Land south of
Litchborough Road,
Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

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Extract from Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment
Planning Appeal decision APP/ Z2380/A/1112163947 dated 5 September 2012
1.0 Introduction

1.1 Iain Reid Landscape Planning Limited was commissioned in June 2016 by Marrons Planning to prepare a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of the potential for development of land south of Litchborough Road, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire. The land - described below as the assessment site – is located (centre of site) at NGR SP672569. It extends to ca 2.0 hectares (4.94 acres) and is shown on Plan No 1 Site Location. Land to the east is currently in residential use, comprising a detached property - ‘The Firs’ – and the rear of recent residential development off Peace Hill. Land further to the south, also adjoining the eastern assessment site boundary has been granted planning permission for residential development.

1.2 The preparation of this appraisal has involved a desk based assessment of relevant planning policies and also published landscape character assessment work. In addition, the assessment site and the surrounding area was visited in June 2016 and viewpoints towards, and of the assessment site identified. The appraisal has been prepared by Iain Reid Dip MRTPI Dip LD CMLI. He has over 40 years experience in planning and landscape work in both the private and public sectors, much of it in the East Midlands.

1.3 This appraisal is structured as follows:
   a) Section 2 considers the assessment site context in terms of landscape planning policy and landscape character. General planning policies are considered by others.
   b) Section 3 examines relevant planning history and comments specifically on a previous planning appeal decision on the assessment site in 2012.
   c) Section 4 sets out a landscape analysis of the assessment site.
   d) Section 5 describes a landscape concept and strategy for the assessment site, and
   e) Section 6 sets out an overall conclusion.
2.0 Landscape Context - Planning Policy and Landscape Character

2.1 Planning Policy

2.1.1 The Development Plan comprises the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (WNJCS) and the remaining 'saved' policies of the adopted South Northamptonshire Local Plan (SNLP) (1997). The emerging Development Plan comprises the forthcoming South Northamptonshire Local Plan (part 2A) (SNLP2).

West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy

2.1.2 The overall vision for West Northamptonshire is set out in the WNJCS as follows:

‘In our vision of the future.....the area will form an outstanding UK location of choice for diverse employment opportunities, high academic and vocational educational attainment, high quality housing for all and a superb quality of life for its communities. The area will blend the best of modern cultural urban living with an enhanced network of green spaces and high quality parks and gardens. The rural areas will include vital and tranquil villages within its rolling landscapes. The area’s proximity to London and connections to other parts of the UK and beyond will continue to be a great economic strength. The area will be a national example of low environmental impact development in response to climate change and high biodiversity and habitat protection’.

Specific to rural areas, the vision further states:

‘Our rural areas will support a network of vibrant rural communities. Villages will retain their local distinctiveness and character, providing affordable homes for local people set within a beautiful landscape. The countryside will support a diverse rural economy including leisure and tourism through its waterways, country houses, parks and woodlands.’

2.1.3 The WNJCS contains a number of objectives of relevance to the potential development of the assessment site including Objective 12 Protecting and Supporting Rural Communities and Objective 13 Rural Diversification and Employment. Objective 14 Green Infrastructure provides as follows:

‘To protect natural species present in West Northamptonshire and enhance the existing strategic green infrastructure network, including biodiversity corridors, by incorporating and designing these into Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) at Northampton, Daventry, Towcester and Brackley’

Objective 15 High Quality Design provides as follows:

‘To achieve high quality design in both rural and urban areas that takes account of
local character and heritage and provides a safe, healthy and attractive place for residents, visitors and businesses.’

2.1.4 Policy S10 Sustainable Development Principles sets out a range of considerations relevant to all forms of potential development; in so doing it touches on both design and environmental matters and indicates (inter alia) that:

‘Development will:

i) protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment and heritage assets and their settings; and

j) promote the creation of green infrastructure networks, enhance biodiversity and reduce the fragmentation of habitats.’

2.1.5 Policy RC2 Community Needs indicates that (inter alia):

‘New residential and commercial development will be required to make provision for community facilities and public open space in accordance with the standards set out in open space/recreation studies’.

The relevant studies include the future South Northamptonshire Local Plan (part 2A) (SNLP2). considered at para 2.2.1 et seq below.

2.1.6 Policy BN1 Green Infrastructure Connections notes the importance of defined sub-regional and local green infrastructure corridors, and identifies a series of measures to enhance existing and provide new green infrastructure, viz:

‘a) be designed and delivered sustainably with prudent use of natural resources;

b) mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change including through improved flood risk management and as a carbon store;

c) be designed to the highest quality in terms of appearance, access provision and biodiversity enhancement and protection;

d) reflect local character through the planting of native and other climate appropriate species and consideration of natural and cultural heritage features;

e) be supported by a long-term management strategy.’

Policy BN3 Woodland Enhancement and Creation seeks to protect and enhance existing woodland and create new woodland, with a particular emphasis on re-establishing linkages between areas of woodland. Policy BN5 The Historic Environment and Landscape seeks to conserve and enhance designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings and landscapes, and sets out criteria for development in areas of landscape sensitivity and/or known historic or heritage
significance (the assessment site does not fall within any such area).

2.1.7 *Policy INF1 Approach to Infrastructure Delivery* sets out a general requirement that ‘*New development will be supported by, and provide good access to, infrastructure, including physical, green and social elements.*’ and that such new/improved infrastructure ‘*will integrate with and complement adjoining communities.*’

2.1.8 Guidance on development in the rural areas, including Bugbrooke, is set out in *Policy R1 - Spatial Strategy for the Rural Areas.* This indicates that there is an identified need for 2,360 dwellings within South Northamptonshire district to be provided within the rural areas (beyond the towns of Towcester and Brackley) between 2011 and 2029. The distribution of that requirement will be determined - through SNLP2 - by reference to a settlement hierarchy that defines primary service villages; secondary service villages; other villages; and small settlements/hamlets. The policy sets out a range of criteria for the definition of settlements within the hierarchy; Bugbrooke is most likely to be defined as a primary service village or as a secondary service village. In relation to design considerations, the policy further notes that residential development in rural areas will be required to:

a) provide for an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes, including affordable housing to meet the needs of all sectors of the community, including the elderly and vulnerable; and

b) not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village; and

c) preserve and enhance historic buildings and areas of historic or environmental importance including those identified in conservation area appraisals and village design statements; and

d) protect the amenity of existing residents; and

e) be of an appropriate scale to the existing settlement; and

f) promote sustainable development that equally addresses economic, social and environmental issues; and

g) be within the existing confines of the village.

Development outside the existing confines will be permitted where it involves the re-use of buildings or, in exceptional circumstances, where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities or would contribute towards and improve the local economy.
South Northamptonshire Local Plan

2.1.9 The saved parts of the Local Plan include a number of policies which touch on matters of landscape and design and layout. In terms of settlement category, by virtue of Policy H5, Bugbrooke is defined as a 'Restricted Infill Village' where development – essentially small scale - within defined village confines will normally be permitted. The assessment site lies outside the village confines for Bugbrooke (as defined on SNLP Inset Plan 19; the village confines for Bugbrooke are in two parts – the main part of the village to the east and a secondary smaller part focused around Great Lane/ West End, immediately to the east of the assessment site). The keynote saved policies in respect of landscape and design matters are Policies G3 General and EV1 Design.

2.1.10 Policy G3 General states that:

'Planning permission will normally be granted where the development:

a) is compatible in terms of type, scale, siting, design and materials with the existing character of the locality;

b) possesses a satisfactory means of access and provides adequate parking, servicing and turning facilities, including for the disabled;

c) does not result in the loss of undeveloped land which in the opinion of the local planning authority is of particular significance to the form and character of the settlement;

d) will not unacceptably harm the amenities of any neighbouring properties;

e) is neither of a hazardous nature nor likely to cause problems of pollution, noise, vibration, smell, smoke, discharge or fumes;

f) does not unduly affect the existing or proposed transportation network;

g) can be provided with access to the necessary infrastructure and public services without causing unacceptable visual intrusion into the surrounding landscape;

h) does not result in the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land;

i) is sympathetic to the quality and character of any building listed as being of special architectural or historic importance or its setting;

j) does not harm the character, appearance or setting of a conservation area;

k) will not adversely affect sites of nature conservation value or sites of geological, geomorphological or archaeological importance;

l) incorporates suitable landscape treatment as an integral part of the planning of the development;
m) provides for satisfactory foul and surface water drainage;
n) is not on or in proximity to land containing known mineral resources, or, if known resources exist, without first considering the need to safeguard these resources.
o) is, where appropriate, accessible by public transport.
p) has full regard to the needs of security and crime prevention

All proposals for development will be considered in the light of this policy.’

2.1.11 Policy EV1 Design states that:
‘Proposals for new development will be expected to pay particular attention to the following elements of design;
(i) existing site characteristics including landscape features and levels;
(ii) the relationship with adjoining land and buildings;
(iii) the scale, density, layout, height, massing, landscape and materials in relation to the site and its surroundings;
(iv) the appearance and treatment of the spaces between and around buildings.’

2.1.12 Other general policies in the SNLP are also of potential relevance. Policy EV2 Development in the Open Countryside sets out a general presumption against new development, save where it is justified by identified exceptional circumstances. Policy EV7 Special Landscape Areas identifies a number of areas within the district of particular landscape quality and seeks to protect their existing character; the assessment site lies outwith the defined SLA, which local to the assessment site lies to the west of the Grand Union Canal. Policies EV19 Trees and Woodlands and EV21 Hedgerows, Ponds and Other Landscape Features deal, respectively with protected trees and the need to retain, wherever possible, existing hedges and other vegetation features, although the latter policy allows for the development of new features by way of compensation for any loss.

2.2 Emerging Development Plan
South Northamptonshire Local Plan (Part 2A)

2.2.1 SNLP2 will build on the WNJCS. It will include a range of policies and will establish a Rural Settlement Hierarchy for settlements within the District. It will also examine possible amendments to the existing town and village confines, and the identification of areas of important green space within settlements. SNLP2 will include site-specific allocations and accompanying policies, together with specific policies for (inter alia) design, and the built and natural environment and heritage objectives, together with
the protection of important landscapes. SNLP2 is still at an early stage in its development; an initial Issues Paper and accompanying document was published for public consultation in October 2013, and a further Options consultation and supporting documents was published in April 2016, with a consultation period ending in early June 2016.

2.2.2 The published Options consultation does not contain any specific policies, but seeks comments on a range of issues, including settlement hierarchy, development options, and environmental designations, including special landscape areas and local green space. A separate issues paper topic paper setting out a draft methodology for town and village confines was published in 2013. It is currently anticipated that following further consultation in late 2016/early 2017, SNLP2 will be submitted in Spring 2018 and following examination, will be adopted in late 2018.

2.3 Supplementary Planning Guidance and Documents

2.3.1 South Northamptonshire District Council (SNDC) has a range of adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). Of these, the SPG on Residential Design in the Countryside (1998) is the most relevant to matters of new housing layout and design in villages, and provides general guidance on the layout and design of new residential development in South Northamptonshire. In the Introduction it is noted that:

‘This (the need for new developments to integrate successfully with the traditional character of villages) does not require a slavish parody of historical styles, but every effort should be made to complement rather than detract from what is already there. Provided that the designer is sensitive to the particular quality of the site and the context in which it is set, there is no reason why contemporary designs cannot be successfully integrated into our villages. A thorough site analysis should be carried out by the developer for even the smallest development, before any planning decision can be taken. This must include considerations of topography, access, aspect, existing landscape, services above and below ground, relationship to surrounding buildings, rights of way, wayleaves etc …’

2.3.2 The SPG sets out a broad background to design matters throughout the district, and discusses matters relating to External Materials, Form and Scale, and the Spaces and Relationships between Buildings. Section 6 deals specifically with New Residential Estates. The opening sentences set the context:

‘There are numerous examples throughout the country where new estates linked to
old villages have borne no relationship to their older settlements, with repetitive housing regularly spaced and dominated by wide roads and verges.’

and

‘It is essential that new developments preserve a local identity as far as they possibly can, taking into account local characteristics of form, scale and enclosure mentioned already. There should be a seamless connection between the new and the old, with a sense of place extending into the new.’

How that might be achieved is developed with further general (but non-prescriptive) advice on specific aspects of design, including Local style, Highways, Layout, Footpath links and Street Lighting.

2.3.3 Section 8 of the SPG summarises the provisions of the SPG as follows:

• ‘Local distinctiveness should be reflected in the layout and design of any new development.

• External materials should relate to those of older neighbouring buildings in type, colour and texture. Village Design Guidance leaflets will provide information on the appropriate materials for each settlement.

• New housing should echo the simple forms and scale of traditional buildings as well as the proportions of external wall openings and relationship of solid to void.

• Relationships between buildings and spaces are critical in maintaining village character and sense of place. Buildings need not necessarily follow highway lines but may be grouped together to enclose attractive spaces.

• Garden walls and planting can be useful visual links between new and old and can also reinforce a sense of enclosure.

• New residential estates need to take account of local identity. Highway and street lighting requirements can have a major impact on these areas and need sensitive handling to avoid a replication of suburbia.

• Landscaping must be considered as an integral part of any development proposals and full details will normally be required as part of a planning application.’

2.4 National Planning Policy Framework

2.4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (The ‘Framework’) confirms that the Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, and that design should contribute positively to making places better for people. Whilst it
is right that the design of development should seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness, innovation, originality and initiative should not be stifled. The Framework makes clear that high quality and inclusive design is not just about buildings, but also the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

2.5 Landscape Character

2.5.1 At a national level, the assessment site lies with the Northamptonshire Vales (NCA 89) and at a regional level (in the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment) within Landscape Type 5C: Undulating Mixed Farmlands. Each level provides broad guidance on key characteristics, pressures for change and guidance on how change might be managed. The areas described at both national and regional level are extensive and thus of limited direct relevance to the assessment site. More specific guidance is found in the Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment (NCLCA) prepared by LDA Design in 2006.

2.5.2 The NCLCA divided the study area into broad landscape types and more detailed landscape character areas. In the NCLCA, the assessment site lies within the Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type and specifically within Area 13b Bugbrooke and Daventry. Extracts from the NCLCA are at Appendix 1. The text below focuses on the characteristics of the site as part of the Bugbrooke and Daventry Character Area. The Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type is described in general terms as:

'... an extensive and complex rural landscape character type that occupies almost a third of the county. It is found along the western fringes of Northamptonshire and stretches in a broad arc around the source of the Nene from Croughton in the south to Ashley in the north, overlooking the broad floodplain of the Welland.'

and:

'... a range of landform features are evident ranging from elevated hills and ridges rising to 180m ASL on ironstone geology and rolling lowlands bordering rivers and streams. The unity of character within this landscape type is derived from a consistent pattern of mixed agricultural land use and land cover and rural settlement, tied together by an intricate network of hedgerows and small copses and shelterbelts.'
2.5.3 Identified key characteristics of the *Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type* include:

- 'Extensive undulating and productive rural landscape stretching across the west of the county;
- cohesive and recognisable unity of character despite scale and extent;
- variations in the underlying geology influence local landform;
- mixed farming predominates across the landscape although local land use and field patterns are strongly influenced by changes in landform;
- numerous small deciduous woodlands, copses and shelterbelts punctuate the rural landscape;
- hedgerow trees, within the strong hedgerow network, contribute to the perception of a well treed landscape and combine with other landscape and landform features to create an intimate, human scale landscape;
- strong historic character underlies this deeply rural landscape.'

The landscape type covers an extensive geographic area. Landform features are closely related to underlying solid geology. Hedgerow trees and small areas of woodland (particularly those around farmsteads) are important locally and contribute to the character of the type and to the perception (as against the reality) that this is a well tree landscape. The combination of topography and vegetation reinforces the perception of a small scale intimate landscape within valleys, but on the higher ground, even with the vegetation cover, there is a sense of expansiveness and greater scale to the landscape. Beyond the major settlements of Northampton and Daventry:

'...the landscape is deeply rural with villages and towns interspersed with small farms and hamlets. Village morphology varies with compact and linear types evident. The density of villages and rural settlement also displays variations, with villages being more frequent in the three southernmost character areas, and becoming smaller and more widespread to the north'.

In terms of aesthetic and perceptual qualities, the landscape is described as:

'...characterised by undulating, productive mixed farmland interspersed with small villages and often remote farmsteads. It retains a strong rural character, which is eroded in places by modern incursions such as major transportation routes and large urban areas. Whilst wide views over the landscape are possible from elevated areas, the Undulatting Hills and Valleys generally have an intimate, human scale, reinforced by landform, small woodlands and hedges screening long distance views and creating enclosure. Even where wide open views are possible, villages, or more
often church towers, offer focal points on the horizon and therefore reduce the perceived scale of the landscape.

It is further noted, in relation to local distinctiveness, landscape condition and change, that:

'The expansion of urban areas in recent years is also responsible for despoiling areas of the landscape on the urban fringe, often in the form of poorly designed and sited housing, a standardisation of road and street furniture, and increased insensitive lighting. The impact is often relatively localised, although wide areas have been influenced by the cumulative effects.'

2.5.4 Area 13c Bugbrooke and Daventry is the most extensive area of the Undulating Hills and Valleys character areas and occurs on the western and southern side the River Nene Broad River Valley. The area is a largely undulating landscape with a pronounced series of hills and valleys to the west, which to the south and east become more subtle due to proximity to the River Nene and its floodplain. The area comprises both arable farmland and pasture, with areas of pasture around settlements and on steeper slopes. Woodland cover – predominantly broadleaf - is limited, becoming less evident south of the Nene. A number of well treed field boundaries also contribute to the overall woodland cover and often emphasise the undulating landform. The landscape is well settled, with a number of larger village settlements - generally compact and extending up the valley slopes - including Bugbrooke – and the area contains a range of recreational facilities including the Grand Union Canal Walk. Landmarks are varied within the character area, including the church spire at Bugbrooke. There are also strong urbanising influences evident in the landscape, not only through the presence of the M1 and M45 motorways, and other major ‘A’ roads and the railway, but also through the number of high voltage pylons crossing the character area. The undulating landform provides some screening for such elements.

2.5.5 The NCLCA sets out a series of landscape guidelines in respect of the separate character features identified within the Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type. Relevant to the assessment site are the following:

- Conserve and enhance the recognisable unity of local landscape character by ensuring that its qualities are not diminished by inappropriate development.
- Conserve and enhance existing small woodlands and copses to contribute to the perception of a well treed landscape.
- Conserve hedgerow patterns to contribute to the perception of a well treed
landscape, and to seek to reinforce the human scale of the landscape.

- Conserve the heritage features within the landscape.
- Conserve the character of rural lanes.
- Seek to limit the effects of urban influences through sensitive siting and creative (landscape) mitigation.
- Create a rural fringe that is functional, visually appealing, and sensitive to the local landscape and townscape.
3.0 Planning History

3.1 An application for outline planning permission for residential development for 70 dwellings was submitted to SNDC in May 2010 (Application no S/2010/0547/MAO). Planning permission was refused in July 2011 for two reasons; neither reason for refusal expressly cited adverse landscape or visual effects arising from the proposed development. The Committee Report in respect of the application indicated that as the application site lay outside the defined village confines on the edge of the village there would be, by definition, ‘...an urbanising effect on the area to a certain extent.’, and that as the development was considered inappropriate in principle and situated in the open countryside it would ‘...have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area...’ although it was also noted that ‘...the proposal appears in outline form to be generally satisfactory in terms of (inter alia)....design and visual impact....’

3.2 An appeal against that refusal of planning permission was considered at a hearing in February 2012. The Inspector’s decision on the appeal was issued in September 2012: the appeal was dismissed and a copy of the decision is at Appendix 2. When the appeal was heard, planning permission (SNDC Ref S/2010/0383/MAO) had been granted (but development had not then occurred) for the erection of 31 dwellings on land off Peace Hill. That development is now constructed and occupied. In addition, at the time of the hearing, a separate planning application (SNDC Ref S/2010/0613/OUT) for the erection of 17 dwellings on land to the south east of the assessment site (lying to the south of, and accessed via, the site with planning permission for 31 dwellings) had been refused and was subject to appeal. Although that appeal was dismissed in August 2012 - solely on the absence of a suitable planning obligation - a further planning application (SNDC Ref S/2012/1210/MAO) was submitted, and following a further refusal by SNDC was ultimately allowed at appeal in March 2013. A further full planning permission (SNDC Ref S/2015/1573/MAF) was granted in March 2016; the development has not yet been built.

3.2 At para 6 of the decision on then appeal in respect of the assessment site, the Inspector identified the main issue as:
‘...the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, having regard to national and development plan policy in respect of the location of new housing and the protection of the countryside.’
The Inspector acknowledged the applications/planning permission on adjacent sites (at para 7 of the decision), noted that development outside defined village limits would be required (at para 17), but expressed caution as to whether those sites would be built. At para 21 she said:

‘However, at present, the appeal site adjoins an isolated house and two potential housing sites which have yet to be developed. Whether or not those sites have the benefit of planning permission, there is no guarantee that they will be developed, or that they will be developed in advance of the appeal site. Until such time as those other two sites are built out, the appeal site is only linked to the defined village confines boundary of Bugbrooke by the somewhat artificial construct of the provision of a footpath link (which would be a permissive path and not a public right of way) only part of which would run along the village boundary.’ (Emphasis added)

3.3 At para 22 she said:

‘Without the development of the intervening sites it would consolidate development away from the village boundary and be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area. At present the site does not adjoin the defined village confines boundary and so I do not consider that it would consolidate the existing village boundary or form a sound alternative.’ (Emphasis added).

3.4 Nowhere in the decision is there any discussion, let alone a conclusion in respect of any contended adverse landscape or visual effects of the then appeal proposals. The Inspector did however say (at para 29) that:

‘Especially in view of the sensitive nature of the site, adjoining the open countryside, the canal and the Special Landscape Area, with such little contextual appraisal the proposal cannot be said to exhibit best practice in design and density issues as required by the IRHPP (SNDC Interim Rural Housing Planning Policy – now rescinded) if proposals over and above the indicative threshold are to be favourably considered. The Framework contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development and Bugbrooke has been identified among the ‘most sustainable’ of the District’s villages. However the Framework also places considerable emphasis on the need for good design. It advises 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. In my view this matter has not be adequately addressed.’ (Emphasis added).

In the absence of that considered appraisal the Inspector concluded, at para 31 that development would be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area.
The Inspector’s conclusions need to be interpreted carefully; the harm identified by the Inspector arose solely because of the absence of contextual appraisal cited in para 29; it must follow that in the event that a contextual appraisal (based on current circumstances) could demonstrate the suitability of the site for development, then either no harm would arise or the benefits of granting permission would outweigh any identified harm.

3.5 The misgivings that the Inspector had in 2012 as to whether the adjacent sites might either be developed and/ or granted planning approval have been overtaken by events. In 2012, the property adjoining the assessment site - ‘The Firs’ was detached from the then village edge, but as a consequence of the implementation of the planning permission for 31 dwellings off Peace Hill the edge of the village has now been extended to encompass that property and will be further extended when the permission further approval for the site for 17 dwellings is implemented. The assessment site thus now adjoins the village edge.

3.6 The specific circumstances that obtained at the time of the 2012 appeal decision – and which led to the Inspector’s decision to dismiss that appeal - no longer apply. In the light of intervening events, and the changed site context that now exists, it must follow that that appeal decision cannot and should not prejudice a further objective assessment of the suitability of the assessment site for residential development. The salient landscape and visual considerations are set out in the succeeding sections of this appraisal.
4.0 Landscape Analysis

4.1 A landscape analysis of the assessment site in its context is set out on Plan No 2 Landscape Analysis.

4.2 The following factors are considered relevant:

*Land Use*

The site comprises a single field used for arable crops.

*Adjoining Land Use*

Land to the south and north (north east of the Grand Union Canal) is used for arable crops. Land to the north east and east of the assessment site is in residential use, or has benefit of planning permission for residential development (see section 3 above). Immediately to the west beyond the Grand Union canal is a mixture of residential and commercial uses; the residential development of large detached properties (Hall Mead Court) lies between the basin and associated facilities of the Bugbrooke Marina, and the Wharf PH; with further employment uses (bounded by the west coast main rail line on embankment) to the west of the minor road heading south east towards Cornhill. Lower lying land to the south and west of the canal and the railway is primarily arable with areas of pasture on steeper slopes and on higher ground at Littleliff Farm and Downs Farm. A line of pylons runs south east to north west to the west of the railway.

*Topography*

The assessment site lies on the north side of the Hoarstone Brook valley facing south/south east. Levels fall gradually from north to south across the site from ca 90m AOD adjacent to Litchborough Road, to ca 86.5m AOD in the south west site corner and 84.5m AOD in the south east site corner. The Grand Union Canal, adjacent to the site, is partly on embankment adjacent to the south western part of the site and to a lesser extent in a cutting close to the north western site corner where Litchborough Road crosses the canal. In the wider area land rise gently to the east and north east of Bugbrooke to ca 95m AOD before falling gently towards the valley of the Nene; to the west, beyond the canal and the railway, which follow contour lines land rises relatively steeply to over 110m AOD adjacent to Norton's Barn to the west and Littleliff Farm to the south, and to 128m AOD at Bugbrooke Downs adjacent to Downs Farm to the south east.

*Vegetation:*

The assessment site has a relatively well developed vegetation structure, with a strong hedgerow boundary to the west to the Grand Union Canal (the embanked
section contains scrub woodland which extends south of the assessment site) and there is a well developed hedgerow along the staggered eastern site boundary, with a stand of mature trees to the rear of The Firs. There is a small area of scrub planting developing in the north western site corner, adjacent to the canal and Litchborough Road canal overbridge, and the northern assessment site boundary to the Road is formed by a machine cut hedgerow. The western part of the southern assessment site boundary is defined in main part by a mature agricultural hedgerow (ca 65m in length), with an open section (ca 35m in length) extending to the edge of the site with planning permission for 17 dwellings (see section 3 above).

**Water Features**

There are no streams or ponds within the assessment site, although the Grand Union canal adjoins the site to the west (partly on embankment) and the Hoarstone Brook (which passes under the canal embankment via a culvert) is located ca 190m south of the edge of the assessment site.

**Built Elements:**

There are no built elements within the assessment site, save for the remains of a collapsed small agricultural shed close to Litchborough Road, now becoming subsumed within the scrub vegetation.

**Roads**

The site has a frontage to Litchborough Road to the north of ca 80m, with a footway along its whole length, connecting Bugbrooke to the development west of the canal.

**Public Rights of Way:**

There are no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that cross the assessment site. PRoW KD26 (the Grand Union Canal Walk) runs along the north eastern side of the canal adjacent to the south west edge of the assessment site. From this PRoW there is access down the canal embankment to PROW KD4, which runs north east (on the south side of Hoarstone Brook) to High Street and links to PRoW KD3 which crosses the brook ca 180m south east of the assessment site, connecting to the head of The Leys in Bugbrooke. West of the canal PRoW KD4 passes under the canal and the rail embankment and then rises gently to the south towards Pattishall (where it becomes PRoW RT13). Some 500m the south east of the assessment site along the Grand Union Canal Walk, PRoW KD18 runs north east towards Camp Hill in Bugbrooke, and also connects to PRoW KD3. PRoW KD3 crosses the canal and the rail line (the latter on a high level footbridge), and then rises towards Littleliff Farm, where it becomes PRoW RT12. There are no rights of way on the higher ground at the Bugbrooke Downs to the south east of the assessment site.
4.3 Views towards and from the assessment site are at Figures 1-3. The locations of the photograph viewpoints are shown on Plan No 1. The assessment site can be seen from a very limited number of viewpoints. The existing built development to the east and west limits views towards the assessment site, even from the higher ground further to the west (beyond the canal and railway) towards Norton's Barn, Littlefiff Farm, and the House on the Hill where the combined facets of built form and off site planting mean that although the village can be discerned (including the church spire) the assessment site itself cannot be seen (Viewpoints 1 and 2). There is the prospect of views from the Grand Union Canal towpath, which is also PRoW (The Grand Union Canal Walk) but the hedgerow along the western boundary of the assessment site limits views into the site itself.

4.4 There are close views into/ over the site from Litchborough Road, although these are only available from the road itself; as land to the north rises to a shallow east-west ridge and thus limits any longer distance views. From Litchborough Road there is a middle to longer distance view over the site to the Hoarstone Brook valley and to rising ground beyond the stream and then to higher ground at Bugbrooke Downs to the south east. In the views from the north, the existing built development to the east and west is less evident, because of the presence and visual strength of existing planting to the boundary of The Firs and alongside the canal. (Viewpoints 3 and 4)

4.5 From the south there are no available views to the assessment site from the Grand Union Canal Walk, but there are views from other PRsoW that intersect with it; from PRoW KD3 where it crosses the canal and the rail line the assessment site can be seen (Viewpoint 5), alongwith the existing historic development within Bugbrooke and, more evidently, the roofs and upper floors of the developed site off Peace Hill. The as yet unimplemented further development site off Peace Hill can also be seen from this viewpoint, as would built development on that site. From PRoW KD18/KD3 north east of the canal there are medium distance views towards the village edge, which lies on a shallow ridge north of the Brook (Viewpoints 6 and 7) with recent development off Peace Hill and other built development visible, albeit filtered/screened in part by perimeter planting. From PRoW KD3 in the floor of the Hoarstone Brook valley there is a view north west towards the southern edge of the assessment site (Viewpoint 8), although the existing hedgerow along part of this boundary limits the extent of the available view. Built development on the site would be visible from this location, but would be seen in the context of the existing built development within the village and also adjacent to the canal to the west.
4.6 In summary, the landscape context for the site has changed demonstrably since the 2012 appeal decision, in that the western edge this part of Bugbrooke was moved closer to and now adjoins the assessment site as a consequence of completed and planned residential development. Existing built development lies to the west and to the east. The site cannot be seen from the west or east (from within the village) and only in local views from Litchborough Road to the north. In near and middle distance views from rights of way to the south, the assessment site is seen, and development on it would be visible, but would be seen in the context of existing and committed built development.
5.0 **Landscape Concept and Strategy**

5.1 A Landscape Concept for the potential development of the assessment site is shown on **Plan No 3 Landscape Concept.** The concept derives from the landscape analysis, and also from the guidance set out in respect of the *Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Character Type* in the NCLCA.

5.2 The principal elements of the concept are as follow:

- Retain the existing hedgerow alongside Litchborough Road save for the formation of new highway access into the assessment site.
- Retain in main part the existing scrub vegetation in the north west site corner adjacent to Litchborough Road and the Grand Union Canal/Canal Walk.
- Retain the existing hedgerow vegetation around the eastern (The Firs/ recent and planned residential development), western (Grand Union Canal) and southern edges of the assessment site.
- Strengthen significantly the southern assessment site edge through new native hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting incorporating some small areas of woodland adjacent to the canal embankment to provide articulation to the (new) settlement edge.
- Retain the lower southern part of the site in open land use as public open space/play space
- Provide for surface water attenuation/swales either in the southern part of the site as part of the area of open space, or locate these features off site in land to the south.

5.3 The overall Landscape Strategy thus envisages a redefinition and strengthening of the landscape structure of the assessment site and through that, and development, an enhancement to the character and appearance (and hence function) of the village edge. Development of the assessment site would contribute to the enhancement of the local Green Infrastructure network.
6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The assessment site is an unexceptional area of settlement fringe farmland on the western edge of Bugbrooke with existing built development to the east and west. It contains no exceptional or unique landscape features. It is not (and never has been) subject to any landscape or landscape related local plan designation. The assessment site is in a moderate landscape condition. Development of the assessment site would fulfil a number of the Landscape Guidelines for the landscape type set out in the *Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Assessment*, specifically in respect of the retention and enhancement of hedgerows, the development of small areas of woodland, and articulation and enhancement of the settlement edge.

6.2 Development of the assessment site would not give rise any significant landscape or visual effects, but, subject to the incorporation of the landscape strategy outlined above, would in practice contribute to local landscape and visual enhancement.
Land south of Litchborough Road, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire

Plan 1:
Site Location
Land south of Litchborough Road, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire
Plan 2: Analysis
Land south of Litchborough Road, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire
Plan 3: Landscape Concept
Appendices
Appendix 1
CHARACTER AREAS

13a Middleton Cheney and Woodford Halse
13b Bugbrooke and Daventry
13c Long Buckby
13d Cottesbrooke and Arthingworth
13e Stoke Albay and Ashley

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Extensive undulating and productive rural landscape stretching across the west of the county;
- Cohesive and recognisable unity of character despite scale and extent;
- Variations in the underlying geology influence local landform;
- Watercourses form part of three principal river catchments of the Cherwell, Nene and Welland;
- Reservoirs and man made lakes are conspicuous features in the local landscape displaying a wide range of size, function and age;
- Navigable canals are an important visual component of the landscape and linear wildlife and recreational asset;
- Mixed farming predominates across the landscape although local land use and field patterns are strongly influenced by changes in landform;
- Numerous small deciduous woodlands, copses and shelterbelts punctuate the rural landscape;
- Hedgerow trees, within the strong hedgerow network, contribute to the perception of a well treed landscape and combine with other landscape and landform features to create an intimate, human scale landscape;
- Strong historic character underlies this deeply rural landscape;
- Numerous villages linked by winding country lanes contribute to rural character; and
- Communication routes and urban influences and infrastructure have, where present, eroded local rural landscape character where present.
LOCATION AND INTRODUCTION

The Undulating Hills and Valleys represent an extensive and complex rural landscape character type that occupies almost a third of the county. It is found along the western fringes of Northamptonshire and stretches in a broad arc around the source of the Nene from Croughton in the south to Ashley in the north, overlooking the broad floodplain of the Welland.

The landscape is formed from a range of geological formations ranging from a predominance of limestone in the south to areas of mudstone and ironstone in the north, overlain by intermittent deposits of glacial till and glaciofluvial sand and gravel. Landform is equally complex and a range of landform features are evident ranging from elevated hills and ridges rising to 180m ASL on ironstone geology and rolling lowlands bordering rivers and streams. The unity of character within this landscape type is derived from a consistent pattern of mixed agricultural land use and land cover and rural settlement, tied together by an intricate network of hedgerows and small copses and shelterbelts.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and Soils

A complex series of geological formations are exposed across the Undulating Hills and Valleys, influencing localised patterns of landform, land cover and agricultural land use. In the south of the area, bordering the Croughton, Aynho and Farthinghoe Limestone Plateau, a succession of Lias Group rocks outcrop with the oldest Charmouth Mudstone Formation progressively overlain by Dyrham Siltstone, followed by the relatively more resistant Marls and Rock, and finally the Whitby Mudstone Formation. These are exposed on the sides of westward flowing tributary valleys.

Although mudstones and siltstones predominate, localised capping of Northampton Sand Formation Ironstone has left distinctive elevated ridges and hills, which rise to a maximum elevation of 180m ASL to the east of West Haddon, and echo the more extensive and dramatic hills of the Ironstone Uplands landscape character type.

Drift geology is not as widespread as in the eastern and southeastern part of the county, and deposits tend to be localised and restricted to elevated hills, and the fringing landscape character types on which drift geology is a significant component, such as the Undulating Claylands and the Clay Plateau. Significant areas of drift geology are evident bordering the main river channels, which themselves are floored by alluvial deposits. Glacial till is the predominant form of drift geology across the landscape, although glaciofluvial sand and gravel are also extensive particularly along the upper reaches of the Nene and its westernmost tributaries between Nether Heyford and Daventry.

Soil cover across the landscape type is particularly complex with the most southerly area comprising slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey soils, with similar fine loamy, over clayey soils; well drained brashy fine and coarse loamy ferruginous soils over ironstone; seasonally waterlogged fine loamy over clayey soils; and fine silty over clayey, and clayey soils. Whilst soils further north have a similar composition, soils with only slight seasonal waterlogging are all evident. Smaller pockets of slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils are also present together with deep, well drained coarse loamy and sandy soils, locally over gravel, and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging, associated with similar but wetter soils.

Landform

Landform features are closely linked to the underlying solid geology. High, often steep sided hills tend to be formed from ironstone deposits, with other lower gentler hills being formed from various other rock types, principally mudstone and siltstone. The higher areas of landform act as watersheds between numerous streams and rivers, which have carved a complex drainage pattern and created a soft undulating landscape of interlocking hills between watercourses. The most elevated areas of landform occupy the ironstone ridge between West Haddon and Long Buckby, which in many respects resembles the Guilsborough Ironstone Uplands to the north.

Hydrology

Streams flowing through and originating in the Undulating Hills and Valleys form part of the region’s three main river catchments: the Cherwell, the Nene and the Welland. In the south of the landscape type, rivers drain westwards off the Limestone Plateau watershed to the Cherwell, which flows southwards alongside the M40. To the north and within the Bugbrook and Daventry character area, Ironstone hills form a high watershed between the Cherwell and Nene catchments. Streams originating on these hills flow generally eastwards where they form the upper reaches of the Nene. Indeed the source of the Nene may be found in woods surrounded by hills to the south of Staverton. Further to the north rise two of the Nene’s principal tributaries, the Brampton and the Ise. In the Stoke Albany and Ashley landscape character area, streams flow northwards eventually to join the Welland.
This is a long settled landscape, and in many areas has a strong historic character. Many villages have retained medieval buildings and street patterns, and occupy landscapes that are rich in remnant areas of ridge and furrow. The wider landscape also contains numerous earthworks attaining to the medieval period including motte and bailey castles and numerous manorial earthworks. Examples are Steane Park where fish ponds, moated sites and a manor house are visible, and Harrington where manorial garden earthworks are an important landscape feature.

HUMAN INFLUENCES

The principal settlements in and bordering the Undulating Hills and Valleys are the urban areas of Daventry and Brackley. The western fringes of Northampton are also dominant in views from landscapes in the vicinity, and urban influences are evident along its fringes, particularly in close proximity to the M1 to the north of Rothersthorpe where numerous transportation routes converge.

Beyond these urban areas and their zone of influence, the landscape is deeply rural with villages and towns interspersed with small farms and hamlets. Village morphology varies with compact and linear types evident. The density of villages and rural settlement also displays variations, with villages being more frequent in the three southernmost character areas, and becoming smaller and more widespread to the north. Cob buildings are notable in a number of villages, adding to the historic character of these undulating routes, and where landform and intervening vegetation allow, villages are often set back from the road, surrounded by hedged pastures, trees and small areas of woodland.

A dense network of narrow winding lanes often bordered by tall hedgerows links villages and hamlets together, beyond which may be found isolated farms at the end of narrow lanes. When travelling on these undulating routes, and where landform and intervening vegetation allow, villages are often visible on distant hilltops. Church towers occur more frequently than spires in this landscape type, and these are often the first element into enter the view, followed by the entire village fringe, which is often surrounded by hedged pastures, trees and small areas of woodland.

The undulating agricultural landscape is punctuated with numerous small deciduous woodlands, copses and shelterbelts. These are distributed evenly across the landscape and tend to be located on steeper areas of land and bordering watercourses. Few are ancient in origin. Those identified as ancient woodlands tend to be larger and congregate along the rolling north facing slopes between Preston Capes and Church Stowe and to the east of Little Brington.

Hedgerow trees and small areas of tree planting surrounding farmsteads are important locally and contribute significantly to local landscape character and to the perception that this is a well treed landscape. Trees and woodlands also limit views and combine with landform to add to the perception of a human scale, intimate landscape.
Historic country houses and designed parklands are also an important heritage resource. These are located throughout the landscape, although the principal sites are Holdenby House and Althorp. Holdenby House was built by Sir Christopher Hatton to entertain Elizabeth I, and became the Palace of James I and the prison of his son, Charles I. Its gardens, whilst limited in extent are of national importance and contain earthwork remains of early formal gardens laid out from 1579 to c. 1587 and a deer park. Althorp is also significant. Its gardens contain traces of an early formal layout. The park dates from 1512, although has since been extended, with date stones recording planting between 1567 and 1901. Traces of avenues are ascribed to Le Notre.

Field sizes and shapes vary considerably across the landscape, reflecting localised variations in landform and land cover. As a general rule, larger fields tend to be located on more elevated land with gentle gradients, and are principally used for arable cultivation. Medium to large fields are extensive, with smaller fields creating more intricate patterns surrounding villages where improved pastures are common.

Field boundaries are generally defined by healthy well managed hedgerows. Many are rambling and species rich, and contain numerous hedgerow trees, principally oak. Hedgerows are an important feature of the landscape, containing and limiting many views from elevated locations, thus contributing the landscape's intimate, human scale. Hedgerows also follow landform features and therefore emphasise the undulating character of the landscape.

The landscape predominantly comprises a dense network of narrow winding country lanes, linking villages and towns. These tend to be enclosed by hedgerows, which often limit views. Roads tend to cross tributary streams rather than follow them and as such their course dips and rises along with the undulating landscape.

The principal and most heavily trafficked route in the landscape, however, is the M1. Its alignment mirrors the course of the route taken by the Roman Watling Street and runs parallel to the A5 between Crick and Flore before diverting eastwards and crossing the Nene to the east of Nether Heyford. This busy route is a prominent landscape feature and introduces noise and movement to otherwise rural landscapes. The course of the A5 (Watling Street) and M1 is also mirrored by two other regionally important transport routes, the mainline railway between Rugby and Milton Keynes and the Grand Union Canal. These important routes combine to make the landscape at the boundary of the Buckby and Daventry and Long Buckby landscape character areas one of the busiest in the county. All four routes, canal, railway, M1 and A5 are running together through the Watford Gap. This demonstrates the choice made by engineers surveying their routes north from London since Roman times.

Overhead transmission lines are the most prominent infrastructure development visible in the landscape, especially where pylon lines extend across the more elevated areas of the landscape. The main alignment of transmission lines runs through the landscape between Winwick and Foscote although other significant stretches can be observed between Crick and Daventry and to the north of Middleton Cheney and Marston St Lawrence.

Whilst not a significant element of the wider landscape, transportation routes in tunnels are another conspicuous local landscape element, their construction necessitated by the undulating character of the landscape. The most significant stretches of tunnel, the Crick Tunnel and Braunston Tunnel, take two arms of the Grand Union Canal beneath areas of elevated ironstone hills. The alignment of the Crick Tunnel is visible above ground by tracing a line of wooded mounds, each marking the site of an airshaft. The Kilsby Tunnel is also important and takes the mainline railway from Rugby beneath the Ironstone Hills to the east of Kilsby. The airshafts here are impressive castellated brick structures that dominate the local landscape and act as locally prominent landscape features.

Another significant infrastructure element in the landscape is the tall telecommunications mast on top of Borough Hill. This is clustered with minor transmitters for mobile phones and is the last remaining mast on the hill that once formed a distinctive silhouette above Daventry, prior to their removal.

Recreation

Daventry Country Park is the principal recreational resource in the landscape. The park is based around the feeder reservoir, which supplies water for the nearby Grand Union Canal. The reservoir dam was begun in 1796 when a stone faced earth dam was constructed across the stream running through the valley to retain water. It was completed in 1804. Various informal recreational activities are catered for, including walking and bird watching. There is also a picnic area and adventure playground.

A dense network of footpaths criss cross the landscape. These are particularly dense around villages, from where they often radiate out into the surrounding countryside. A number of promoted paths run through the landscape, providing an important recreational facility. The principal route is the Grand Union Way, which runs through the undulating landscape alongside the canal from where it enters the county to the north of Downtown Hill to Blisworth. Here the canal continues southwards through the Undulating Claylands.
The Macmillan Way is also an important promoted walk through the landscape on its route from Boston in Lincolnshire to Abbotsbury on the Dorset coast. This route runs from the north of the character type from Weston by Welland southeastwards to Chipping Warden where it passes just to the north of Arbury Banks.

Significant stretches of four other promoted walks wind through the rural landscapes of the Undulating Hills and Valleys. These comprise the Midshires Way, the Jurassic Way, the Nene Way and the Knightley Way.

**AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES**

The landscape is characterised by undulating, productive mixed farmland interspersed with small villages and often remote farmsteads. It retains a strong rural character, which is eroded in places by modern incursions such as major transportation routes and large urban areas. Whilst wide views over the landscape are possible from elevated areas, the Undulating Hills and Valleys generally have an intimate, human scale, reinforced by landform, small woodlands and hedges screening long distance views and creating enclosure. Even where wide open views are possible, villages, or more often church towers, offer focal points on the horizon and therefore reduce the perceived scale of the landscape.

**LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS, LANDSCAPE CONDITION AND LANDSCAPE CHANGE**

The Undulating Hills and Valleys are widespread and occupy a significant portion of the west of the county. Local variations in landform, geology, soils and land use history, have an impact on local landscape character. However, the landscape is perceived as a unified, if extensive, landscape character type.

The mixed farming economy has necessitated the retention and maintenance of the hedgerow network and as such field boundaries are generally in a good condition and add much to the perceived intactness and good condition of the landscape. These are an integral part of the landscape, as they limit views and add to the well treed character of the rural scene and the sense of intimacy and human scale of the landscape. Hedgerow patterns also follow landform features and emphasise its undulating character.

The expansion of urban areas in recent years is also responsible for despoiling areas of the landscape on the urban fringe, often in the form of poorly designed and sited housing, a standardisation of road and street furniture, and increased insensitive lighting. The impact is often relatively localised, although wide areas have been influenced by the cumulative effects. The landscape bordering major transportation networks, for example the M1, is also showing signs of decline and standardisation, ensuring that when travelling along major roads, no sense of local character is evident.
The Bugbrooke and Daventry Character Area is the most extensive area of the Undulating Hills and Valleys character areas and occurs on the western and southern side the River Nene Broad River Valley Floodplain. It extends from the western county boundary, around the eastern edge of Daventry, to the southwestern edge of Northampton. Whilst this undulating landscape has a pronounced series of hills and valleys to the west, to the south and east it becomes more subtle due to its proximity to the River Nene and its floodplain. Views along the undulations are generally long and open, although landform and vegetation frequently limit more extensive, panoramic views.

Land cover in the area is a combination of both arable and pastoral farmland in fields of varying size. There is, however, a predominance of improved pastures with grazing cattle and horses surrounding the settlements dispersed through the character area, and often on steeper slopes such as those around Borough Hill. Woodland is limited to small, predominantly broadleaved woodland copses sparsely scattered throughout the area and becoming less frequent south of the River Nene. A number of well treed field boundaries also contribute to the overall woodland cover and often emphasise the undulating landform. A concentration of several larger woodlands are evident, however, between Preston Capes, Everdon and Farthingstone on steeper sloping valley sides. Woodlands within this location are also ancient, including Everdon Stubbs. Although this area of ancient woodland has been there for at least 300 years, It was not recorded during the Domesday Survey. Covering 30 hectares, the woodland straddles the road connecting Farthingstone and Everdon and consists of a mixture of hardwoods, including sessile and pendunculate oak together with other species including hornbeam, rowan, hazel, sycamore, silver birch and some very old beech. Designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the woodland is also well known for its display of spring bluebells. A small car park and numerous footpaths are located within the woodland, providing a valuable recreational facility. Other recreational facilities include the Grand Union Canal Walk, Macmillan Way, Knightley Way and Nene Way National Trails and numerous public rights of way. Man made reservoirs are also a significant feature of the landscape. Two reservoirs, Daventry and Drayton are located on the fringes of the town of Daventry. A third reservoir, Ravensthorpe, is located to the east of the village of Ravensthorpe in the valley of a dammed stream. A mill is located at the northern end of the main water body and a causeway crosses it, providing views over the reservoir.

The landscape is well settled with a number of larger village settlements including Kilsby, Barby, Braunston, Weedon Bec, Lower Weedon and Bugbrooke. These are generally compact and extend up the valley slopes. Distant views are also possible of the large urban centre of Northampton. Smaller settlements have both a linear and clustered form, for example, Preston Capes and Badby are clustered, nucleated villages whilst Everdon, Farthingstone and Church Stowe have a typical linear form, often extending across the upper slopes and on occasions down the valley sides. Between the villages, the settlement pattern includes scattered farmsteads and dwellings located both adjacent to roadsides, and set back from the road and accessed via minor tracks. Some areas remain unsettled, however, with the only means of access on foot. Crossing the landscape and connecting settlement is a network of minor roads along with a number of more major roads, including a limited stretch of the M45 and M1, the A361, A45(T), A43(T) and the A3(T) Watling Street Roman Road.
Heritage features in the area include not only the Roman Road, but also Fawsley Hall, a Grade II listed park and garden. The original Tudor manor house, with its vaulted great hall and Queen Elizabeth I chamber, forms the core of the hall, with Georgian and Victorian wings including gables, gargoyles and gothic crenellations. The house sits in 120 hectares of ground, and although the gardens are of an uncertain date, the creation of the parkland landscape is attributed to Capability Brown in 1763. Also located at Ashby St Ledgers is the Grade II Manor House and surrounding grounds, providing an important landscape feature. Located in the northwestern corner of the area is the site of the medieval village of Fawcliff and on the southern boundary is the site of an 11th Century motte and bailey castle at Preston Capes. Scattered throughout the area are numerous fields of ridge and furrow particularly around Ashby St Ledgers, on the southern slopes of Cleves Hill, and around Dodford and Newnham. On the eastern edge of Daventry, Borough Hill, designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, includes numerous earthworks, a fort, and tumulus. Burnt Walls to the south, proves the existence of a considerable Roman station. Industrial heritage features are also evident in the Bugbrooke and Daventry Undulating Hills and Valleys, including significant sections of the Grand Union Canal and large stretches of both dismantled and working railways. Located in the northeastern corner of the character area is the Kilsby Tunnel, built by Robert Stephenson in 1838 as part of the London and Birmingham Railway. The construction of the 2,400 yard long tunnel commenced in 1833 and took 1,250 men nearly two years to build at a total cost of almost £300,000 against an estimate of £99,000. The increased cost was due to the discovery of quicksand under a 40 feet thick bed of clay. Several miles wide, the waterlogged sand was about 120 feet below the surface and water had to be pumped out continuously for 8 months at an average of 2,000 gallons of water per minute. Prominent features above the tunnel are large circular turrets providing airshafts for the railway below.

The M1, A5 (Watling Street), railway and canal all convene in the area in a tight transportation corridor, on the boundary with the neighbouring Long Buckby Character Area. This has been the natural location for major routeways north from London since the Roman period and is known as the Watford Gap. The location of this major strategic gap is marked by a service station and a collection of buildings surrounded by ridge and furrow a short distance to the north.

Landmarks are varied in the character area, including radio masts and a transmitting station around Borough Hill and a telecommunication mast south of Barby. Newnham Windmill is also a prominent landmark along with notable church spires and towers at Newnham, Bugbrooke and Church Stowe. Strong urbanising influences are evident in the landscape, not only through the presence of the M1 and M45 motorways, and other major ‘A’ roads and the railway, but also through the number of high voltage pylons crossing the character area. The undulating landform does, however, provide some screening for such elements.
KEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER FEATURES

- Extensive undulating and productive rural landscape stretching across the west of the county with a cohesive and recognisable unity of character despite scale and extent. This is the quintessential agricultural landscape of the Midlands with its broad sweeping undulating landform, rich and productive agricultural land contained by a strong hedgerow enclosure, and a deeply rural character.

- Variations in the underlying geology influence local landform and introduce an ever changing pattern of local distinctiveness within the broader undulating landform.

- Watercourses form part of three principal river catchments of the Cherwell, Nene and Welland, and have eroded a dendritic drainage pattern and a complex network of interconnected valley forms.

- Reservoirs and man made lakes are conspicuous features in the local landscape displaying a wide range of size, function and age. This can vary from reservoirs as at Ravensthorpe, Drayton and Daventry, designed lakes in historic parkland as at Fawsley Hall and Cottesbrooke Park, and natural water bodies as in the Cherwell Valley to the south of Aynho. These create diversity and focal points in the landscape.

- Navigable canals are an important visual component of the landscape and linear wildlife and recreational asset. This important heritage resource has adapted in response to their popularity as a recreational resource for use by local communities and wider public, with wider use likely as a consequence of the growing population within the county and wider region.

- Mixed farming predominates across the landscape although local land use and field patterns are strongly influenced by changes in landform. The land use introduces local variety and diversity to the landscape and an intricate patchwork pattern of fields of contrasting colours and textures, contained by generally well managed hedgerows.

- Numerous small deciduous woodlands, copses and shelterbelts punctuate the rural landscape and contribute to the impression of a well treed landscape. While evident across the whole landscape they tend to be associated with steeper land and follow watercourses, emphasising the relationship with the landform.
• **Hedgerow trees** within the strong hedgerow network contribute to the perception of a well-treed landscape and combine with other landscape and landform features to create an intimate, human-scale landscape. They are important features that add richness and a sense of maturity to this productive agricultural landscape.

• **Strong historic character underlies this deeply rural landscape** with evidence of a long period of settlement with wide-ranging examples of heritage features and historic landscapes from many periods of occupation. The notable and rich remnants of ridge and furrow that occur within this Landscape Type are an iconic symbol of the Midlands agricultural landscape, and evidence of a long period of cultivation and production.

• **Numerous villages linked by winding country lanes contribute to rural character.** The dense network of narrow winding lanes, often bordered by tall hedgerows, and linking the wide distribution of villages and hamlets, contributes to the sense of a long settled area focused on agricultural production.

• **Communication routes and urban influences and infrastructure have, where present, eroded local rural landscape character** with the noise and movement associated with traffic and visual influences of urban activities contrasting with the sense of rural isolation and tranquility elsewhere.

### UNDULATING HILLS AND VALLEYS

The Undulating Hills and Valleys Landscape Type covers the greatest land area within Northamptonshire. It extends across the western and central part of the county from the most southerly part near Aynho, sweeping northwards in a broad arc to the northern boundary near Weston by Welland. It includes much of the upper catchment area of the Nene, and its tributary the Brampton Arm.

This is the quintessential agricultural landscape of the Midlands with a strong sense of unity derived from a palette of well-defined characteristics. The broad sweeping undulating landform supports a rich agricultural land use of mixed farming, with a patchwork pattern of fields contained within a strong hedgerow network with hedgerow trees. On more elevated land at the crest of the undulations, and where there are gaps in the hedgerows, there are wide vistas across this productive landscape, and the mosaic of hedgerows and fields. Elsewhere, a more intimate, human scale prevails as a consequence of the more enclosed landform and the containment provided by hedgerows and hedgerow tree cover, and the succession of small, mainly deciduous woods. Narrow winding lanes, often bordered with strong hedgerows, and small villages nestling into the folds of the landscape or on hill tops, often identifiable by their church tower or spire, creates a sense of harmony with this deeply rural landscape.

The many heritage features within this landscape type are indicative of a long period of settlement and enrich the experience of the landscape. These include Iron Age sites, such as the Borough Hill and Castle Dykes defensive structures, Roman roads, and numerous motte and bailey and manorial medieval sites, as well as more recent features associated with the canal network. The area is particularly renowned for the well-preserved areas of ridge and furrow. Many historic houses and designed parklands add richness to the landscape, with Holdenby House and Althorp of particular note. Their parklands contribute to the tree cover, with the houses forming memorable landmark features. Larger settlements on the perimeter of the Landscape Type, notably Daventry and Brackley, and principal roads such as the M1 and A5, introduce urban influences that detract from the otherwise quiet and remote rural character.

### LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

New development, change and land management should be controlled to conserve and enhance the balance of the rural elements that contribute to the intrinsic character of this productive agricultural landscape. In particular, the scale and pattern of the fields enclosed by a robust hedgerow network, the woodland mosaic, and village form and setting and their relationship with the undulating landform should be retained. Wherever possible, the distinctive and strong hedgerow network should remain intact, particularly where historic field patterns are evident, and conserved and managed to encourage species diversity and enhanced wildlife habitats. Valued intact historic landscapes and features should be retained, and protected from degradation, and agricultural practices should be encouraged to conserve and protect valued features from any further loss, notably the irreplaceable areas of ridge and furrow.

Large scale development should be resisted within this rural landscape and particularly in the open and remote areas. However, in view of the potential growth of urban areas surrounding this landscape, it is likely that areas adjacent to principal settlements may need to accommodate development and change. In addition, there may be opportunities for limited development within the lower and more secluded locations and in association with the rural villages. Where such development is considered, reference should be made to the locality for the effect on the landscape resource and wider setting, together with particular details of local vernacular building styles, materials, and layout and arrangement of features in the landscape.
### Landform and Views

**Extensive undulating and productive rural landscape stretching across the west of the county with a cohesive and recognisable unity of character despite scale and extent.** This is the quintessential agricultural landscape of the Midlands with its broad sweeping undulating landform, rich and productive agricultural land contained by a strong hedgerow enclosure, and a deeply rural character.

*Conserve and Enhance the cohesive and recognisable unity of character across the Undulating Hills and Valleys and ensure that the integrity of this quintessential rural agricultural landscape is not diminished through inappropriate development and loss of the characteristic combination of elements.*

**Variations in the underlying geology influence local landform and introduce an ever changing pattern of local distinctiveness within the broader undulating landform.**

*Conserve and Enhance the changing patterns of local distinctiveness that relate to the subtle variations in landform and land use patterns, and in respect of scale and enclosure, but within the wider character of a productive agricultural landscape.*

### Hydrology and Water Features

**Watercourses form part of three principal river catchments of the Cherwell, Nene and Welland, and have eroded a dendritic drainage pattern and a complex network of interconnected valley forms.**

*Conserve and Enhance the quality of watercourses that flow within the upper catchment areas of the Cherwell, Nene, and Welland.*

**Create opportunities to strengthen the identity and presence of the watercourses by encouraging management practices that establish or enhance bankside planting and linear woodlands adjacent to the watercourses.**

**Reservoirs and man made lakes are conspicuous features in the local landscape displaying a wide range of size, function and age.** This can vary from reservoirs as at Ravensthorpe, Drayton and Daventry, designed lakes in historic parkland as at Fawsley Hall and Cottesbrooke Park, and natural water bodies as in the Cherwell Valley to the south of Aynho. These create diversity and focal points in the landscape.

*Conserve lakes and man made water bodies for their intrinsic visual appeal, as well as their recreational and nature conservation value.*

**Enhance the setting and fabric of reservoirs, by seeking opportunities for enhanced recreational and nature conservation facilities. Seek to ensure that the character of the landscape is enhanced through habitat management and creation.**

**Restore and Enhance structures and landscape features that form part of the historic landscape associated with reservoirs.**
Navigable canals are an important visual component of the landscape and linear wildlife and recreational assets. This important heritage resource has adapted in response to their popularity as a recreational resource for use by local communities and wider public, with wider use likely as a consequence of the growing population within the county and wider region.

- Conserve and where applicable Restore neglected sections of the network of canals and encourage opportunities for their further Enhancement to serve the leisure requirements of local and wider communities, but ensuring that they appropriately and sensitively undertaken and accord with the principles of sustainable tourism.
- Conserve and Enhance the biodiversity value of habitats associated with these linear networks through appropriate management and strengthen their role as habitat links.

Land Management

Mixed farming predominates across the landscape although local land use and field patterns are strongly influenced by changes in landform. The land use introduces local variety and diversity to the landscape and an intricate patchwork pattern of fields of contrasting colours and textures, contained by generally well managed hedgerows.

- Conserve field patterns to reflect various episodes of enclosure and subsequent land management and as features of the landscape that emphasise the grain of the landform.
- Discourage hedgerow removal and field amalgamation that lead to broader areas of monoculture, and a consequent reduction in the visual interest associated with the mosaic of fields and cropping patterns.

Woodland and Trees

Numerous small deciduous woodlands, copses and shelterbelts punctuate the rural landscape and contribute to the impression of a well treed landscape. While evident across the whole landscape they tend to be associated with steeper land and follow watercourses, emphasising the relationship with the landform.

- Conserve and Enhance the existing small woodlands and copses, including shelterbelts close to farms, by appropriate management and encourage natural regeneration and replanting with broadleaved native species.
- Create new woodlands where appropriate but with a preference for locations that relate to and strengthen the local landform pattern. Encourage the use of broadleaved native species for woodland planting to enhance biodiversity.
Hedgerow trees within a strong hedgerow network contribute to the perception of a well-treed landscape and combine with other landscape and landform features to create an intimate, human scale landscape. They are important features that add richness and a sense of maturity to this productive agricultural landscape.

**Conserve** hedgerow patterns to reflect various episodes of enclosure. Where appropriate, manage more sympathetically for their nature conservation value and encourage more hedgerow trees to develop to further contribute to the character of the landscape. Whilst encouraging a more sympathetic hedgerow management regime, seek to ensure that the pattern of fields can still be appreciated.

Heritage, Settlement and Infrastructure

**Strong historic character underlies this deeply rural landscape** with evidence of a long period of settlement with wide-ranging examples of heritage features and historic landscapes from many periods of occupation. The notable and rich remnants of ridge and furrow that occur within this Landscape Type are an iconic symbol of the Midlands agricultural landscape and evidence of a long period of cultivation and production.

**Conserve** the heritage features within the landscape that are an irreplaceable representation of past layers of occupation of the land, and enrich the experience and character of the landscape. Encourage farmers and landowners through guidance to limit damage to the heritage resource through sensitive land management. Limit any further loss or damage of the irreplaceable and well-preserved areas of ridge and furrow by contemporary ploughing methods.

Numerous villages linked by winding country lanes contribute to rural character. The dense network of narrow winding lanes, often bordered by tall hedgerows, and linking the wide distribution of villages and hamlets, contribute to the sense of a long settled area focused on agricultural production.

**Conserve** the character of rural lanes in the landscape with their hedged enclosure and close relationship with the pattern of villages, hamlets, and scattered farmsteads that they connect. Ensure that road improvements do not adversely affect their rural character through the introduction of kerbing, roundabouts and other features such as lighting.

Communication routes and urban influences have, where present, eroded the local rural landscape character with the noise and movement associated with traffic and visual influences of urban activities contrasting with the sense of rural isolation and tranquility elsewhere.

**Seek to limit the effects of infrastructure and urban influences on the wider rural landscape through sensitive siting of any necessary developments and through creative mitigation that is in keeping with local landscape character.**

**Create** a vibrant and visually appealing urban rural fringe or interface that is functional, visually appealing and sensitive to variations in local landscape and townscape character.

Strong historic character underlies this deeply rural landscape with survival of ridge and furrow.
The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.

The appeal is made by Heygate and Sons against the decision of South Northants District Council.


The development proposed is 70 houses.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was in outline with all matters other than access reserved for future determination. The application was accompanied by an indicative scheme which I have taken into account in coming to my decision.

3. Shortly after the Hearing, an appeal decision\(^1\) relating to land off Johns Road and Pilgrims Lane, Bugbrooke, which had been referred to at the Hearing, was issued. Also, the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). These documents are material considerations in my determination of this appeal and the main parties were afforded the opportunity to make further written representations on these matters which I have taken into account.

4. As agreed at the Hearing, a revised s106 Unilateral Undertaking was subsequently submitted by the appellants. However, as the appeal is to be dismissed on the substantive merits of the case, it is not necessary for me to consider this in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 and the Framework, or in terms of the additional ‘wish list’ put forward by the Parish Council.

5. At the Hearing British Waterways (BW) expressed the view that some of the land within the landscaping area shown along the towpath on the indicative drawing was in their ownership. After the Hearing that was found to be the case by the appellants and BW. The appellants therefore served the appropriate notice on BW. As BW were clearly aware of the planning application, I do not consider that any interests were prejudiced by this being

\(^1\)APP/Z2830/A/11/2159377 dated 15 March 2012
carried out late in the planning process, though there could be implications for the implementation of any landscaping scheme along this boundary. Nonetheless, landscaping is a reserved matter and this could be taken into account in the submission of details.

Main Issue

6. The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area, having regard to national and development plan policy in respect of the location of new housing and the protection of the countryside.

Reasons

7. The appeal site, predominantly an arable field, sits on the south western side of Bugbrooke, and fronts onto the B4525 Litchborough Road. To the west is the Grand Union Canal, while along part of the eastern boundary is a house and garden (The Firs). To the south is further agricultural land. Along the remainder of the eastern boundary is part of a site, again fronting Litchborough Road and adjoining houses in Peace Hill, for which there is an extant planning permission for 31 houses, and a site which is the subject of a separate appeal involving the development of 17 houses. The latter site adjoins houses in The Leys.

8. It is proposed to develop 70 houses on the appeal site. Access would be from Litchbrooke Road, slightly to the east of the existing field access so as to achieve better visibility. The indicative layout submitted with the planning application also shows an amenity area with a pond, a landscaped buffer along the boundary with the canal towpath and a footpath from the southern part of the site linking to West End.

9. Local Plan\(^2\) policy G2 sets out that new development will be concentrated in Towcester and Brackley, limited in the villages and severely restrained in the open countryside. Residential development is directed to the built up areas of Towcester and Brackley (policy H3). Policy H5 allows for some limited housing development within the village confines of the Restricted Infill Villages which include Bugbrooke. The site is outside the defined Village Confines Boundary for Bugbrooke and so its development would be contrary to adopted Local Plan policy. Nonetheless, the Framework contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development and housing applications should be considered in this context.

Housing Land Supply

10. The Framework charges local planning authorities ‘to boost significantly the supply of housing’. It requires local authorities to identify and update annually a supply of specific, deliverable sites, sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. It goes on to say that relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up to date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites.

\(^2\) South Northamptonshire Local Plan (1997)

www.planningportal.gov.uk/planninginspectorate
11. When the relevant part of the Localism Act is brought into force, the East Midlands Regional Plan, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) will be revoked. Until such time it provides an appropriate basis for determining the housing requirements of the District. The West Northamptonshire JPU Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment\(^3\) (SHLAA), while favoured by the Council as a local, achievable, delivery based approach to inform subsequent plan making, has not yet replaced its own Housing Land Availability Study (HLAS) which is based on the RSS.

12. The housing requirement for 2001-2026 identified in the HLAS is for 330 completions/year. During the first 10 years of the RSS there was a shortfall of 568\(^4\) completions. There are differing views between the Council and the appellants as to how the shortfall should be dealt with: the Council considers it appropriate to spread the shortfall over the remaining 15 years of the RSS, whereas the appellants argue that, in view of the imperative to identify land and deliver new housing embodied in the Framework, it should be addressed sooner.

13. There is no definitive guidance as to which approach should be taken, but the thrust of Government policy to deliver new housing and economic growth urgently carries significant weight in my assessment of the housing land supply situation. Although it is evident that, after the abolition of the RSS, the Council is likely to adopt a different approach to housing provision through its Core Strategy, to accord with the aims of Government policy I consider there is a more urgent need to address the shortfall. When the shortfall is not backloaded, the appellants have shown that the Council’s housing land supply falls below the 5 years plus 5% figure required by the Framework.

14. The Council’s housing figures rely heavily on the rate of delivery from just a few large sites. Since the April 2011 HLAS it seems that these are not coming on stream as fast as originally envisaged and there is some doubt as to how readily available they are. The Council disagrees with the appellants’ view as to the rate of delivery from these sites and considers that sufficient housing will result over the 5 year period to meet the target figures. Although the Council has tried to make realistic assumptions about delivery from these sites, given the general slow down in the housing market and the fact that delivery is already falling behind what was envisaged at the time of the April 2011 report, I consider that this casts further doubt as to whether a 5 year housing supply of readily available sites (plus 5%) can be achieved.

15. There is also disagreement as to whether windfalls should be included in the housing land supply figures. Previously it has been accepted in other appeal decisions that the Council has sound reason for the inclusion of a windfall allowance because South Northamptonshire is a predominantly rural district where it is not practicable to carry out a capacity study for each of its villages. The appellants argue that this has now been done in the SHLAA. However the purpose of that document is to inform future policy of the Core Strategy and, as the Council argues the SHLAA is produced on a different basis from the RSS targets on which the HLAS is based. I therefore consider that at this stage the windfall allowance is reasonable. Nevertheless, this does not outweigh the concerns outlined above.

\(^3\)West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Final Report (January 2012) (SHLAA)

\(^4\)There was an error in the originally submitted figures which gave this as 598 dwellings
16. Overall, I find that there is reason to suppose that there is a shortfall in the 5 year plus 5% supply of housing land in the District. As such, and particularly in view of the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in Framework, the proposal falls to be considered under the Interim Rural Housing Planning Policy (IRHPP).

**Interim Rural Housing Planning Policy**

17. In response to the shortfall in housing land availability at the time, in July 2009 the Council adopted the IRHPP to assist in meeting housing targets until such time as a 5 year supply of land could be identified. The IRHPP set an indicative figure for new housing which would be permitted in a number of villages across the District. It was recognised that there were unlikely to be sufficient brownfield sites to accommodate such development within the villages so that development on greenfield sites, outside the village confines boundaries designated in the Local Plan, might be necessary. The IRHPP allocates a figure of 111 houses to Bugbrooke.

18. The IRHPP covers housing in sites outside, but adjoining, the village confines of those villages that are considered most sustainable or reasonably sustainable. Housing will be permitted where a number of criteria are met and which I consider in turn below.

19. **It can be demonstrated that there are no suitable and deliverable brownfield sites available within or adjoining the village confines:** There is no evidence that there are such sites within or adjoining Bugbrooke.

20. **The suitability of any proposed extension to the existing settlement form in terms of the consolidation of an existing village confine boundary or formation of a sound alternative boundary that reflects and respects natural or other long term features can be demonstrated:** The Design and Access Statement (DAS) submitted with the planning application states that the proposed development forms an obvious extension of the village, providing a link to the substantial existing developed to the west and therefore a strong alternative boundary to the village.

21. However, at present, the appeal site adjoins an isolated house and two potential housing sites which have yet to be developed. Whether or not those sites have the benefit of planning permission, there is no guarantee that they will be developed, or that they will be developed in advance of the appeal site. Until such time as those other two sites are built out, the appeal site is only linked to the defined village confines boundary of Bugbrooke by the somewhat artificial construct of the provision of a footpath link (which would be a permissive path and not a public right of way) only part of which would run along the village boundary.

22. On its western side the site borders the Grand Union Canal. I recognise that there is development on the other side of the canal, including a period house, 5 modern dwellings, a pub, small marina and a commercial site. Even so, that, for the most part, is canal-related development (the 5 houses were on a brownfield site), well outside the confines of the village and separated from it by the strong physical boundary of the canal and open fields. It seems to me that development of the appeal site as proposed would have the effect of extending the village boundary to beyond the other side of the canal and into the Special Landscape Area, even if a landscape buffer were provided alongside
the canal boundary as shown in the indicative scheme. Without the development of the intervening sites it would consolidate development away from the village boundary and be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area. At present the site does not adjoin the defined village confines boundary and so I do not consider that it would consolidate the existing village boundary or form a sound alternative.

23. *The scale of the proposal either individually or cumulatively with other sites granted planning permission since April 1st 2009 does not exceed the percentage of the existing number of dwellings within that village (the indicative target for Bugbrooke is 111 dwellings) except where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would result in improvements on the site including for example the re-use of previously developed land and best practice in density and design issues; or is required to support the retention of or improvement to essential local services that may be under threat (in particular the local primary school or primary health services); and has been formulated with meaningful discussions with the appropriate parish council at the pre-application stage:*

24. With the permission recently granted for the John’s Road site and the extant Peace Hill permission, as a matter of fact the indicative target of 111 houses set for Bugbrooke is taken up. Approval for the second Peace Hill site would mean that it would be exceeded. I have seen the legal opinion submitted by one of the local residents regarding the consideration of further sites which would mean that the indicative threshold could be exceeded but, in any event, as set out above the IRHPP allows for the threshold to be exceeded subject to certain conditions.

25. However the appeal site is not previously developed land and there is no evidence before me to show that the site is needed to support the retention of, or improvement to, essential local services that are under threat.

26. The Parish Council has expressed a preference for this site to be developed rather than the Johns Road site. At the Hearing it was suggested that this was mainly on the basis of the relative weight of local objection to the proposals rather than because of detailed planning considerations. I note that the Parish Council’s written representations make clear its opposition to the development of the site outside the village boundary. Even so, it acknowledges that previously, in the context of the application of the IRHPP, it has reluctantly accepted the appeal site as the ‘least worst’ of the major applications submitted at the time (the others being the sites already referred to in this Decision) as this would balance out the village and re-instate the High Street as the village centre. The Parish Council would also seek other benefits for the village as part of a s106 Agreement.

27. With regard to design and density, there is little in the submitted DAS to show how the design of the proposal has been informed by the wider context, or what the scale parameters of the proposal are to be. This was not part of the Council’s case as it had objected in principle to the development on the basis that the IRHPP would not apply as it considered a 5 year supply of land could be demonstrated, but the matter was raised in other representations.

28. I appreciate that the layout before me is an indicative scheme, but it gives an idea as to how the quantum of development proposed would be accommodated on the site. In the DAS it is stated that the density would be 36 units/hectare,
with dwellings 2-2½ storeys in height, but no indication is given of, say, their overall height and size etc. There would be a buffer strip up to 10 metres wide along the 260 metre frontage to the Grand Union Canal, reinforced planting along the boundaries, an amenity area and footpath links to the canal and a path to the village. Although there is a landscape study, no analysis is given of wider design issues such as why this would be an appropriate density for development on the site, what dwelling mix would meet identified local needs or whether the estate type layout shown in the indicative plans would be an acceptable form of development for the site in response to its location. BW has also expressed concern about the effect of planting too close to the embankment which could affect its integrity and the impact of providing a number of new pedestrian access points onto the towpath.

29. Especially in view of the sensitive nature of the site, adjoining the open countryside, the canal and the Special Landscape Area, with such little contextual appraisal the proposal cannot be said to exhibit best practice in design and density issues as required by the IRHPP if proposals over and above the indicative threshold are to be favourably considered. The Framework contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development and Bugbrooke has been identified among the ‘most sustainable’ of the District’s villages. However the Framework also places considerable emphasis on the need for good design. It advises 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. In my view this matter has not be adequately addressed.

30. There is no reason to suppose that the site is not deliverable if planning permission is granted, thus contributing to the 5 year supply of housing land. Provision would be made for 40% of the units to be affordable housing and the submitted Unilateral Undertaking could secure contributions to necessary infrastructure. Nevertheless, overall I find that the proposal would not accord with several of the requirements of the IRHPP; it would not consolidate the existing village boundary or form a sound alternative boundary which reflects and respects natural or other long term features; it would not meet the additional criteria set out in the policy if the indicative threshold for additional houses is to be exceeded in terms of best practice in design and density issues, the re-use of previously developed land or being needed to support the retention of essential local services.

31. I therefore conclude that the proposed development, outside the village confines, would be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area and would not accord with the policies of the Local Plan, the IRHPP or the Framework.

Other Matters

32. The proposed footpath link from the site is shown meeting footpath KD21 at a point to the east of West End. At present KD21 runs through the garden of no.31 West End and the occupier of that property has pointed out that there would be 2 sections to KD21 if the new path were to be constructed as shown. I do not find that this is problem which affects the proposal which is for a permissive footpath rather than a public right of way. The status of KD21 would remain unchanged. However, if planning permission were to be granted, there may be scope for negotiation on this matter to enable the occupier of no.31 to have the footpath diverted from his garden.
Conclusion

33. Although the Framework supports sustainable development to enable housing delivery and economic growth, it also seeks to promote good design. I have found that the harm to the character and appearance of the rural area is not outweighed by the need to provide for additional housing land in this instance.

34. For the reasons given above I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Isobel McCretton

INSPECTOR
APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLENT:

Peter Frampton Framptons, Chartered Surveyors
Charles Haselwood Fisher German, Chartered Surveyors (Appellants’ Land Agent)

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Shaun Greaves GC Planning Partnership
Andrew D’Arcy BA(Hons), MRTPI Planning Policy Lead Officer South Northamptonshire Council (SNC)

INTERESTED PERSONS:

Ian Dickinson British Waterways
Laurence Wilbraham DipTP, MRTPI Wilbraham Associates (agent for site at John’s Road/Pilgrim’s Lane)
Cllr Stephen Clarke SNC
Cllr David Harries SNC
John Curtis Chair, Bugbrooke Parish Council
John Mundy Chair Bugbrooke Cricket Club
Andrew Bodman Local Resident
Julian Howard Local Resident

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE HEARING:

Document 1 Copy of Unilateral Undertaking
Document 2 Statement from Mr Bodman with attached legal opinion
Document 3 Council’s updated 5 year housing land supply
Document 4 Appellants’ 5 year Housing Delivery Supply Assessment (February 2012)
Document 5 Schedule of housing sites suitability/delivery trajectory submitted by the Council

DRAWINGS:

A1-4 Drawings submitted with the planning application (site plan, indicative layout, street scene, appraisal)

B1 Extract from the Local Plan (Inset 19: Bugbrooke)
Land south of Litchborough Road, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire: Photographs – Figure 1