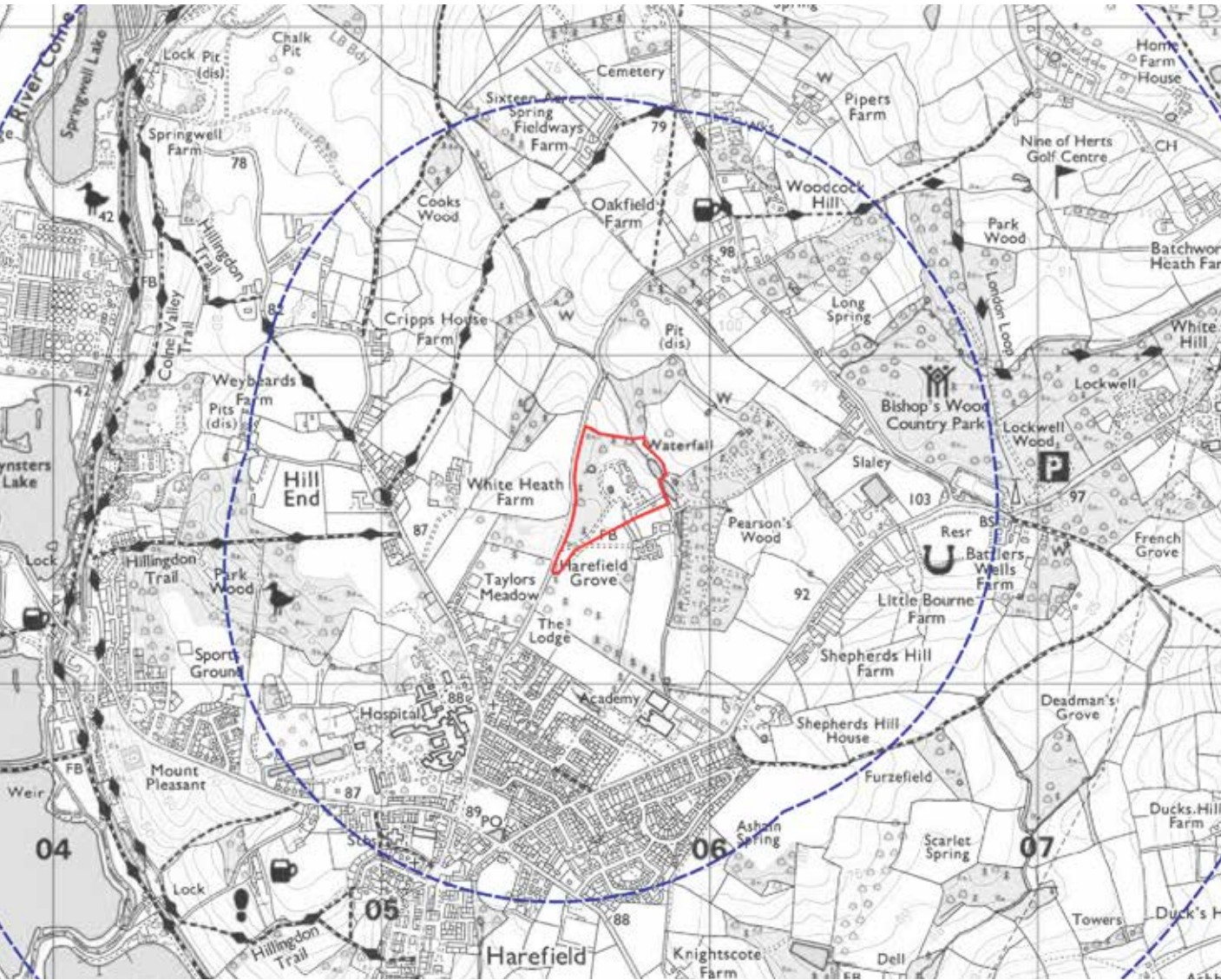
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 James Blake Associates Ltd has been instructed by Comer Homes Ltd to complete a Landscape and Green Belt Assessment to explore the potential for development of Land at Harefield Grove, Uxbridge, Middlesex, to examine the landscape factors of relevance and the potential effect of the proposed development on Green Belt.
- 1.1.2 This Assessment concerns the Grade II Listed Harefield Grove Main House, immediately surrounding properties and grounds. The Site lies immediately east of Rickmansworth Road and north east of Harefield village and is enclosed by existing mature trees and hedgerows to all boundaries, including the historic Pearsons Wood to the east. It is situated to the north eastern fringe of existing residential settlement of Harefield. The landscape surrounding the Site comprises medium to large sized arable agricultural fields which are interspersed by farmsteads. The Site location is shown on Figure 1.

1.2 Scope

- 1.2.1 This document and supporting photographs provide a further detailed assessment of the Site, the potential impact of residential development on landscape quality, biodiversity and wildlife, and its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.2.2 Whilst it is acknowledged that these documents are crucial in assessing the potential suitability of sites for much needed residential, commercial and other development, it is perhaps only after more exhaustive studies on specific sites that the potential of mitigations from sensitive siting and design considerations can be explored in more detail, that might or might not be able to successfully integrate development into sites that hitherto were conceived as being too sensitive or contrary to policies – such as the Green Belt or that were thought of as strategic to prevent coalescence.
- 1.2.3 This Statement has been prepared with reference to the National Planning Policy Framework, Hillingdon Local Plan (2012-2026) and the Greater London Authority Planning Report for Harefield Grove (2013).



KEY

- Site
- Boundary

Figure 1: Site Location Plan. Not to Scale
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2. POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 General Policy Matters

- 2.1.1 The development of the site needs to be considered against national and local planning policy context. Policies and advice contained within the following documents (and supporting Supplementary Planning Documents) have been reviewed:
- National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021);
 - Hillingdon Local Plan (2012- 2026);
 - Planning Policy Evidence Base Documents:
 - Greater London Authority Planning Report, Harefield Grove (2013).

2.2 National Planning Context

- 2.2.1 The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF sets out a clear presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a ‘golden thread’ running through plan-making and decision-taking. There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.
- 2.2.2 *‘NPPF Section 13: Protecting Green Belt land 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’.*
- 2.2.3 Green Belt is considered to perform five purposes:
- 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; and
 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.2.4 The NPPF emphasises in Paragraph 140 that local planning authorities should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. It goes on to state that *‘Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans’.*
- 2.2.5 Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that: ‘Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:
- 2.2.6 *a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;*
- 2.2.7 *b) optimises the density of development... including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and*
- 2.2.8 *c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground’.*

- 2.2.9 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF provides guidance for local planning authorities when defining Green Belt boundaries. As previously highlighted there is a need to redefine the local Green Belt boundaries in order to release land for development in order to reach the local housing growth targets. A key aspect is ensuring the permanence of the Green Belt is secured using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent over the lifetime of the development plan.
- 2.2.10 Paragraph 145 states that *‘once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their 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’.*
- 2.2.11 Paragraph 147 of the NPPF states, as with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 2.2.12 NPPF Section 3: Plan-making states that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led, and sets out the need for Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and other Supplementary Planning Documents to succinctly set out the development needs and plans specific to the area they relate to. This section also emphasises the opportunities and platforms in which local people can shape their surroundings. As such *‘once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently.’*
- 2.2.13 NPPF Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities sets out that planning decisions should achieve healthy, inclusive and safer places. An emphasis is placed on a number of design strategies to facilitate a holistic approach to community well-being. These include:
- *Promotion of social interaction through the use of ‘mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages.’*
 - *Promotion of community of safety through the use of ‘attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas.’*
 - *Promotion of strategies and features to support healthy lifestyles through ‘the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.’*
- 3.2.14 NPPF Section 11: Making effective use of land promotes efficient use of land to meet housing needs whilst safeguarding and improving the environment. Developments should showcase opportunities for new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside in order to achieve environmental net gains. As well as recognising that undeveloped land has important functions to play such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production.
- 2.2.15 NPPF Section 12: Achieving well-designed places sets out that high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places, that are safe, inclusive and accessible are fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. As such all new developments should *‘function well and add to the overall quality of the area..;’* be *‘visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping’* and *‘sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting’.*
- 2.2.16 NPPF Section 15: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment sets out that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. This includes designated landscapes but also the wider countryside. In this respect Local planning authorities could achieve this by *‘protecting and enhancing valued landscapes’; ‘recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services’* and *‘minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity’.*

2.2.17 NPPF Section 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment places emphasis on the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, recognising that ‘heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource’ and should be ‘conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance’. These principles are supported by NPPG 18a: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment.

2.3 District Level Policy

2.3.1 The current adopted Local Plan governing the area is the Hillingdon Local Plan (2012-2026) which comprises 2 parts. Part 1 sets out the overall level and broad locations of growth up to 2026 while Part 2 comprises Development Management Policies, Site Allocations and Designations and the Policies Map. Part 1 of the Local Plan (adopted November 2012) and Part 2 (adopted January 2020) and set out the planning vision for growth throughout the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Relevant policies included in Part 1: Strategic Policies of the Local Plan are listed below:

- Policy H1: Housing Growth
 - *The Council will meet and exceed its minimum strategic dwelling requirement, where this can be achieved, in accordance with other Local Plan policies. The borough’s current target is to provide an additional 4,250 dwellings, annualised as 425 dwellings per year, for the ten year period between 2011 and 2021.*
- Policy HE1: Heritage
 - *Conserve and enhance Hillingdon’s distinct and varied environment, its settings and the wider historic landscape, which includes: designated heritage assets such as statutorily Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments; Locally recognised historic features, such as Areas of Special Local Character and Locally Listed Buildings.*
- Policy BE1: Built Environment
 - *Achieve a high quality of design in all new buildings, alterations, extensions and the public realm which enhances the local distinctiveness of the area, contributes to community cohesion and a sense of place.*
- Policy EM2: Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains
 - *The Council will seek to maintain the current extent, hierarchy and strategic functions of the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains. Notwithstanding this, Green Chains will be reviewed for designation as Metropolitan Open Land*
 - *Any proposals for development in Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will be assessed against national and London Plan policies, including the very special circumstances test.*

Relevant policies included in Part 2: Development Management Policies of the Local Plan are listed below:

- Policy DMH3: Office Conversions
 - *Where offices are found to be redundant, their demolition and redevelopment for office accommodation will be supported.*
- Policy DMHB1: Heritage Assets. The Council will expect development proposals to avoid harm to the historic environment. Development that has an effect on heritage assets will only be supported where:
 - *i) it sustains and enhances the significance of the heritage asset and puts them into viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
 - *ii) it will not lead to a loss of significance or harm to an asset, unless it can be demonstrated that it will provide public benefit that would outweigh the harm or loss, in accordance with the NPPF;*
 - *iii) it makes a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness of the area;*
 - *iv) any extensions or alterations are designed in sympathy, without detracting from or competing with the heritage asset;*
 - *v) the proposal would relate appropriately in terms of siting, style, scale, massing, height, design and materials;*
 - *vi) buildings and structures within the curtilage of a heritage asset, or in close proximity to it, do not compromise its setting; and*

- *vii) opportunities are taken to conserve or enhance the setting, so that the significance of the asset can be appreciated more readily*
- Policy DMHB2: Listed Buildings
 - *Applications for Listed Building Consent and planning permission to alter, extend, or change the use of a statutorily Listed Building will only be permitted if they are considered to retain its significance and value and are appropriate in terms of the fabric, historic integrity, spatial quality and layout of the building. Any additions or alterations to a Listed Building should be sympathetic in terms of scale, proportion, detailed design, materials and workmanship.*
- Policy DMHB5: Areas of Special Local Character
 - *Within Areas of Special Local Character, new development should reflect the character of the area and its original layout. Alterations should respect the established scale, building lines, height, design and materials of the area.*
 - *Extensions to dwellings should be subservient to, and respect the architectural style of the original buildings and allow sufficient space for appropriate landscaping, particularly between, and in front of, buildings.*
- Policy DMHB14: Trees and Landscaping
 - *All developments will be expected to retain or enhance existing landscaping, trees, biodiversity or other natural features of merit.*
- Policy DMHB16: Housing Standards
 - *All housing development should have an adequate provision of internal space in order to provide an appropriate living environment.*
- Policy DMEI4: Development in the Green Belt or on Metropolitan Open Land
 - *Inappropriate development in the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will not be permitted unless there are very special circumstances.*
 - *Extensions and redevelopment on sites in the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will be permitted only where the proposal would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land, and the purposes of including land within it, than the existing development.*
- Policy DMEI7: Biodiversity Protection and Enhancement
 - *The design and layout of new development should retain and enhance any existing features of biodiversity or geological value within the site. Where loss of a significant existing feature of biodiversity is unavoidable, replacement features of equivalent biodiversity value should be provided on-site. Where development is constrained and cannot provide high quality biodiversity enhancements on-site, then appropriate contributions will be sought to deliver off-site improvements through a legal agreement.*

2.4 Planning Policy status at Harefield Grove

- 2.4.1 The Site itself is subject to extant planning permission, application number 28301/APP/2013/3104. This included a ‘redevelopment proposal comprising the conversion of the majority of historic main house into a single dwelling unit, alteration and conversion of existing east and west wings and southern part of main house into 15 residential units and conversion of ‘stable building’ into 4 residential units, plus conversion and erection of outbuildings, comprising 24 new residential units in total.
- 2.4.2 The Site proposals have since been revised to ‘demolish the existing office wing and erect a new three-storey courtyard building to include 29 residential flats, plus the conversion of the main building into 6 flats, as well as the previously proposed erection and conversion of outbuildings. In total, 39 new residential units are proposed’. Planning application number 28301/APP/2022/2205 and App 2206.

The Greater London Authority: Planning report GLA/2022/0870/S1/01 (Jan 2023)

2.4.3 The Greater London Authority (GLA) have raised issues and concerns, and these are set out below;

Development on Green Belt

- 2.4.4 ‘The site lies wholly within land designated as Green Belt. Paragraph 149 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except for very special circumstances (VSC). The construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate development, as set out in paragraph 149, with the following limited exceptions:
- g) Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (Brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would: not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development; or not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.
- 2.4.5 ‘It is noted that the Inspector for the appeal APP/R5510/A/13/2204776 concluded that the previous proposals on the site met exception (g) above, in that the new development was considered to involve the limited infilling of previously developed land that would have no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt. An application was subsequently approved for a similar development as the appeal scheme.’
- 2.4.6 ‘Whilst it is accepted that the previous applications established that the spread of development proposed (in terms of the new outbuildings to the south of the site) was acceptable in Green Belt terms and that any limited additional harm caused by this was offset by the reduction of hardstanding (similar to what is proposed here), it should be noted that the current proposals include a different form of development than previously approved. The previous proposals involved the conversion of the existing main building and its existing extension into residential use. The current proposal seeks to demolish the office wing and replace it with a new three-storey separate residential building.
- 2.4.7 ‘Whilst **there may be some benefit to the openness of the Green Belt resulting from the separation of the two building elements, currently limited information has been submitted regarding any additional impact on openness, in terms of wider contextual views (existing and proposed).** Without this information, officers are unable to fully assess whether the proposals would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and therefore whether NPPF exception (g) would be met.’

Development layout and public realm

- 2.4.8 ‘The **proposed demolition rather than conversion of the existing office building** (subject to determining whether the office building has merit as a heritage asset, as explained further below), gives the opportunity to make **meaningful improvement to the site layout and reduce impact on the listed building.** The applicant should explore alternative layouts such that **any new buildings do not dominate, and the mansion building is celebrated in the landscape.**’

Scale and Massing

- 2.4.9 ‘The **proposed new stable block building is significant in length** in comparison with the listed mansion building. The continuous solid form emphasises this and is not sympathetic.’

Conclusion

- 2.4.10 ‘Land use principles: The site is within designated Green Belt land. The **proposals involve the demolition of an existing extension and construction of a new three storey building which potentially has greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt, thus constituting inappropriate development.** At present insufficient information has been submitted to determine the impact on the Green Belt and this information will need to be submitted for a full assessment to be made, or else a case for very special circumstances (VSC) put forward to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.’

The London Borough of Hillingdon: Urban Design & Conservation Officer Comments (Feb 2023)

- 2.4.11 The London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH) have raised issues and concerns, and these are set out below;
- New buildings in Green Belt
- 2.4.12 ‘The site lies within land designated as Green Belt. **It should be demonstrated that the building footprint compared to the previous application is not larger.** There is currently insufficient information provided to satisfy this requirement to show no further impact on the openness of the Green Belt.’
- Height scale and massing of New Stable Block
- 2.4.13 ‘The proposed Stable block is three-storey in height with lower ground basement 2.7m below the ground level. The proposed building ridge height is 90.49n OAD with larger element at approx. 91.45m OAD along the southeast elevation which is lower than the existing office block ridge height of 91.84m OAD.
- 2.4.14 The **proposed ridge height of the proposed Stable block combined with the separation distance is considered acceptable as it would appear secondary to the listed house’**
- New buildings in Green Belt
- 2.4.15 ‘Harefield Grove is a largely complete example of a garden and park laid out informally from the mid-C18 with later developments, as the extensive setting for a modest country house which reflects various successive trends in landscape design. It has considerable local and regional interest as a well-preserved example of its type and one of several in Harefield parish.
- 2.4.16 The landscaped garden envelopes the house in an arcadian idyll, characteristic of 18th and 19th century country house settings. It is also on a dramatic site topographically that adds to the drama and appeal. There are many fine specimen trees some of which have TPOs. In the 19th century the estate developed as a horticultural enterprise. **All this forms the setting and contributes to the significance of the house and needs to be respected and preserved.’**

2.5 Response To Harefield Grove Report and Comments

- 2.5.1 It is clear that both the GLA Planning Report and the LBH comments, seek further information in order to fully ascertain the potential impact on the openness of the Green Belt. This is to be determined via a quantitative understanding of the difference in building footprint, from existing to the proposed building. This is as set out below;
- Existing Building Footprint = 1,457m2
 - Proposed Building Footprint = 1,068m2
- 2.5.2 This quantitative element to the assessment of openness, clearly demonstrates a reduction and indicates that the overall effect of the new proposals would be to reduce building footprint, by 27%. In regards to paragraph 149 of the NPPF, exceptions to the Green Belt, and ‘(g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land’, the proposals would **not** therefore have a ‘greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt that the existing development’.
- 2.5.3 In qualitative terms, the proposals open up the space immediately around the historic listed mansion house, through the proposed demolition of the 1980’s office block, at odds with the scale and proportion of the historic house, and provides a separation between it and the new stable block, enhancing the setting of the listed building, and restoring the balance such that the historic listed mansion house is the dominant building once again in the wider landscaped grounds and the stable block is subservient. This is also achieved through the overall height of the buildings, with the existing listed mansion house approximately 12m high above the main front door, with the new stable block proposed to be 8m high to ridge height approximately, with the exception being the clock tower feature on the southern elevation which will reach 10m high approximately. The eastern facade of the stable block appears as 3storeys high as the garden itself drops away, the ridge height is however maintained and thus retains its subservient relationship to the main historic mansion house.

3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

3.1 Site Location and Context

- 3.1.1 The Site's boundaries and context are shown in **Figure 1**. The area is approximately triangular in shape and is located within a historic parkland setting north of the village of Harefield. It is surrounded mainly by farmland with woodland abutting the south eastern corner of the site. Rickmansworth Road runs parallel to the western side of the site with farmland and pockets of woodland beyond.
- 3.1.2 The Site is well enclosed by dense and mature trees which form the Site boundaries, including where it backs onto Rickmansworth Road to the west. The Site extends to the east and abuts Pearson's Wood which situated to the east of the Site. The principle features of the Site and surrounds are shown in **Figure 5: Site Photos**.
- 3.1.3 The surrounding context is predominantly agricultural land which is interspersed by farmsteads. To the south, the landscape becomes more residential towards the main settlement area of Harefield village as well as to the south east along Northwood Road. The Site lies at the north eastern margin of the existing residential area with the main settlements of Harpenden located to the west of the Site.
- 3.1.4 The Site is incorporated into the London Area Green Belt, which includes the surrounding areas beside the Site including Harefield village. A full assessment of the Site's contribution to Green Belt Purposes is outlined in **Section 4**.

3.2 Published Character Assessments

- 3.2.1 At the national level (Natural England, 2012) the Site lies within the Thames Valley National Character Area (NCA 115). This NCA is a mainly low-lying, wedge-shaped area, widening from Reading, and includes Slough, Windsor, the Colne Valley and the southwest London fringes
- 3.2.2 Key Characteristics of the Thames Valley National Character Area (NCA 115) of relevance to the proposals include:
- *'The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character, although almost half of the area is greenbelt land and development has been restricted in areas like Crown Estate land and Eton College grounds.'*
- National: NCA Statements of Environmental Opportunity**
- 3.2.3 Statements of Environmental Opportunity for the Thames Valley of relevance to this proposal include:
- *'SEO 3: Maintain existing greenspace and plan for the creation of green infrastructure associated with the significant projected growth of urban areas, to reduce the impact of development, to help reduce flooding issues, and to strengthen access and recreation opportunities. Seek links from urban areas to wider recreation assets such as the Thames Path National Trail, National Cycle Routes, and the river and canal network, and promote the incorporation of best practice environmental measures into any new development.*
 - *SEO 4: Protect and manage the area's historic parklands, wood pastures, ancient woodland, commons, orchards and distinctive ancient pollards, and restore and increase woodland for carbon sequestration, noise and pollution reduction, woodfuel and protection from soil erosion, while also enhancing biodiversity, sense of place and history.'*

3.3 District Character Baseline

- 3.3.1 The Hillingdon Landscape Character Assessment (2012) shows that the Site falls within the Wooded Undulating Farmland LCT. Within this Landscape Type, the Site falls within the Harefield Wooded Undulating Farmland (D1) LCA.
- 3.3.2 **Harefield Wooded Undulating Farmland**
- *a smoothly undulating tributary valley landform of the River Colne;*

- *a mosaic of farmland and woodland, comprising medium sized sinuous fields of pasture and rough grazing, and some areas of paddock;*
 - *settlement density is low, comprising scattered farmsteads, and only one linear row of housing in the north, along Northwood Road. Modern settlement edge of Harefield and Northwood are prominent in the west and east;*
 - *few roads cross the landscape, often ancient;*
 - *a uniform landscape, with high woodland cover and low settlement density, which contributes to a sense of tranquility and a strong rural character.*
- 3.3.3 Closely neighbouring the Harefield Wooded Undulating Farmland LCA to the west is the Hill End Undulating Farmland LCA. Key characteristics of this LCA include:
- *an elevated, gently undulating small scale farmland landscape;*
 - *fields are delineated by hedgerows with trees and wooden post and rail fencing, interspersed by small woods;*
 - *Park Wood SSSI is a large ancient woodland in the south of the area;*
 - *settlement density is low.*

- 3.3.4 Also closely bordering the Harefield Wooded Undulating Farmland LCA is the Moor Park Slopes LCA to the north east. Key characteristics include:
- *strongly undulating slopes across a series of ridges and valleys;*
 - *woodland areas to higher ground mark the horizon;*
 - *major parkland landscape with mature feature trees at Moor Park;*
 - *high proportion of golf courses;*
 - *horse pasture enclosed by tall mixed hedges.*

District: Landscape Guidelines for Harefield Wooded Undulating Farmland LCA

- *Conserve and enhance the extensive woodland cover, which provides important landscape cover, enclosure and a backdrop to views;*
- *Conserve and manage the network of hedgerows, and hedgerow trees, which provide visual unity and a wildlife corridor;*
- *Maintain the essentially undeveloped rural character, with limited settlement development and roads;*
- *Conserve views across arable farmland to wooded horizons;*
- *Ensure that new buildings and development is sensitively integrated into the landscape through careful screening. Seek to integrate and soften existing settlement edge;*
- *Conserve the character and setting of historic listed buildings, which provide important historic context and prominent features in the landscape;*
- *Conserve the intact, remote and peaceful character which is former by the woodland cover, absence of modern development and roads.*

3.4 Historic and Cultural Issues

- 3.4.1 Harefield enters recorded history through the Domesday Book (1086) as Herefelle, comprising the Anglo-Saxon words *Here* "army" and *felle* "field". Before the Norman conquest of England, the Manor of Harefield belonged to Countess Goda,

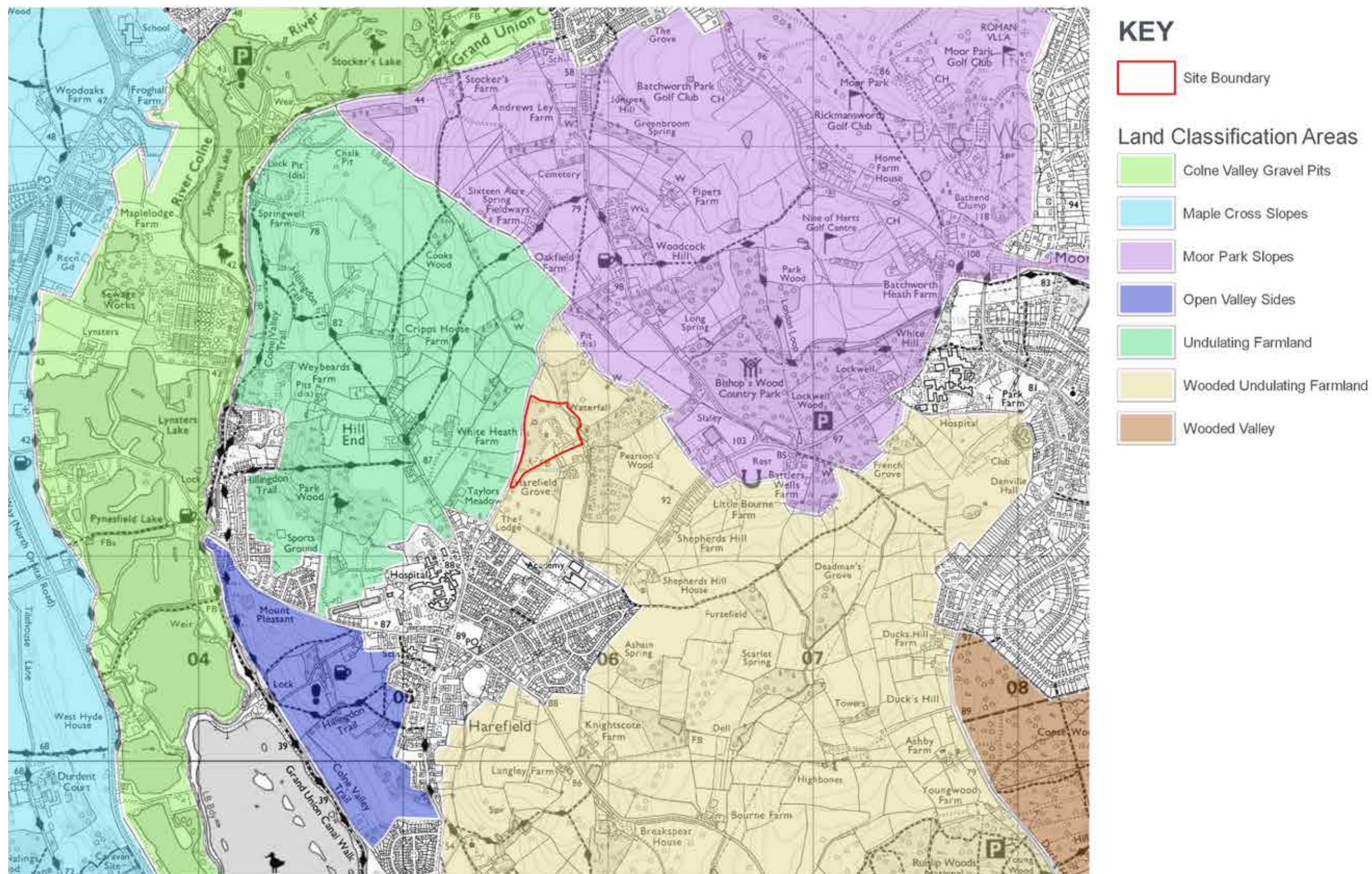


Figure 2: Landscape Character Areas. 1:20,000 @ A3

Source: Surrey Landscape Character Assessment: Runnymede Borough (April 2015)

- the sister of Edward the Confessor. Her husbands were French, Dreux of the Vexin and Count Eustace of Boulogne.
- 3.4.2 Following the Norman conquest, ownership of Harefield passed to Richard FitzGilbert, the son of Count Gilbert of Brionne. It was listed in the Domesday Book as comprising enough arable land for five ploughs, with meadow land only sufficient for one plough. Woodland areas in Middlesex were registered in the number of pigs which could be supported there; Harefield had 1,200, the second highest in the Hundred of Elthorne to Ruislip, with 1,500. Ten villeins (tenants) are also counted; they held their land freely from the lord in exchange for rent payments and labour. By the 12th or 13th century their land is believed to have passed back to the lord and become unfree. There were also seven bordars (poorer tenants) with five acres each, while one had three. In addition, three cottars, who owned a cottage and garden, also feature.
- 3.4.3 Harefield was eventually split into the main manor of Harefield, and the two smaller submanors of Brackenbury and Moorhall. It had been owned by the Clares, descended from Richard FitzGerald, before passing to the Batchworths by 1235. In turn, the Swanlord family took possession in 1315. By 1446, the Newdigate family owned Harefield - they still owned some land in the 1920s. John Newdigate exchanged most of his land in 1585 with the Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, Sir Edmund Anderson. He sold the manor to Sir Thomas Egerton, who staged an elaborate entertainment for Queen Elizabeth in 1602.
- 3.4.4 During World War I, Harefield Park was used as an Australian military hospital. The bodies of the servicemen who died there were buried with full military honours within the graveyard of St Mary's Church; the area, which also included the ground where the Harefield Place building stood, became a military cemetery.
- 3.4.5 In 1929 Harefield became part of the Municipal Borough of Uxbridge, then in 1965 the London Borough of Hillingdon. According to the 2021 Census, the population of the Harefield Ward stands at 14,488.

3.5 Settlement

- 3.5.1 The Harefield of today is a village situated in the London Borough of Hillingdon, approximately 8km south west of Watford and approximately 25km north west of the centre of London. It is served by the M25 and Rickmansworth Road.
- 3.5.2 The village centre, which forms the historic core of the town provides a variety of services including a pharmacy, post office, hospital, football club, cafes, pubs and restaurants, many of which are independently run. A number of churches are also present along Rickmansworth Road in the centre of the village.
- 3.5.3 A notable feature of Harefield is its abundant greens, parks and wooded areas. These form a green wedge that leads out and spills into the wider countryside to the north of Harefield.
- 3.5.4 Surrounding suburban residential areas are generally formed of semi-detached and detached dwellings set back from the road with private driveways. These form a relatively regular settlement pattern within Harefield village.

3.6 Site Character and Visual Amenity

- 3.6.1 The Site is located within a historic parkland setting north of the village of Harefield. It is surrounded mainly by farmland with woodland abutting the south eastern corner of the site. Rickmansworth Road runs parallel to the western side of the Site with farmland and pockets of woodland beyond. Mature trees and groups extend around all sides of the Site and also scattered throughout within, much of the planting contemporary with documented phases of landscaping during the nineteenth century and later. The Site itself is flat, ranging from approximately 80-89m AOD. The landscape surrounding the Site on all sides comprises arable agricultural fields with dispersed farmsteads.
- 3.6.2 Currently the Site is accessed via Rickmansworth Road and along Lime Tree Drive which leads to Harefield Grove.
- 3.6.3 A floodplain describes the area that would naturally be affected by flooding if a river rises above its banks. According to the mapping available from Flood Map for Planning, the Environment Agency has indicated that the Site is located near both Flood Zone 1 and Flood Zone 2, from the floodplain of the River Colne which runs from north to south approximately 1.5km west of the Site boundary.

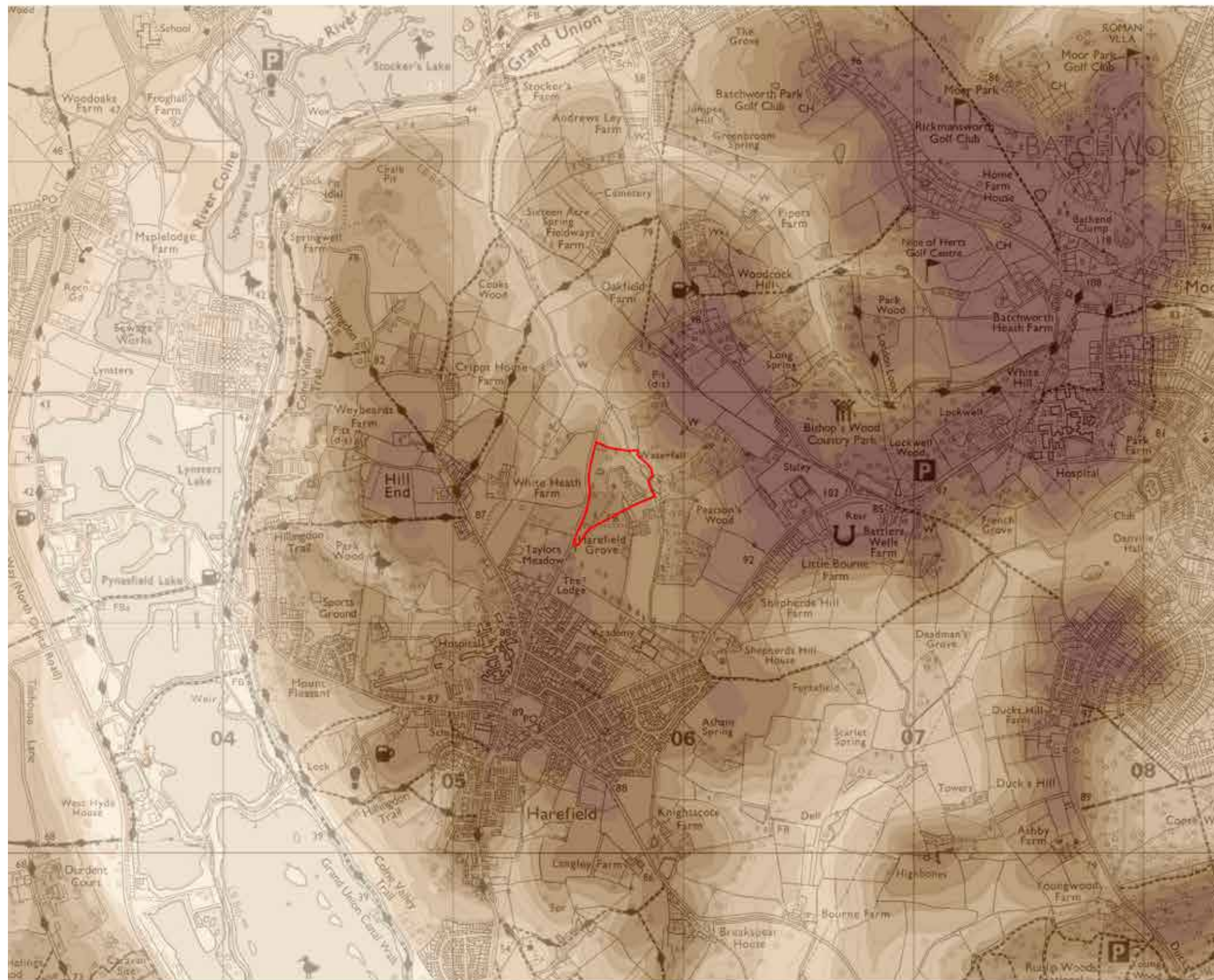
- 3.6.4 The well-vegetated mature trees and hedgerow boundaries effectively screen the Site from the surrounding agricultural landscape. However, this screening would be partial in winter and more complete in summer due to the deciduous nature of the vegetation.

3.7 Access

- 3.7.1 The main transport infrastructure includes a number of B roads that connect to the surrounding settlements to the M25 and A40.
- 3.7.2 There are no PRoWs cutting through the Site itself or bounding the Site, however there are a network of PRoWs to the west and north of Harefield village.

3.8 Designation

- 3.8.1 The Site is currently situated within London Area Green Belt which protects land from development. However, in accordance with NPPF paragraph 149, there are certain exceptions, in particular '(g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land', whereby the proposals must not have a 'greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development'. Generally it can be said the both the Greater London Authority and the London Borough of Hillingdon acknowledge that the proposed development may bring forward an opportunity to benefit the openness of the Green Belt, but that currently there is insufficient information to support this understanding of the proposals within the Site context.
- 3.8.2 This Site is worthy of detailed examination, because if developed, the proposals represent a limited infilling or partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, and would have limited impact on the openness of the green Belt across the site, with the potential to improve the setting of the existing Listed Building of Harefield Park and have a positive effect on the openness of Green Belt across and within the Site. The proposals would not remove the existence of a green break between settlements and cause coalescence, and the Site's boundaries are very well-defined mature woodland, robust and defence-able.
- 3.8.3 The potential for compromising the openness of the Green Belt by development proposals is explored in **Section 4** - looking at the issue primarily in landscape and visual terms.
- 3.8.4 Harefield Grove itself is Grade II Listed and likely dates to the early C19.



KEY

Site Boundary

Metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD)

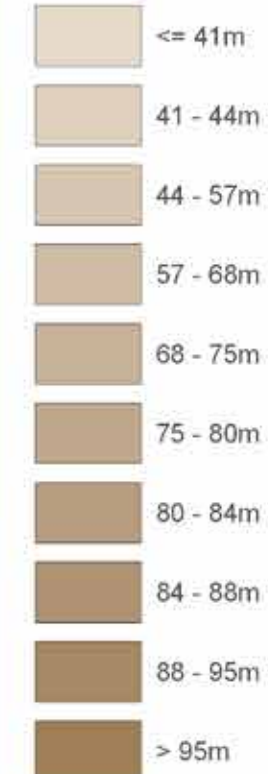
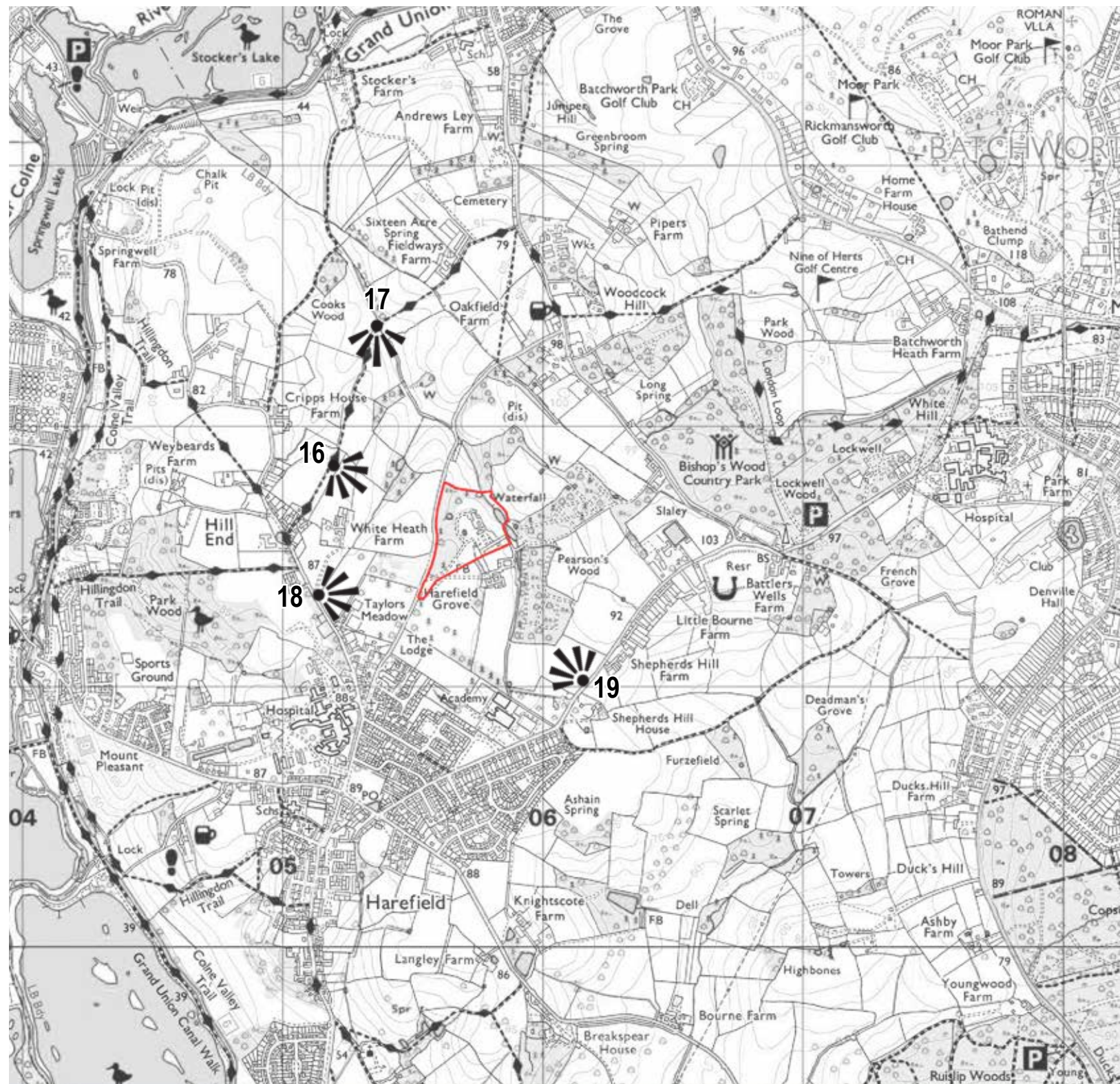


Figure 3: Landform Analysis. 1:20,000 @ A3
Source: April 2023

3.9 Photographic Survey

- 3.9.1 A number of representative and illustrative views of the Site and surrounds have been selected to demonstrate the existing visual amenity, with viewpoint location chosen based on distance, the degree of visibility, the nature of the view and the anticipated number or type of potential receptors.
- 3.9.2 Photographs were taken in April 2023 and demonstrate a scenario when vegetation is still not full leaf. Visibility will be decreased in summer months when deciduous vegetation is in leaf. For each viewpoint the likely visual receptors are identified and the view is described. Refer to **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**.
- 3.9.3 **View Descriptions**
- 3.9.4 **Viewpoint 1** - View looking north west across the Site from the eastern boundary. From this location, the stable building in the distance prevents views towards Harefield Grove. To the left of the building the clock tower is visible. Mature vegetation surrounding the building further screens the surrounding buildings within the Site.
- 3.9.5 **Viewpoint 2** - View north west across the Site from further north along the eastern Site boundary, adjacent to the Cottage House. From this point, the Conservatory and buildings to the east of the Stable House are visible. Vegetation remains tall and mature at this point, screening the wider Site from view.
- 3.9.6 **Viewpoint 3** - View looking south west across the Site from the east of the Site. From this point, the existing Office Extension to the south of the Main House is visible. Intermittent mature trees in the mid-distance partially screen views to the offices. The undulating nature of the local topography is evident in this view.
- 3.9.7 **Viewpoint 4** - View south east across the Site from the north of the Site. From this location, the Main House is clearly visible as well as the eastern wing of the Office Extension. The lawn in the mid distance steeply rises in elevation towards the Main House, making the building more prominent. Surrounding the Main House, the vegetation is tall and mature, contributing to the impression of a well established landscape.
- 3.9.8 **Viewpoint 5** - View looking south east across the Site from the north of the Site. From this location, the Main House, west wing and east wing of the Office Extension are visible. Surrounding the lawn around the building, the vegetation remains mature and dense and screens other buildings from view.
- 3.9.9 **Viewpoint 6** - View east across the Site from the west of the Site. From this location, the Main House and west wing of the Office Extension are visible. To the west of the Main House, the vegetation is mature and dense and prevents views further into the Site.
- 3.9.10 **Viewpoint 7** - View north east across the Site from the Lawn to the south west of the Site, adjacent to Rickmansworth Road. From this location, no existing buildings in the Site are visible due to the dense and mature vegetation bounding the Lawn to the north east.
- 3.9.11 **Viewpoint 8** - View north east across the Site from Entrance Driveway. Similarly to the previous viewpoint, the mature and dense vegetation surrounding the view location prevents views to the existing buildings within the Site. The maturity of the vegetation creates the impression of a well established landscape.
- 3.9.12 **Viewpoint 9** - Viewpoint looking north east into the Site from the southern Site boundary. The view is open until it is curtailed by the mature vegetation in the mid-distance. No existing buildings within the Site are visible from this viewpoint location.
- 3.9.13 **Viewpoint 10** - View north east along the Entrance Driveway from further north, looking across the Site. From this point, the mature vegetation surrounding the Driveway continues to curtail the view to the near-distance so that no existing buildings within the Site are visible.
- 3.9.14 **Viewpoint 11** - Looking north east towards the Site from further north up the Entrance Driveway. Despite the proximity of the Stable Building and surrounding buildings, no existing buildings are visible due to the mature vegetation which closely bounds the Drive.

- 3.9.15 **Viewpoint 12** - View east from Rickmansworth Road across the Site. From this viewpoint location, the view is predominately curtailed to the immediate distance by the dense vegetation buffer bounding the east of Rickmansworth Road. The Lawn in the middle distance is partially visible through a gap in this vegetation, but no views to existing buildings are possible.
- 3.9.16 **Viewpoint 13** - View south east across the Site from the northern portion of the Site. From this viewpoint, the Woodland to the north of the Site conceals the buildings to the south of the Site from view. The gently undulating nature of the landform is clear, with the land rising towards the Main House.
- 3.9.17 **Viewpoint 14** - View west across the Site from the eastern Site boundary. From this location, despite the mature vegetation which conceals most of the view, the eastern wing of the Office Extension to the south of the Main House is visible.
- 3.9.18 **Viewpoint 15** - View east up the Entrance Drive from Rickmansworth Road. From this location, no existing buildings within the main area of the Site are visible due to the distance and intervening mature vegetation. To the right of the view, an existing detached dwelling to the east of Rickmansworth Road is visible.
- 3.9.19 **Viewpoint 16** - View south east towards the Site from PRoW RICKMANSWORTH 058. From this viewpoint location, the Site is not visible due to intervening settlement and layers of mature field boundaries. The view is open across the arable agricultural fields until it is curtailed by vegetation in the distance.
- 3.9.20 **Viewpoint 17** - View south from further north east along PRoW RICKMANSWORTH 058, looking towards the Site. From this point, the mature and dense vegetation bounding Harefield Road curtails the view to the near-distance such that neither the Site nor surrounding settlement is visible.
- 3.9.21 **Viewpoint 18** - View east from Hill End Road, looking towards the Site. Due to the distance from Site and intervening vegetation, the Site is not visible. The view has a rural appearance, with the mature vegetation giving the impression of a well established landscape.
- 3.9.22 **Viewpoint 19** - View north west towards the Site from Northwood Road. The Site is not visible from this viewpoint due to Pearson's Wood which curtails views to the north west. The dense and mature hedgerow bounding Northwood Road to the north further curtails the view. Settlement is sparse and scattered at this point.



- Site Boundary
- Representative Viewpoints
- PRoW Footpath
- PRoW Bridleway



Figure 4: Photographic Survey - Viewpoint Locations. Not to Scale
 Source: Ordnance Survey Crown Copyright 2023. All rights reserved. License Number 100022432

←----- Approximate extent of Site ----->



Viewpoint 1

←----- Approximate extent of Site ----->



Viewpoint 2

←----- Approximate extent of Site ----->



Viewpoint 3

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.

Source: JBA, April 2023

Approximate extent of Site



Viewpoint 4

Approximate extent of Site



Viewpoint 5

Approximate extent of Site



Viewpoint 6

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.

Source: JBA, April 2023



Viewpoint 7



Viewpoint 8



Viewpoint 9

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.

Source: JBA, April 2023



Viewpoint 10



Viewpoint 11

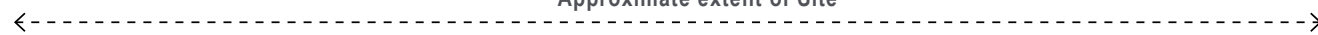


Viewpoint 12

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.
Source: JBA, April 2023

Aldwickbury Golf Course

Approximate extent of Site



Viewpoint 13



Viewpoint 14



Viewpoint 15

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.

Source: JBA, April 2023



Viewpoint 16

Valley Rise Road



Viewpoint 17



Viewpoint 18

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.
Source: JBA, April 2023



Viewpoint 19

Figure 5: Site & Surrounds Views.
Source: JBA, April 2023

4. GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

4.1 Current Effect of Site on Green Belt Purposes

- 4.1.1
- The Site consists of a Grade II Listed Building, Harefield Grove, set within landscaped grounds and parkland. This parkland is well defined by woodland to the north east and west, opening up to the south to more typical parkland landscape.
- 4.1.2
- The house itself is noted as sitting on a plateau to the east of Rickmansworth Road, which drops sharply east of the house into a stream valley, which has been dammed to create a series of small lakes, before rising again to a similar level in the east half of the historic park. Harefield Grove has since the late 1980s been used as offices, and related buildings and car parking were constructed at the same time on land to the south of the house. At this time the walled kitchen garden was lost to car parking and the lodge at the main entrance was demolished. During the mid-C20 a farm was constructed in the parkland south of the nucleus of the kitchen garden on land which had since the late C19 been part of the productive area.
- 4.1.3
- The Site is predominantly self-contained, possessing a limited visual envelope. Views are restricted to the adjacent offices / buildings, with some glimpsed views afforded from the surrounding grounds and parkland through gaps in the existing well vegetated woodland and woodland copses.
- 4.1.4
- The existing built development on Site has a localised impact on the openness of the Green Belt in this location. The Site views demonstrate the proximity of 1980’s office block to the historic mansion house and where it directly abuts it, highlighting how the Site is a cluster of built form nestled amongst existing dense woodland and parkland landscape.
- 4.1.5
- The Site has strong physical boundaries on all sides. To the west, the Site is bounded by the existing Rickmansworth Road and wooded edge, through which the driveway traverses to connect to the car park to the south of the main house, to the north is Woodcock Hill and further woodland and tree belts with remnant parkland and pasture, to the east is Pearsons Wood with pasture and arable fields beyond. To the south lies Harefield Grove Farm , further reducing the historic landscape setting once associated with the historic Listed mansion house. These boundaries provide the application site with strong levels of physical and visual containment.
- 4.1.6
- An assessment of the land as it exists currently, against purposes 1-5 of Green Belt as set out within the NPPF, is set out below (refer to **Appendix C**):
 - **Restrict sprawl of large built up areas:** At present, the proposed Site located within the Green Belt has strong, well vegetated boundary edges. The Site does not physically or visually contribute to any urban sprawl.
 - **To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another:** The nearest settlement, Harefield, is located to the south, with Hill End to the west and there is no intervisibility between the Site and settlements here, with arable fields and dense woodland ensuring there is no coalescence. Whilst the Site does provide a historic mansion house, offices and grounds and wider parkland with woodland, in reality the Site is completely obscured from view and development of the Site would have no effect on the integrity of the rest of the Green Belt, with the mature vegetation along the Site boundaries remaining intact and providing a strong physical and visual barrier.
 - **To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment:** Whilst the Site does provide a historic mansion house, offices and grounds and wider parkland with woodland, its well vegetated and predominantly woodland boundaries provide a good strength robust boundary. The strength of these existing features would ensure that the development of the Site as proposed would not contribute to encroachment into the countryside.
 - **To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns:** The Site is self-contained and is not within or adjacent to any Conservation Areas. There is no intervisibility between the Site and Harefield nor Hill End.
 - **To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land:** The Site is not considered to be urban land, and whilst it does constitute redevelopment of existing developed land, cannot be said to be urban regeneration. Redevelopment of the Site would not compromise this purpose.

4.2 Assessment of ‘Openness’ of Green Belt

- 4.2.1
- The term ‘openness’ is identified within the NPPF as one of the essential characteristics of Green Belts, however it is not formally defined. Paragraph 149 of the NPPF (July 2021) includes defined exceptions which are identified, with the provision that they “would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development”. How the impact of a particular scheme on the ‘openness’ of the Green Belt is assessed has been sometimes open to interpretation.
- 4.2.2
- Key factors to be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt, is that ‘openness’ is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects, such that the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume.
- 4.2.3
- This assessment has been carried out in order to assess the effects of development on the visual openness of the Green Belt including impacts on long distance views, visual links to the wider Green Belt, inter-visibility between settlements and whether, if a development is temporary, or detracting elements are removed, restoration measures could restore the balance and the visual aspects of openness.
- Openness of Existing Site
- 4.2.4
- The current Site includes elements that do not adequately respond to the historic Listed mansion house, nor the wider landscaped grounds, and have a strong detracting influence. The 1980’s office block forms a solid mass, even with the glass atrium, against the mansion house, distorting its proportions from the original designed intentions, and as originally considered, set within its own landscaped grounds. It detracts from the house itself and from the grounds immediately surrounding the main house, blocking views towards the wider landscaped surrounds.
- 4.2.5
- In qualitative terms, the existing Site appears neglected, with trees and shrubs forming dense clumps in the grounds surrounding the house. The house itself is no longer the dominant building within the landscaped grounds, with the 1980’s office block, at odds with the scale and proportion of the historic house, such that the historic Listed mansion house is not the dominant building with other buildings being subservient to it, set in the wider landscaped grounds.
- 4.2.6
- In summary, the Site and existing levels of openness, as determined in Green Belt terms, is considered to be restricted and these restricting elements are detrimental to the overall garden and park laid out as the extensive setting for a modest country house which reflects various successive trends in landscape design. As noted in the Conservation and Design LPA comments, ‘*This application offers scope to deliver conservation gain with design proposals that respond positively to the unique characteristics of the Grade II listed building setting of a verdant naturalistic landscape with specimen trees, tree groups and grass.*’
- Openness of Proposed Redevelopment of Site
- 4.2.7
- As set out above in section 2.5, the proposed redevelopment of the Site would result in a marked reduction in the built development footprint, approximately 27% decrease from the current built form footprint. This provides the quantitative measure or volume in regards to openness, as determined by the NPPF and Green Belt. In quantitative terms, the redevelopment proposals would not therefore have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing.
- 4.2.8
- In qualitative terms, the proposals open up the space immediately around the historic listed mansion house, through the proposed demolition of the 1980’s office block, and will provide a separation between it and the new stable block. This will enhance the setting of the listed building, and restore the balance such that the historic listed mansion house is the dominant building once again in the landscaped grounds and the stable block is subservient.
- 4.2.9
- Re-establishing the dominance of the Listed mansion house is also achieved through the particular design considerations of the overall height of the proposed buildings, with the new stable block proposed to be 8m high to ridge height approximately, subservient to the existing mansion house, which is approximately 12m high above the main front door. The exception to this being the clock tower feature on the southern elevation of the stable block, which will reach 10m

- high approximately, and thus remain lower than the height of the main house. The eastern facade of the stable block appears as 3storeys high as the garden itself drops away, the ridge height is however maintained and thus retains its subservient relationship to the main historic mansion house.
- 4.2.10 There will be a long-term strategy to maintain and enhance the Site's historic parkland setting. Mature trees will be managed to prolong their lives and management plans for these trees will be individual and bespoke based on each tree's age and condition.
- 4.2.11 In qualitative terms, the redevelopment proposals would not therefore have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing situation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Green Belt Purposes

- 5.1.1 The proposals for development of the Site at Harefield Grove, off Rickmansworth Road, uphold the intention and purpose of national and local planning policies and does not contravene such policy in a harmful way that might serve to undermine that policy's future robustness nor to the aims and objectives of such policy to prevent loss of character, erosion of valuable countryside, denudation of protected Green Belt countryside, or threaten the integrity of the strategic green gaps between settlements.
- 5.1.2 This report provides a fine grain assessment in order to determine the potential for harm at a local level. The results of this assessment indicate that the Site can be redeveloped with no harm to the five purposes of Green Belt.

5.2 Green Belt Openness

- 5.2.1 It is considered that the Site is a suitable for redevelopment, and that this would provide the opportunity to improve openness, in Green Belt terms, across the Site, through the marked reduction in built form footprint, and restoration of the dominance in the landscape grounds of the Listed mansion house of Harefield Grove itself.
- 5.2.2 Proposed management and maintenance of the existing historic parkland setting, along with new tree and shrub planting would further restore and elevate the character of the historic landscaped grounds. Through good design, redevelopment of the Site would be able to provide housing in a suitable landscape setting, with no harm to the purposes of the Green Belt designation and an improvement to local character and visual amenity.

5.3 Conclusions

- 5.3.1 This Green Belt Statement has been prepared by James Blake Associates on behalf of Comer Homes Ltd to explore the potential effect on openness of the Green Belt from redevelopment of Harefield Grove, Rickmansworth Road, Harefield.
- 5.3.2 This document and supporting photographs also provides a brief assessment of the Site and its contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 5.3.3 It is acknowledged that the redevelopment of the Site will alter the level of openness of the Site, however it is considered that the level of openness will improve, both in perception and actual terms, with a positive change to the immediate landscaped grounds to the Listed mansion house, and no effect on areas beyond the Site, retaining the integrity of the Green Belt. This therefore represents a localised improvement on openness of the Green Belt with no effect on the wider designated Green Belt.
- 5.3.4 Redevelopment of the Site would have no adverse effect on the openness across the landscaped grounds, and in fact will present an improvement. Proposals will not affect the integrity of the Green Belt to perform the purposes and functions of the Green Belt.

APPENDIX A: Defining Green Belt Purposes

1.1 Defining Green Belt Purposes

1.1.1 Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the five purposes of Green Belt. This section looks at each of them to consider how they apply to the Site.

Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas

1.1.2 For the purposes of this assessment, the large built-up areas in the context of the District are taken to include important settled areas, including significant villages, as well as the larger towns. Small hamlets, ribbon development and sparse housing, e.g. small numbers of dwellings along a rural road, are not considered to be part of a large built-up area.

Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into each other

1.1.3 As highlighted above, for the purposes of this assessment, ‘towns’ are taken to include important settled areas, including significant villages, as well as the larger town settlements.

1.1.4 When looking at the potential impact of a development on Green Belt Purpose 2 there is a need to look at visibility. For example, if there is a hill between a potential development site and a settlement which prevents inter-visibility between them, the impact on Green Belt purposes is less than it would be if the land were flat and the site could clearly be seen, even if it was two or three miles away.

1.1.5 The Planning Advisory Service guidance note ‘Planning on the Doorstep: The Big Issues – Green Belt’ 2015, makes specific reference to preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another: *‘Purpose: to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another. Green Belt is frequently said to maintain the separation of small settlements near to towns, but this is not strictly what the purpose says. This will be different for each case. A ‘scale rule’ approach should be avoided. The identity of a settlement is not really determined just by the distance to another settlement; the character of the place and of the land in between must be taken into account’*. The assessment of the contribution that a site makes to the prevention of the merging of neighbouring towns (and, therefore, the impact that the development of a site would have on the separation of settlements) should therefore consider the landscape elements within the ‘strategic gap’ between the settlements which affects the inter-visibility between the settlements. If the gap consists of interlinked blocks of woodland, views between settlements are likely to be more screened than they would be if the landscape was one of large arable fields with low hedges. Similarly, the topography of the land will affect inter-visibility across a strategic gap between settlements, with an undulating landform likely to be more effective in screening development than flat terrain.

1.1.6 For the purposes of this assessment ‘openness’ is considered to refer to the quantum and massing of built form and paved areas (and not any ‘sense of openness’).

1.1.7 In assessing the Site against Purpose 2, two criteria have been considered:

- The degree of visual encroachment that would be caused by a **residential** development on the site on the ‘green gap’ between settlements. This considers the effect that landscape features such as woodland blocks and landform would have on the visual obtrusiveness a **residential** development within a strategic gap.
- The degree of visibility of the site from neighbouring settlements, were **residential** development to take place on it.

1.1.8 Each of the two criteria were rated for the importance that the site had in terms of its contribution to preventing neighbourhood towns from merging into each other. This ranged from ‘zero importance’ for a site where development would make no difference to this purpose through ‘low importance’, ‘moderate importance’, ‘important’ to ‘high importance’ for sites where development would make the biggest contribution towards the merging of neighbouring settlements.

Purpose 3: to assist in the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment

1.1.9 When assessing the contribution that a site makes to this Green Belt Purpose, the degree to which both the Site and its surroundings have the characteristics of open countryside needs to be considered. The primary characteristic to be considered is the absence of built development and dominant urban influences. The impact on this purpose of development on a site that at present has such countryside land uses as agriculture, forestry, green recreation and wildlife conservation will be greater than one which is more urban in character. The same is true of the context of the site – a housing development in an area with a strong countryside character will be a greater encroachment into the countryside than one in an area with urbanising features such as industrial or storage units. The landscape character of the Site and surrounding area therefore needs to be considered.

1.1.10 As with Purpose 2, the assessment of the effect of a development on encroachment into the countryside involves a consideration of the visual impact on open countryside. A development which is primarily visually connected to an urban area (through proximity, landform and/or screening) will encroach on the countryside less than one which is more visible from receptors within the open countryside.

1.1.11 Another factor which affects the effect that the development of a site would have on the open countryside is its landscape sensitivity. This can be assessed by assessing the landscape value of the site in terms of the characteristics of open countryside and using the standard methodology of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to assess the site’s Landscape Susceptibility (vulnerability to change). These two parameters can be used to reach an assessment of Landscape Sensitivity. The development of a site with a high landscape sensitivity would have a greater impact on the open countryside than one with low sensitivity and would therefore contribute more to this Green Belt Purpose.

1.1.12 The final factor to consider in assessing the degree of encroachment of the open countryside that would be caused by the development of a particular site is the strength, defensibility and permanence of the new Green Belt boundary that would be created. A strong new boundary (such as a topographic feature or railway line) would act as a defence against further encroachment during and beyond the duration of the Local Plan whereas a weak new boundary (such as a fence or hedge) would make it more likely that further encroachment will take place.

Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

1.1.13 There is no strict legal or planning definition of a ‘historic town’ in reference to Green Belt Purpose 4. Some Districts may not contain any nationally recognised ‘Historic Towns’; however, this does not mean the individual settlements within the District do not have an historic character with important aspects that have defined settlement patterns and the overall landscape character of the area.

1.1.14 For the purposes of this assessment relationships to Conservation Areas have also been considered.

Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration

1.1.15 All Green Belt land is considered to contribute equally to fulfilling this purpose. It has therefore been excluded from this assessment.

Assessment of Green Belt Purposes

National Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas				
Relative contribution to Green Belt purposes				
Zero Importance		Low Importance	Moderate Importance	High Importance
Comments				

National Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another					
Criteria	Zero Importance	Low Importance	Moderate Importance	Important	High Importance
Effect on the visual ‘green gap’	No encroachment	Some/little encroachment	Moderate encroachment	Large-scale encroachment	Significant encroachment
Views between settlements	Neighbouring settlements not visible	Glimpsed views from neighbouring settlements	Views from neighbouring settlements partly obscured	Fairly clear views from neighbouring settlements	Clear views from neighbouring settlements
Relative contribution to Green Belt purposes					
Zero Importance		Low Importance	Moderate Importance	Important	High Importance
Comments					

National Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment					
Criteria	Zero Importance	Low Importance	Moderate Importance	Important	High Importance
Permanence of green belt boundaries following development	Definitive	Strong defensible	Moderate defensible	Weak defensible	No defensible boundary
Character	Significant built form within and/ or around the site	Strong urban character, not perceived as open countryside	Notable urban context,	Strong/largely rural character	Unspoilt open, rural character
Sensitivity	Low	Low to Medium	Medium	Medium to High	High
Relative contribution to Green Belt purposes					
Zero Importance		Low Importance	Moderate Importance	Important	High Importance
Comments					

National Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns				
Relative contribution to Green Belt purposes				
Zero Importance		Low Importance	Moderate Importance	High Importance
Comments				

Strength of Green Belt Boundaries

Strong: prominent physical features	Moderate: less physical features	Weak: no definable or weak boundary on the ground
Roads (Motorways / A and B roads)	Minor Roads (C roads and unclassified)	Environmental designation
Railways	PRoW: Public footpaths, bridleways, cycle ways	Pylons / towers supporting overhead lines
Buildings / Urban Edge	Property boundaries	Fragmented hedgerow
Extensive / Ancient Woodland	Small Woodland	Ditches
Rivers	Streams / brooks (all other watercourses except rivers)	Individual or small clusters of trees
	Established tree belt / hedgerow (continuous or with minor gaps)	Fragmented tree belt / hedgerow
	Distinctive topography, eg. ridgeline	Farm track (not a PRoW)
		No definable boundary

APPENDIX B: FIELD SURVEY FORMS

Assessment of Sensitivity

Landscape Value

Which of the following landscape elements are present on site and what is their condition?					
Woodland block elsewhere (off-site)	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Boundary tree belt	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Grassland elsewhere	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Native hedge elsewhere	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Ornamental hedge	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Specimen trees - other native species	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
Specimen trees - ornamental	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A
What land uses are present on site?	Agricultural	Equine	Industrial/Commercial	Open Access	
	Parkland	Sport/Recreation	Residential	Other	
To what degree is the land use on site typical of the countryside?	Completely typical	Highly typical	Moderately typical	Slightly typical	Not at all typical
To what degree is the land cover on site natural?	Completely natural	Mostly natural	Equal parts natural and urban	Mostly urban	Completely urban
What is the field pattern on site?	Regular		Irregular*	N/A	
Are any of the following buildings present on site?	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Agricultural	
	Sheds	Stables	Car Parking	Other	
Which building materials are used on site?	Brick and Flint*	Brick	Render	Stone	
	Timber	Concrete Block	Metal	Other	
What opportunities are there for public recreation on site?	Bridleway	Footpath	Permissive Path	Unofficial Path	None
What degree of tranquillity is experienced on site?	High	Medium to High	Medium	Low to Medium	Low
What is the scale of views from within the site?	Expansive		Open	Semi-enclosed	Enclosed*
How representative of the local landscape character the site?	Significantly representative	Highly representative	Moderately representative	Slightly representative	Not at all representative

Susceptibility

Potential for mitigation	Very low	Low	Some	Good	Very good
Potential for substitution, replacement or restoration of features	Very low	Low	Some	Good	Very good
Capacity to accommodate development without affecting baseline	Very low	Low	Some	Good	Very good
Effect of development on management and policy objectives	Substantially contradicts	Contradicts	Partly in accordance	Generally in accordance	Entirely in accordance

Assessment of Green Belt Purposes

Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas					
To what degree would development on the site encroach on the openness of the countryside?	Substantial, large-scale encroachment	Large-scale encroachment	Some encroachment	Little encroachment	No encroachment
How is the site contained?	Not at all contained	Few links to built up area	Linked to built up area	Within a built up area	Fully contained
How strong is the existing urban boundary?	No boundary	Weak boundary	Moderate boundary	Strong boundary	Very strong boundary
Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another					
What degree of physical screening separates the site from surrounding settlements?	No barriers	Few barriers	Some barriers	Many barriers	Completely obscured
What are the visual barriers?	Landform	Vegetation	Buildings (residential)	Buildings (industrial)	Other
What effect would there be on the visual 'green gap' if the site were to be developed?	Complete loss	Major loss	Some loss	Limited loss	No effect
Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment					
What forms the site boundaries?	A Road	B Road	Minor Road	Railway Line	Water Course
	Woodland	Other Vegetation	Track/Public Right of Way	Fence	Other
What level of permanence do these boundaries currently have?	Definitive	Strong defensible boundary	Moderate defensible boundary	Weak defensible boundary	No defensible boundary
What level of permanence will these boundaries have following development?	Definitive	Strong defensible boundary	Moderate defensible boundary	Weak defensible boundary	No defensible boundary
Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns					
What level of intervisibility between the Site and Harefield or Hill End?	Significant intervisibility	Strong intervisibility	Moderate intervisibility	Limited intervisibility	No intervisibility
Which heritage features are visible from the site?	Scheduled Monument	Grade I Listed Building	Grade II(*)/Listed Building	Conservation Area	Registered Park or Garden
				Other	None
How prominent is the site in the landscape setting of the heritage features?	Significantly prominent	Highly prominent	Moderately prominent	Slightly prominent	Not at all prominent