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# Land East of Ten Acre Lane, Thorpe: Landscape and Visual Assessment and Green Belt Appraisal

Prepared on behalf of CEMEX UK Properties

28th May 2020



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CEMEX UK Properties

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Site Appraisal and Context Photographs (1-11)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The site is a former quarry located on the eastern edge of Thorpe, adjoining Coldharbour Lane on the northern edge of a complex of lakes, formed from previous mineral extraction activities, which extend between the M3 and the site and include Thorpe Park amusement park. To the north and east of the site a former quarry area has been filled and forms a raised landform which physically and visually separates the site from the edge of Egham Hythe to the east and Thorpe Industrial Park to the north.

### Key Points from Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The key landscape and visual attributes of the site, see accompanying illustrative material, include:

- Landform: levels within the site are raised through landfilling and vary from 15-20m AOD, rising gradually to a high-point in the northern part of the site. A linear bund follows the southern and western boundary of the site (**Site Context Photographs 1 and 11**).
- Landscape Character: lies within NCA Profile 115: "Thames Valley" at a national level, "River Valley 2: Thames" landscape character area (LCA) in the Surrey Landscape Character Assessment (**Figure 2: Townscape and Landscape Character Assessment**).
- Land Use: comprises grassland, interspersed with areas of newly planted woodland as part of the quarry restoration.
- Vegetation cover/Enclosure: well contained by tree belts and hedgerows, on all boundaries with only glimpsed views into the site from Coldharbour Lane and Ten Acre Lane (**Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**).
- Scale: medium.
- State of repair: hedgerow trees and trees generally in good condition, albeit hedgerow structure gappy in places. Newly planted woodland requires maintenance to become established.
- Representativeness: representative of the Thames Valley NCA and the River Valley 2 Thames LCA which is influenced by urban features including mineral extraction, limited farming (grazed pasture) and tree cover which restricts views and helps obscure built form.
- Designations: Green Belt, Thorpe Conservation Area; Biodiversity Opportunity Area (draft Policy EE11), within 500m of South West London Waterbodies Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site, within 5-7km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (**Figure 1: Site Context Plan**).
- Tranquillity / Remoteness: noise from traffic using the M25 and M3, noise from Thorpe Park amusement park, diminishes the tranquillity.
- Cultural / Recreational Associations: the site is within Thorpe Conservation Area which contains a number of listed buildings, but there is a lack inter-visibility between the site and the rest of the village and there is currently no public access to the site.
- Scenic Beauty: enclosed, due to dense woodland cover, but limited scenic quality due to the non-natural landforms and lack of positive visual features within the site.

- Visual Influence: very limited visual envelope to due to the flat to gently undulating topography and the containment afforded by dense vegetation cover and adjacent built form, distant views from the Beacon (viewpoint) on St Anne's Hill, scheduled ancient monument to the south of the site.

The key opportunities from a landscape and visual perspective include:

- Well contained by vegetation;
- Very limited visual envelope;
- Influence of adjoining built and engineered elements;
- Potential to respond positively to the Biodiversity Opportunity Area policy; and
- Generally flat landform, therefore limited requirements for cut and fill.

The key constraints from a landscape and visual perspective include:

- Green Belt designation, comprising an area of agricultural land between Thorpe and Egham Hythe;
- Relationship to the historic centre of Thorpe Conservation Area; and
- Trees to be retained on the site boundaries.

Based on this assessment the site has capacity to accommodate residential development from a landscape and visual perspective.

### Summary of Green Belt Review

Criteria	Discussion	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The northern limit of the site is marked by treed hedgerows, beyond which is a notable local landform. Further north is the well vegetated edge to Thorpe Industrial Estate along Green Lane. To the east of the site is the densely vegetated boundary to Coldharbour Rosery and Fleetmere. The southern western limit of the site is formed by Coldharbour Lane and the dense vegetation along this edge and Manor Cottage.</p> <p>The land to the north of the site containing a 15m high hill contributes to the Green Belt function of restricting sprawl to a greater extent than the Site itself. The existing hedgerow lines on the northern edges of the Site form a secondary restriction. Limited development on the parts of the Site adjacent to existing development could be contained within a robust boundary of structure planting. Whilst resulting in an extension to the eastern edge of Thorpe, this would relate to existing residential built form and set within a comprehensive landscape framework, including Green</p>	Limited

Criteria	Discussion	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose
	Infrastructure, reflecting the overall scale of development in this part of Thorpe.	
Prevent nearby towns from merging into one another	The settlements of Thorpe and Egham Hythe to the north are separated by landform, vegetation and the built form of Thorpe Industrial Estate. Residential and leisure development on the south western part of the Site would be contained within a strong landscape framework reinforced by defensible boundaries of woodland. Potential development would not result in the merging of Thorpe with Egham Hythe through ribbon development along Coldharbour Lane and the intervening landscape would continue to provide separation between the two settlements.	none
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>The character of the site is influenced by its former use as a quarry including the artificial bunds on its boundaries. Surrounding mineral extraction workings have an influence including the large earth works to the north of the Site, haul roads and industrial sheds. There is limited public access as noted in the Runnymede GB Villages Review. PROW 49 to the south of the site is limited in length and impassable to the east.</p> <p>Development of the south western corner of the Site would result in the localised loss of agricultural land of poor landscape quality. However, the development would give the opportunity to improve the overall quality of the landscape of the site through restoration of natural contours, native hedgerow planting and improvement to public access.</p>	none
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<p>Although the sites are within Thorpe Conservation Area there are no features of historic significance in or visible from the site. The site, due to its very contained visibility makes a limited contribution to the setting of Thorpe. The hedgerow boundaries on Coldharbour Lane and Ten Acre Lane contribute to the vegetated nature of the lanes. These would be preserved as part of any development proposals.</p> <p>The site is not visible from within the historic core of Thorpe Village.</p>	very limited

1.1 The below table makes an assessment against the two additional criteria set out in the Site Selection Methodology and Assessment.

### Assessment of Site Against Additional SSMA Criteria

Criteria	Discussion
<p>Cumulative impact when considered with other sites against the settlement hierarchy and/or whether the total or cumulative area of Green Belt for release is proportionate to the amount of land which is actually developable.</p>	<p>The LVIA was undertaken alongside, and informed, the masterplanning process. The design and assessment stages are iterative, with stages overlapping in part.</p> <p>Mitigation measures were embedded within the design of the Development as a result of the desk-based study and field work. These measures, such as the building layout, massing and height, and arrangement of open spaces and new structural planting are included within the Site Layout Plan (Appendix A.5) and Site Landscaping Proposals (Appendix A.6) which define the application. Effective primary mitigation strategies avoid or reduce adverse effects by ensuring the key principles of the design of the Development, as noted above, are sympathetic with the existing baseline.</p>
<p>Whether the site forms a 'rounding off' of a settlement edge or is infill, to ensure settlements remain compact and protect the Green Belt from further fragmentation.</p>	<p>Thorpe is not a typical 'nucleated' village that has spread evenly from a historic core. The core is accepted as being the Church and Village Hall. However, development to the east of this has previously been limited owing to mineral working that has now ceased. More recent development has principally been to the west towards the M25 away from the historic core and Conservation Area. The Site is located on the north east corner of the Ten Acre Lane/ Coldharbour Lane junction, immediately to the rear of a pair of existing dwellings and contiguous with the settlement edge. The Site is well located in the context of existing built development and the historic core, and will focus development around this key gateway into the Village, providing for a logical 'rounding off' of the settlement.</p>

#### *Contrasts Between Published and Barton Willmore Green Belt Reviews*

The differences between the findings of the above Barton Willmore review and that contained within the Local Plan evidence documents can be explained by the extent of what is to be assessed and the timeframe of what is to be assessed.

The Arup GBR reviewed parcel 78 as a whole, as if it were to be removed wholesale from the Green Belt. As such, parcel 78 would make a large contribution to the second purpose of the Green Belt. In addition, the Arup report rightly considers the current situation, not the potential for the creation of new defensible boundaries as proposed within the Site.

Due to the findings of the Arup report, the Site was not considered further for the review of sub-parcels and is therefore not considered in the Green Belt Village Review Stage 2. This is due to the methodology used and the discounting of the entire parcel and the assessment of the Site 'as is', rather than its potential. The Barton Willmore Green Belt Review is site specific, has been able to focus entirely on the

local issues within and around the Site and is able to take into account the potential for the creation of new defensible boundaries through new green infrastructure. Figure 6: Green Infrastructure Plan demonstrates how new GI can be established within the Site, creating new defensible boundaries to development to accord with paragraph 139 of the NPPF and further reducing the perception of merger.

### **Summary**

Proposed development could therefore be accommodated on the site, with no significant increase in the extent of development visible in existing views and would not result in greater visibility of the site within the immediate or wider context.

By containing the extent of proposed development, the existing contribution that the site makes to the functions of the Green Belt would be maintained. Views of the site, from the Green Belt which includes and surrounds the site are, in any event, very limited. Ensuring that there is no increase in visibility of development on the site in views from the immediate east and from the south will assist in accommodating development on the site.

Proposed development could therefore be successfully accommodated on the site, limited to the south western extent of the site; and set within an existing and enhanced framework of mature trees and vegetation; without significantly increasing the potential visibility of development on the sites or reducing the contribution the sites makes to the purpose or functions of the Green Belt in this locality.

### **Proposed Landscape and Green Infrastructure Strategy**

From our assessment of the landscape and visual context of the site the following strategy is recommended to maximise potential of the Site to promote green infrastructure within and surrounding Thorpe and to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt in accordance with paragraph 141 of the NPPF (2019). These principles are illustrated in **Figure 6: Green Infrastructure Plan**.

- Retain and enhance, through management and supplementary native planting, existing hedgerows and tree belts on the boundaries of the site; including suitable offsets from retained vegetation from changes in level or built development.
- Protect and enhance local character through the use of scale, massing and materials within the proposed residential area.
- Incorporate a structure of street tree planting to soften and integrate the built form.
- Establish a strong structure of native woodland/hedgerows to create a well-defined edge to the Green Belt and transition from the proposed housing area to the country park.
- Extend the hedgerow/woodland links across the site and within the country park promote biodiversity through a variety of habitat types including native wildflower grassland planting, native wildflower wetland planting and native aquatic planting to provide new habitat and

foraging opportunities for local wildlife. These areas would sit within the wider framework of Green Infrastructure within the site, drawing together existing areas of planting.

- Create interest for users of the footpath linkages through ground modelling and vegetation.
- Provide cycle paths and a network of safe accessible pedestrian routes linking Ten Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane.
- Integrate a network of surface water drainage channels / swales across the site, planted with moisture-tolerant trees and shrubs, contributing to the site-wide green infrastructure and visual amenity.
- Promote opportunities for country park to be used as an educational resource for schools / local wildlife bodies with strategically located interpretation boards.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) were commissioned in June 2016 by CEMEX UK Properties to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal with Green Belt Review (LVA GBR) of land north and south of Coldharbour Lane, Thorpe (the Site) to assist in identifying the potential for the Site to accommodate residential development.
- 1.2 The extents of the Site are demonstrated as outlined by the red line boundary on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** and **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**. The Study Area corresponds to the area shown on **Figure 1**.
- 1.3 The objectives of this landscape and visual appraisal and Green Belt review are:
- To assess the landscape character and quality of the Site and its context and the function of the Site within the wider landscape, particularly in relation to existing landscape designations and policies.
  - To appraise the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site.
  - To assess the potential of the Site and its landscape context to accommodate residential development in terms of landscape and visual opportunities and constraints.
  - To consider the policy basis for the underlying Green Belt designation which applies to the Study Area, as defined on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**.
  - To assess the contribution of the Site in response to its Green Belt function and potential for the Green Belt boundary to be amended.
- 1.4 The following illustrative material supports the landscape and visual appraisal and Green Belt assessment:
- Figure 1: Site Context Plan
  - Figure 2 Landscape and Townscape Character Plan
  - Figure 3: Visual Appraisal Plan
  - Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan
  - Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan
  - Figure 6: Green Infrastructure Plan
  - Site Context Photographs (1-11)

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### Methodology for Landscape and Visual Appraisal

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

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

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

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

- 2.9 The Site was assessed against the first four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the recently published NPPF dated February 2019, Paragraph 134 of the NPPF, which are:
- *"To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas*
  - *To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another*
  - *To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*
  - *To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns...* "
- 2.10 The fifth purpose of the Green Belt *"to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land"*, has been scoped out of the assessment as the Council is considering greenfield sites and, therefore, should the Site be brought forward for development, it would not prejudice derelict or other urban land being brought forward for development.
- 2.11 The NPPF states in Paragraph 136 that *"once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan"*.
- 2.12 The NPPF states that the key characteristics of the Green Belt are *"their openness and their permanence"*. In defining new boundaries to the Green Belt, it must be ensured that these characteristics are not diminished for the areas remaining within the Green Belt designation as a direct result of development. An assessment is made of the openness of the Green Belt in the vicinity of the Site and to what extent its removal could have on the perception of openness in the remaining designated area.

- 2.13 In addition, the relationship of the Site to existing elements, such as built form, roads, railways and rivers, as well as visual barriers, such as ridgelines and areas of notable vegetation is set out. This assists in the assessment of the Site in relation to the existing Green Belt and consideration of potential development in relation to the openness of the remaining Green Belt and the permanence of Green Belt boundaries.
- 2.14 Where relevant, these factors, on top of consideration of the contribution of the Site as existing to the Green Belt, are then used to determine the degree of harm to the Green Belt, resulting from the Proposed Development, accounting for the mitigation by design approaches taken (and beneficial uses as set out in paragraph 141 of the NPPF if the Site remains within the Green Belt).

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

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

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

Purpose	Criteria
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>Considerable - Development of the land would be strongly perceived as sprawl, as it is not contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in an incoherent manner.</p> <p>Some - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl, as it is partially contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a moderately incoherent manner.</p> <p>Limited - Development of the land would be perceived as sprawl to a limited degree, as it is largely contained by robust physical features and/or would extend the settlement pattern in a broadly coherent manner.</p> <p>None - Development of the land would not be perceived as sprawl as it is well contained by robust physical features and/or is entirely set within the existing coherent settlement pattern.</p>
Prevent neighbouring towns from merging	<p>Considerable - Development would result in the physical unification of two (or more) towns</p> <p>Some - Development would substantially reduce the physical or perceived separation between towns</p> <p>Limited - Development would result in a limited reduction in the physical or perceived separation between towns</p> <p>None - Development would not physically or perceptually reduce the separation between towns</p>
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>Considerable: No built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a strong urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Some: Built or engineered forms present but retaining a perception of being predominantly undeveloped and/or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a moderate urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p> <p>Limited: Built or engineered forms present and a minimal perception of being undeveloped and or rural in character. Development would potentially result in a limited urbanising influence over the wider landscape.</p>

	None: Built or engineered forms present and perceived as inherently developed and/or urban in character. Development would not result in urbanising influence over the wider landscape.
Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<p>Considerable: Strong physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town. May be within or adjoining the historic part of a town.</p> <p>Some: Partial physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town, whilst not adjacent to it.</p> <p>Limited: Weak physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p> <p>None: No physical and/or visual and/or character connection with the historic part of a town.</p>

**Table 1.2: Definitions**

Term	Definition
Brownfield	See 'Previously Developed Land'
Character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that differentiates one area from another.
Coalescence	The physical or visual linkage of large built-up areas.
Countryside	In planning terms: land outwith the settlement boundary. In broader terms: the landscape of a rural area (see also rural)
Defensible Boundary	<p>A physical feature that is readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.</p> <p>The NPPF states at Paragraph 139 f) that "local authorities should define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent".</p> <p>With regard to physical boundaries, these would include roads, railway lines, rivers, streams, or canals, large woodland or strong tree belts, or significant topographical features.</p>
Encroachment	<p>Advancement of a large built-up area beyond the limits of the existing built-up area into an area perceived as countryside either physically or visually.</p> <p>Any development on greenfield sites would inevitably lead to physical encroachment, whether the land is within the Green Belt or not. Encroachment into the countryside takes into consideration the landscape character context, and the urbanising features present as well as the potential visual encroachment into the countryside.</p>
Green Infrastructure	A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.
Greenfield	Land (or a defined site) usually farmland, that has not previously been developed.
Large Built-Up Area	An area that corresponds to the settlements identified in the relevant Local Plan, including those inset from the Green Belt.
Merging	This relates to the physical or visual linkage of large built up areas i.e. the coalescence of settlements or the erosion of the gap between settlements. Interlying physical barriers, intervisibility between towns / settlements and the potential for coalescence are all taken into consideration. (see coalescence)

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

### 3.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

3.1 **Figure 1: Site Context** provides an overview of the location of the Site within Runnymede District in Surrey. As illustrated on **Figure 1**, the Site is located within the Green Belt and Thorpe Conservation Area, set between the settlements of Staines, Egham, Virginia Water, Addlestone and Chertsey, within and surrounded by the western fringe of the wider conurbation of London. The Site forms part of a Landscape Problem Area (Policy NE10).

3.2 The Study Area extends from the urban areas of Egham and Staines-upon-Thames in the north to Chertsey in the south, Virginia Water to the west and the River Thames to the east. The area is crossed by the M25 running north-south and the M3 running east-west. The Staines Road, A320, also runs to the east of the Site, connecting Staines with Chertsey, to the north-east and to the south-east of the Site, respectively. The mainline railway line runs parallel to the east of the M25 through Egham and Virginia Water.

#### Land Use and Settlement

3.3 The Study Area is strongly influenced by infrastructure such as motorways, major roads and railway lines. A mixture of residential, industrial, educational and leisure land uses are distributed throughout the Study Area, including Thorpe Park amusement park, lakes, TASIS school, Penton Hook Marina, Laleham Golf Club and commercial and business units at Thorpe Industrial Park. The area has been very active in mineral extraction and there are a number of sites recently restored or undergoing restoration including land to the northeast of the Site. Residential areas of Egham, Thorpe, Staines, Chertsey and Virginia Water are considered within the Study Area.

3.4 Although fragmented by these elements of built form, there is a high proportion of open space within the Study Area which is variously in agricultural, leisure and recreational use.

3.5 The Site comprises an area of restored quarry land, located between the settlement area of Thorpe to the west and Thorpe Industrial Estate to the north, separated from it by a row of houses along Ten Acre Lane. Thorpe cemetery is located on the north western corner of the site in line with this row of properties. To the west of Ten Acre Lane is The American School in England (TASIS). Adjacent to the road are sport pitches, car parking and a sports pavilion, with the main school building set back from the road by approximately 100m. Residential properties set behind the Grade II listed "north wall" line the eastern end of Coldharbour Lane and the south western end of Ten Acre Lane. Manor Farm Cottage is located on the eastern corner of these two roads on the south western corner of the Site. To the south of Coldharbour Lane are a variety of farm buildings set behind brick perimeter walls.

3.6 The majority of the Site is to the immediate north of Coldharbour Lane which connects with Norlands Lane running west-east from Thorpe to the A320A small parcel of land to the south of Coldharbour Lane

to the west of 'Fairacre' is also included in the assessment. To the south of Coldharbour Lane is a complex of lakes formed from previous mineral extract activities, and which extend between the M3 and the Site. These lakes include Manor Lake, Fleet Lake, Abbey Lake, Britannia Arena, and St Ann's Lake. The Thorpe Park amusement park is located in the centre of the complex of lakes, approximately 700 metres to the south-east of the Site. The headquarters of CEMEX is located on the northern shore of the lakes, south of Coldharbour Lane and its junction with Norlands Lane. The CEMEX headquarters offices include the listed building of Eastley End House, which was extended in the late 1980s with predominantly single storey development. The campus of The American School in England (TASIS) forms a large part of the Conservation Area in the historic core of Thorpe and the open space to the north east of the settlement is formed by playing field belonging to the school.

- 3.7 Significant areas of open space include the River Thames corridor with its associated wetlands and lakes. The River corridor broadly runs from north to south east on the eastern side of the Study Area. The lakes including Manor Lake, Fleet Lake, Abbey Lake, Britannia Arena, and St Ann's Lake form the most significant feature of open space and green infrastructure in the area.

### **Public Rights of Way**

- 3.8 No Public Rights of Way (PROW) cross the Site. PROW FP40 runs to the south of the Site, to the north of Coldharbour Lane/Norlands Lane, although it is currently unpassable. 350m to the east of the Site PROW FP49 follows a track through woodland. There are no views of the Site from this enclosed pathway. To the south, PROW FP51, or Monks Walk, is the historic route from Chertsey Abbey to Thorpe Manor. This track runs between Manor Lake and St Ann's Lake and Britannia Arena, from Thorpe Village towards Thorpe Park amusement park and Staines Road and the M3.
- 3.9 Further to the south, to the immediate south of the M3, there are also several PROWs, PROW FP41 and PF42, which run up the elevated St Ann's Hill and provide access to a viewing point at 'The Beacon' on the north side of St Ann's Hill which allows views, across the Site, of the wider River Thames Valley.

### **Topography and Hydrology**

- 3.10 The Site is located within the flat valley floor of the River Thames. The Site is generally flat located at an approximate elevation of 14 -15 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), with man-made earth banks on the perimeter of the southern, eastern and western boundaries. These earth banks were in place when the Site was in use for mineral extraction. To the north-east of the Site an artificial hill has been created up to a height of 30m (AOD), as illustrated on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**.
- 3.11 St Ann's Hill is a local highpoint at an elevation of 60m (AOD) of the approximately 1 kilometre to the south of the Site, on the south eastern side of the M3/M25 Junction. To the west of the Study Area the land rises up towards Englefield Green from the mainline railway line, over 3km to the west of Thorpe.

- 3.12 The Site is located close to the northern edge of a complex of lakes, including Manor Lake, Fleet Lake, Abbey Lake, Britannia Arena, and St Ann's Lake, formed from previous mineral extraction activities. The generally low-lying area is close to the water table and there are numerous natural and man-made water features surrounding the Site including a smaller waterbody to the north of the Site.

### **Vegetation**

- 3.13 The M3/M25 junction is densely planted with mixed woodland, as are the edges of the lakes and rivers. St Ann's Hill to the south of the Site is densely wooded including substantial tracts of ancient woodland.
- 3.14 Agricultural land is made up of medium to large fields with varying degrees of enclosure by hedgerows and trees.
- 3.15 Boundary vegetation to roads and properties is generally dense and provides tree cover in the area which restrict views and help "create areas with a degree of tranquillity" as noted in the Thames River Valley Floor landscape character assessment. The settlement of Thorpe, especially the historic core, is characterised by mature vegetation over hanging boundary walls.
- 3.16 The CEMEX headquarters to the south of the Site is well-vegetated, with vegetation consisting of large numbers of mature trees, in groups, avenues, clusters and as individual specimen trees; ornamental shrub and hedge planting; and vegetation associated with the margins of the ornamental lake within the Site.

### **Designations**

#### *Conservation Area*

- 3.17 The extent of the Thorpe Conservation Area is shown on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**, and the Site is located within its north-eastern portion.

#### *Green Belt*

- 3.18 As illustrated in **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**, the Green Belt stretches across the Study Area from Egham and Virginia Water in the west to the River Thames and the Queen Mary Reservoir in the east. It extends southwards from Egham and Staines in the north along the M25 between Chertsey and Virginia Water. It includes recreational land uses, including former gravel works/lakes, the M25 and the M3 and settlements areas including Thorpe. To the north of the Site the Green Belt is interrupted by Thorpe Industrial Estate.

### **Photographs Demonstrating the Character and Features of the Site**

- 3.19 The locations of the Site Context Photographs are demonstrated on **Figure 3: Visual Appraisal Plan** and **Figure 4: Site Appraisal Plan**

- 3.20 The **Site Context Photographs 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8**, the locations of which are illustrated on **Figure 3: Visual Appraisal Plan**, record the landscape features and character of the Site.
- 3.21 **Site Context Photograph 1** taken from the eastern corner of the Site shows the flat open nature of the body of the Site from close to PROW FP40. The dense vegetation on the southern boundary of the Site can be seen on the left of the view, obscuring views of Coldharbour Lane. Landform and vegetation surrounds Manor Cottage which is partly visible amongst trees. The roofline of Manor Cottage at the southern corner of the Site can be seen in the distance as can the boundary vegetation along Ten Acre Lane. To the right of view are the raised earth mounds which enclose the site on all but the northern side. The tree belts on the northern boundaries of the Site can be seen in the centre right of the view.
- 3.22 **Site Context Photograph 4** illustrates how the earth mounds on the edges of the Site are partially visible through the trees within the cemetery.
- 3.23 **Site Context Photograph 5** is taken through a break in the dense roadside vegetation on Ten Acre Lane to show the earth mounding on the south western edge of the Site.
- 3.24 **Site Context Photograph 7** shows an entrance to the Site through the dense roadside vegetation on Coldharbour Lane. The earth mounding can be seen through this gap.
- 3.25 **Site Context Photograph 8** shows the entrance to Manor Cottage on the southern boundary of the Site. Native and ornamental vegetation, as visible within the property, forms a boundary with the Site.

### **Site Context Summary**

- 3.26 The Site located within and surrounded by the western fringe of the wider conurbation of London, within the valley floor of the River Thames, with the River Thames running approximately 1 km to the east of the Site. The Site is located within the National Character Area No. 115 – Thames Valley and the Surrey character area RV2: Thames River Valley Floor.
- 3.27 The context of the Site is influenced by the surrounding urban development including the village of Thorpe to the east, and the settlements of Staines, Egham, Virginia Water, Addlestone and Chertsey. The Site is also located to the north-east of the major interchange junction between the M25 and M3, with the M25 running north-south and the M3 running east-west in the vicinity of the Site. The Staines Road, A320, also runs to the east of the Site, connecting Staines with Chertsey, to the north-east and to the south-east of the Site, respectively.
- 3.28 The Site is located to the north of a complex of lakes formed from previous mineral extraction activities, and which extend between the M3 and Coldharbour Lane to the south of the Site. The Thorpe Park

amusement park is located in the centre of the complex of lakes, approximately 700 metres to the south-east of the Site. The Site was until recently an active quarry.

- 3.29 The Site is located within Metropolitan Green Belt and the Site is included within the Thorpe Conservation Area. CEMEX House is Listed Grade II\*, and other structures on the Site are covered by listed building legislation as curtilage buildings.
- 3.30 The Site is located within an area of mixed land use with residential, industrial, educational and leisure uses set in a flat low-lying landscape strongly influenced by the presence of water in the form of the River Thames and large lakes, formed as a result of mineral extraction. Boundary vegetation to roads and properties surrounding the Site provide a sense of enclosure. The Site forms part of Thorpe Conservation Area and the Green Belt. It is very well contained by boundary vegetation along its southern boundaries with Ten Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane, which is further reinforced by the remaining earth bunds on the periphery of the Site which are a remnant of its former use as a mineral extraction site. The northern boundaries of the Site are marked by hedgerow lines including non-native species.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 The Site is located within Metropolitan Green Belt and the Site is included within the Thorpe Conservation Area. There are a number of listed buildings close to the Site including CEMEX House, a Grade II\* listed building to the southeast of the Site, Manorhouse Farm Barn and the north wall on Coldharbour Lane to the southwest of the Site (both listed Grade II).

4.2 The landscape policy context for the Site makes reference to the following adopted and emerging policy documents:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2019)
- Planning Practice Guidance
- Runnymede Borough Local Plan (Second Alteration April 2001)
- Runnymede 2030 Submission Local Plan (July 2018)
- Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan 2015-20: Pre-submission Plan (November 2019)

4.3 In addition, the following supplementary guidance and evidence base documents are of relevance:

- Surrey Design – A Strategic Guide for Quality Built Developments (2002)
- Runnymede Interim Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) (2016)
- Runnymede 2030 Site Selection Methodology and Assessment Final Version (December 2017)

4.4 Landscape character and Green Belt documents are explored further in the following chapters.

### National

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

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

4.6 Paragraph 38 refers to Decision making and states that:

***"Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including***

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

***brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible."***

4.7 Paragraphs 124-132 focus on achieving well-designed places and seek to promote good design of the built environment. Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

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

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

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

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

**k) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.**

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

4.11 Paragraph 138 states that:

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

4.12 Paragraph 141 of the NPPF states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

4.13 Paragraph 143 notes that, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in "very special circumstances". Paragraph 144 states that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. "Very special circumstances" will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

4.14 Chapter 15 is entitled "Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment". Paragraph 170 notes that the planning system and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

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

- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, whilst improving public access to it where appropriate.**
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.**
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans.**
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.**

4.15 Paragraph 171 states that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

#### *Planning Practice Guidance*

4.1 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first published online in March 2014 and provides detailed guidance to support the NPPF. The PPG was last updated on 1st October 2019 and replaces the previous guidance on 'Design: Process and tools' with the National Design Guide, which sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice.

4.2 Under the heading 'Planning for Well-Designed Places', Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20191001 of the PPG states that, as set out in paragraph 130 of the NPPF, permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Good design is set out in the National Design Guide under the following 10 characteristics:

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

- Resources (Efficient and resilient).
- Lifespan (made to last).

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

- C1: Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context.
- C2: Value heritage, local history and culture.
- I1: Respond to existing local character and identity.
- I2: Well-designed, high quality and attractive.
- I3: Create character and identity.
- B1: Compact form of development.
- B2: Appropriate building types and forms.
- B3: Destinations
- N1: Provide high quality, green open spaces with a variety of landscapes and activities, including play.
- N3: Support rich and varied biodiversity.
- P1: Create well-located, high quality and attractive public spaces.
- P2: Provide well-designed spaces that are safe.
- P3: Make sure public spaces support social interaction.
- L1: Well-managed and maintained.

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

4.5 Under the heading of 'Green infrastructure', Paragraph 5 focuses on the way in which natural capital green infrastructure can add to communities including, **"... enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes..."**. This approach to achieving biodiverse communities is enshrined in Paragraph 6, which states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Local**

*Runnymede Borough Local Plan Second Alteration April 2001*

- 4.9 The Runnymede Borough Local Plan Second Alteration was adopted in April 2001 and saved policies with relevance to landscape and visual matters are set out below.

- 4.10 Policy GB1 Development within the Green Belt states that:

***"Within the Green Belt except for the area within the settlement of Thorpe, there will be a strong presumption against development that would conflict with the purposes of the green belt or adversely affect its open character."***

- 4.11 Policy GB2 Rural Settlements in the Green Belt notes that:

***"Within the rural settlement of Thorpe shown on the Proposals Map new development will be allowed only in the following cases:***

- ii) infilling,*
- iii) appropriate small-scale community, service and employment facilities, or*
- iv) small-scale housing developments, especially those designed to provide for those types of dwellings specified in relation to Policy H04.*

*Any such development will only be permitted where:*

- a) it is on land which is substantially surrounded by existing development,*
- b) it does not detract from the character of the settlement or the surrounding area;*
- c) the traffic generated is compatible with the environmental character of the settlement and can be accommodated on the surrounding network; and*
- d) adequate utility and other services are available."*

- 4.12 Green Belt Policy GB5 allows that *"Essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, which preserve the openness of the green belt (genuinely required for the use of the land)... be permitted"* stating that:

*"Outdoor sport and outdoor recreation uses, which utilise landscape problem areas and provide for its restoration, will be encouraged."*

- 4.13 Policy NE7 notes that the mineral sites shown on the Proposals Map be restored to a satisfactory after-use, the preferred after-use for the Site at Coldharbour Lane being Agriculture/ Recreation. As a potential working site at the time of the Local Plan adoption (it has subsequently been worked and infilled) it is noted that:

*"This site lies within the Thorpe Conservation Area and is close to the historic core of Thorpe Village. In the event of extraction any scheme for restoration will have to pay respect to the Conservation Area Status."*

- 4.14 Policy NE10 relates to Landscape Problem Areas and states that:

*"In the landscape problem area shown on the Location Map in Appendix 'F' the Council will seek to improve the appearance of the landscape through development control and other powers and negotiations. This policy applies only within the green belt and sites covered by Policy GB8."*

*(3) Thorpe Mineral Workings Area. The principal areas of past and present mineral workings in the Borough surround the village of Thorpe. Some of these workings are in the process of restoration or have become part of Thorpe Water Park or Penton Hook Marinas, others are derelict, some are still being worked and a few small areas are still to be worked. Substantial and comprehensive landscape treatment is required in this area. In*

***particular the setting of Thorpe Village and the urban fringe of Hythe need attention.***

4.15 Policy NE11 applies especially to areas covered by NE10 noting that ***“the Council will use available powers and resources to support a comprehensive approach to the positive management of the countryside... (with) particular emphasis.. given... to the implementation of a Landscape Strategy for the Borough”***

4.16 Policy NE12 Protection of Trees notes that:

***“The Council will continue to protect significant trees, hedgerows and woodlands and make provision for new planting, through the use of development control powers, tree preservation orders and through countryside management.”***

4.17 Policy NE13 Tree Preservation Orders states that trees and woodlands will be considered for inclusion in tree preservation orders where they:

- 1) “have good health and stability, and***
- 2) either individually or as part of a group, make a significant contribution to public amenity, and***
- 3) are under threat.***

***In considering whether a tree preservation order should be made, the Council will also have regard to:***

- a) rare or unusual trees of special value, or trees of historic interest, or ancient semi-natural woodlands.***
- b) trees in a conservation area, which make a particular contribution to its character.***
- c) the suitability of a tree to its surroundings.***
- d) the general level of tree cover in the locality.”***

4.18 Policy NE14 Trees and Development Proposals states that where existing trees form a major feature of development or redevelopment sites:

- “the Council will require planning applications to include a detailed tree survey. Wherever practical, plans for new developments will be expected to allow for the retention of existing suitable trees. Suitable space should be kept between any trees to be retained and proposed buildings.***
- appropriate conditions will be imposed on planning permissions to ensure that any trees to be retained are adequately protected during site clearance and building operations.***
- trees which make a significant contribution to public amenity will be expected to be retained even where this would restrict or prevent development and these trees will be protected by tree preservation orders.”***

4.19 Policy NE15 Landscaping Schemes requires that:

***"...planning applications for new developments to be supported by a comprehensive landscaping scheme giving details of new tree, hedge and shrub planting.***

***The Council will impose conditions on planning permissions as appropriate, requiring that landscaping is undertaken and maintained to the satisfaction of the council."***

4.20 Policy BE5 Development within Conservation Areas states that:

***"The Council will require that all development (including new buildings, renovations, extensions, hard surfaces, walls and landscaping) preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the particular Conservation Area. In this regard the Council will give consideration to the following criteria:***

- 1) the retention of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area;***
- 2) the retention of the historic street pattern, established plot and frontage sizes, building lines and historic plot boundaries.***
- 3) the preservation of architectural features such as walls, shopfronts and other features which contribute to the character of the conservation area.***
- 4) the impact of any proposal on the townscape of the conservation area.***
- 5) the protection of trees which contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.***
- 6) the need to respect the scale, height, materials and architectural details characteristic of the Conservation Area.***

***Detailed planning applications, as opposed to outline submissions, will need to be submitted within Conservation Areas."***

4.21 Policy BE6 Additional Design Guidance for Development in Conservation Areas states that the Council will produce detailed design guidance for individual Conservation Areas and development within Conservation Areas will be expected to comply with the relevant guidance.

*Runnymede 2030: Submission Local Plan (July 2018)*

4.22 The Local Plan will eventually replace the current 2001 Local Plan as the principal guide to future development in Runnymede up until 2035. The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in July 2018 and hearing sessions held in November 2019. Public consultation on the Main Modifications was held, closing in February 2020.

4.23 The following policies are of relevance to this LVA GBR:

- SD1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development – as per the NPPF.
- SD8: Sustainable Design – Development proposals will be supported where they protect existing biodiversity and achieve biodiversity net gains.
- EE1: Townscape and Landscape Quality – Development proposals will be supported if they create attractive places that contribute positively to the landscape and/or townscape quality. New developments must avoid the loss of trees and other vegetation worthy of retention.
- EE2: Environmental Protection – Lighting schemes will be expected to avoid prominence in the local landscape/townscape.
- EE5: Conservation Areas – Development affecting a Conservation Area, including views in or out should protect, conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Character Area.
- EE9: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Conservation – The Council will seek net biodiversity gains.
- EE10: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area – Residential development between 400m and 5km buffer zones will be required to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space at a standard of at least 8 hectares per 1000 residents.
- EE11: Green Infrastructure – The Council will seek development to contribute to the delivery of high quality and multifunctional GI.
- EE12: Blue Infrastructure – The Council will require developments to contribute to a high quality multi-functional Blue Infrastructure.

*Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan 2015-20: Pre-Submission Plan*

- 4.24 The Site is situated within the Thorpe Neighbourhood Area and, as such, will be covered by the Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan when Made.
- 4.25 The vision set out in paragraph 5.1 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that new homes should enhance the character of the village and protect its landscapes, that the planting of new hedgerows and trees will enhance biodiversity and that a new parkland will provide an important community asset.
- 4.26 Objectives set out in paragraph 5.2 include the following:
- *To sustain a thriving village that respects its cultural, historical and archaeological heritage and the biodiversity value of its surroundings.*
  - *To retain the character of the village and enhance the locality through encouraging sympathetic development that enhances local character.*
  - *To improve the breadth and quality of community and sports facilities to enhance health and wellbeing.*
  - *To create an integrated safe and convenient network of green spaces and a footpath and cycleway network to serve the village.*
  - *To plan for climate change and work in harmony with the environment to conserve natural resources and reduce flood risk.*

4.27 The following draft policies are of relevance to this LVA GBR:

- Policy TH2 (iv): Land East of Ten Acre Lane/North of Coldharbour Lane – The development will include green-blue infrastructure a park, retain existing trees and hedgerows unless removal essential, new green belt buffers and pedestrian and cycle access.
- H5: High Quality Design – Development proposals in Character Area A should retain and reinforce the prominence of mature trees and hedgerows on road frontages, replace lost hedgerows, not harm the historically distinct street pattern, not harm the contribution that the landmark tower of St Mary’s Church makes, use materials that contribute to the distinctive character of the Conservation Area.
- TH7: Green and Blue Infrastructure – Development within or adjoining the Green and Blue Infrastructure network on the policies map will be supported if they can demonstrate how they will contribute to the network. Landscape schemes will be required to avoid the loss of trees and hedgerows and to provide new planting that respects the distinctive local landscape character.
- TH10: Residential schemes will be required to provide SANG in compliance with the Thames Basin Heaths SPA SPD.

### **Supplementary and Evidence Base Documents**

#### *Surrey Design Guide*

4.28 Surrey County Council published ‘Surrey Design - A strategic guide for quality built environments’<sup>3</sup> in 2002. The purpose of this document is to promote high quality design of new development in Surrey. A number of design principles are set out, of which the following relate to landscape and visual issues:

- ***Principle 2.3: Landscape design should be an integral part of new development;***
- ***Principle 3.2: The design of new developments should evolve from Surrey’s rich landscape and built heritage;***
- ***Principle 3.3: Distinctive local character and design quality should be protected and enhanced;***
- ***Principle 4.3: Existing landscape and habitats should be retained and wildlife enhanced.***

#### *Runnymede Borough Council Interim Strategic Land Availability Assessment 2016*<sup>4</sup>

4.29 The Site is identified as CEMEX Thorpe 3, Coldharbour Lane and a site assessment is given in Part 3, ID 044. Given its Green Belt designation the site is considered unsuitable for development, ***“unless the***

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<sup>3</sup> Surrey Local Government Association: “Surrey Design: A strategic guide for quality built environments. Shaping Surreys Future” 2002

<sup>4</sup> Runnymede Borough Council (2016) Strategic Land Availability Assessment Interim SLAA

***Borough Council considers that exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated which warrants alterations to the Green Belt boundary and ahead of any resulting Technical Review of the Green Belt Boundary...."***

4.30 It is noted in paragraph 11 that:

***"Stage one of a Runnymede villages Green Belt review has also been completed in February 2016, which makes recommendations to include Thorpe village in the urban area. Stage two will consider the detailed boundary review of Thorpe village and any decision to include Thorpe village in the urban area will be made by Members. If any of the SLAA sites fall within the recommended Thorpe village boundary, they will be reassessed for their capacity if included in the urban area in the next iteration of the SLAA."***

*Runnymede 2030 Site Selection Methodology and Assessment Final Version 2017<sup>5</sup>*

4.31 This document is intended to inform the selection of housing and employment sites for allocation within the emerging Local Plan. The document considers the conclusions of the Runnymede Green Belt Reviews Parts 1 and 2 and the Surrey Landscape Character Assessment.

4.32 Paragraph 4.60 of the assessment sets out two additional Green Belt criteria to be considered when assessing potential development sites. These are as follows:

- ***Cumulative impact when considered with other sites against the settlement hierarchy and/or whether the total or cumulative area of Green Belt for release is proportionate to the amount of land which is actually developable.***
- ***Whether the site forms a 'rounding off' of a settlement edge or is infill, to ensure settlements remain compact and protect the Green Belt from further fragmentation.***

4.33 The Site was assessed under its SLAA reference 42: CEMEX Thorpe 1, Ten Acre Lane, Thorpe. The Site was not taken forward to the next stage of the assessment due to access to local facilities.

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<sup>5</sup> Runnymede Borough Council (2017) Site Selection Methodology and Assessment Final Version

## 5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER CONTEXT

### National Landscape Character Assessment

- 5.1 The Site is located within National Character Area (NCA) 115: Thames Valley. The NCA extends from the western edge of Inner London, including Slough and Reading to the west. Where farming survives within the NCA, grazed pasture is the major land use within what is described as a ***"generally open, flat and featureless landscape"*** and a medium-scale and irregular field pattern. The NCA is densely populated and developed, with pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows which provide escape and tranquillity. The natural character of the NCA is overtaken by urban influences in the east, including a dense network of roads, Heathrow Airport, railway lines, golf courses, pylon lines, reservoirs, extensive mineral extraction and numerous flooded gravel pits. The NCA is described as having an urban character with very few villages of more traditional nature despite almost half the area being Green Belt land and areas subject to development restriction.
- 5.2 As identified on the Natural England National Character Areas Map of England, originally published by the Countryside Agency in 1999, the Site lies within National Character Area No. 115 – Thames Valley. In the introductory summary of the NCA profile the Thames Valley<sup>6</sup> this area is described as "a very diverse landscape of urban and suburban settlements, infrastructure networks, fragmented agricultural land, historic parks, commons, woodland, reservoirs and extensive minerals workings."
- 5.3 The character assessment describes a number of key characteristics relevant to the Site:
- *Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills...*
  - *The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity; these features include the River Thames and its tributaries, streams, lakes, canals and open waterbodies (the result of restored gravel workings).*
  - *Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape...*
  - *Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity...*
  - *Towards London in the east, the natural character of the area is overtaken by urban influences: a dense network of roads (including the M25 corridor), Heathrow Airport, railway lines, golf courses, pylon lines, reservoirs, extensive mineral extraction and numerous flooded gravel pits.*
  - *The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character...*

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<sup>6</sup> Natural England (March 2015) NE379: National Character Area profile 115: Thames Valley

- 5.4 Statement of Environmental Opportunity 3 advocates planning for the creation of green infrastructure *"to reduce the impact of development, to help reduce flooding issues, and to strengthen access and recreation opportunities."*

### **Surrey Landscape Character Assessment**

- 5.5 As illustrated on **Figure 2: Landscape and Townscape Character Plan** the Site is located within the "River Valley Floor" landscape character type and "RV2: Thames" character area, as identified by the Surrey Landscape Character Assessment for Runnymede Borough<sup>7</sup>. It is adjacent to the "River Floodplain" type, character area "RF3: Thames" to the east and the settlement of Thorpe to the west.

- 5.6 The Thames River Valley Floor RV2 is described as:

- *"... level, low lying area....*
- *mainly pastoral, grassland landscape, but with a significant amount of low density dwellings and other larger buildings such as research facilities, nursery glasshouses, businesses and a hotel complex.*
- *...some significant belts of woodland...*
- *There are a number of large lakes resulting from gravel extraction...*
- *There is a network of public rights of way, providing access to most parts of the character area.*
- *The M25 motorway passes north-south through the character area, and joins the M3 at Junction 12 of the M25, immediately to the south of the character area. ...*
- *Tree cover and boundary vegetation restricts views and helps obscure built form, roads and the M25 motorway.*
- *Human influences including settlement, surrounding Built -up areas, roads and the M25 motorway, prevent a sense of remoteness, although tree cover helps create areas with a degree of tranquillity ...*

- 5.7 An evaluation of the River Valley Floor landscape type includes the following as key positive attributes, which are relevant to the Site:

- *Blocks of mature trees, hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating intimate areas of landscape*
- *Tree lined roads and boundaries, and small blocks of woodland or mature trees.*

- 5.8 Pressures for change/sensitivities/pressures lists the following past changes:

- *Loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees*
- *Intensification of edge of settlement*
- *Mineral extraction and restoration*

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<sup>7</sup> Surrey Landscape Character Assessment: Runnymede Borough. Hankinson Duckett Associates. April 2015

...and potential forces for change in the future:

- *Encroachment on valley floor from settlement edges and transport infrastructure.*
- *Further loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees*
- *Pressures for further residential and industrial development*

5.9 The landscape strategy for the River Valley Floor is to "***conserve the commons, open areas and pastoral farmland, the historic village centres and a positive relationship between buildings and settlements edging the rural landscape.***" The following points are included in the Landscape Guidelines:

5.10 Land Management:

- *Encourage landowners to maintain an appropriate management regime using traditional farming techniques where these will conserve and enhance key landscape features such as the pasture fields, hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands and maintain rural character.*
- *Encourage understanding of historic dimension of the landscape including underlying archaeology. Conserve historic elements of the landscape.*
- *Conserve remaining intact areas of agricultural or open land surrounding settlement.*
- *Encourage restocking and consistent management of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree lined roads and boundaries.*
- *Encourage sustainable and multi-purpose woodlands.*
- *Ensure physical and biodiversity connections between river valley floor (Type RV) and river floodplain (Type RF) character areas are maintained and enhanced. These areas coincide with Surrey's Rivers and Thames Valley biodiversity opportunity areas.*
- *Conserve and enhance connectivity of key landscape attributes, paying particular attention to their positive contribution to the character of adjoining character areas (Types RF and RS).*

5.11 Built Development:

- *Retain the distinct character of settlements and avoid merging these through linear development along roads, and by retaining the rural gaps between them.*
- *Improve understanding of the general pattern of settlements and their relationship to the landscape and to ensure that new development is sympathetic to the wider pattern of settlement.*
- *Work to foster local distinctiveness around settlements, where standard design criteria creates a lack of variation and 'urbanisation' of rural roads. Seek opportunities to 'downgrade' main roads through settlements, enhancing the immediate landscape setting and ensuring minimum clutter through encouraging appropriate surfacing of existing pavements, quality signage and reduced speed limits where possible.*
- *Promote the use of traditional materials and signage features with particular regard to local style and materials. Refer to Surrey*

*design guidance; Surrey Design (Surrey Local Government Association).*

- 5.12 The Site is adjacent on its western boundaries with the Thames River Floodplain Landscape Character Area. This area has *"numerous ecological designations across the character area, in particular Sites of Nature Conservation Importance covering the lakes, designated for their wildfowl habitat and wet meadow. St. Ann's Lake, to the south-east of Thorpe is designated as a Ramsar, Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest"*.
- 5.13 Approximately 1km to the south of the Site is the Settled and Wooded Sandy Farmland LCA SS3. Key characteristics include the following:
- *The topography rises to a number of hills, including St Ann's Hill which overlooks the river floodplain to the north, ...*
  - *There are views from St Ann's Hill, north over the floodplain and nearby Thorpe Park. On lower ground views over the northern part of the character area are contained or framed by tree cover.*
  - *St. Ann's Hill and the Dingle, and St. Ann's Court are grade II and II\* registered parks and gardens. The remains of St. Ann's hillfort and 14th century chapel are registered as a scheduled monument.*

### **Runnymede Urban Character Appraisal**

- 5.14 An urban character appraisal<sup>8</sup> was prepared in 2009 as part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan, to aid the formulation of urban design policy relating to residential development in Runnymede Borough. Nine urban areas were appraised including Thorpe.
- 5.15 Three broad character sub-areas were identified in the "Thorpe Settlement Area covered by Green Belt" as shown on **Figure 2: Landscape and Townscape Character Plan**. The Site is on the eastern edge of the Thorpe Village Historic Core Conservation Area. The assessment states that this:

*"...forms the historic core of the area. Its distinctive character is recognised in Pevsner's Buildings of Surrey<sup>9</sup> as being... 'like a Middlesex Village, with curving walled streets screening medium-sized houses in small parks; the only example in the county. Enlarged since 1945, but all the walls kept, hence the village has stayed intact'. The village is centred on Church Approach and St Mary's Church, dating from the C12.... The most visually distinctive historic buildings include the church and Thorpe House"*

<sup>8</sup> Runnymede Borough Council Urban Character Appraisal September 2009

<sup>9</sup> Pevsner, Nairn and Cherry; The Buildings of England Surrey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1971

5.16 The landscape setting to the urban areas of Thorpe is described in paragraph 8.4 as

**“the relatively flat landscape of the River Thames meadows” with “lakes to the south in the old mineral workings... In between are winding green lanes with mature trees and hedgerows. This intimate enclosed setting does not afford any significant long distance views, including any of the Thorpe Park amusement park.... The most recognisable landmarks are the church tower and the historic buildings...”**

5.17 It is noted at Paragraph 8.8 that the green belt surrounding the urban areas provides “limited” public access and that key areas of public realm are limited to Church Approach and the Thames Towpath.

5.18 The ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’ of Thorpe urban area as noted in paragraphs 8.10 and 8.11 focus upon traffic and the appearance of and signage to Thorpe Industrial Estate.

### **Thorpe Heritage and Character Assessment (2017)**

5.19 Under the heading of ‘Managing Change’ on page 28, the above document sets out the positive aspects of the character of Thorpe:

- *The strong sense of enclosure resulting from boundary walls and mature trees through and around the village;*
- *The well-detailed architecture and preservation of the public realm of the historic core of the village in the conservation area; and*
- *The village character resulting from the incremental development of streets, narrow roads and boundary treatments.*

5.20 Under the heading of ‘Sensitivity to Change’ the following elements are listed as being as sensitive to change:

- *The number of surviving heritage assets, both designated and non designated, including Thorpe Conservation Area and its setting;*
- *The sense of enclosure within the village; and*
- *Visual and acoustic screening provided by tree belts alongside the M25 and M3 corridors.*

5.21 The following management principles are set out:

- *Proposals to alter existing buildings should demonstrate a detailed understanding of the history and design qualities of the buildings and provide a clear rationale for how this is taken account of in the design of the alterations proposed;*
- *New developments should be responsive to the village characteristics of Thorpe, in particular its sense of enclosure, narrow streets, varied building design and building lines, and boundary treatments;*

- *The materials proposed for any new buildings and building alterations should be of a high quality, respond to the design of the buildings in the area, and have strong attention to architectural detailing;*
- *Conserve and protect designated and non-designated heritage assets, including Thorpe Conservation Area, and their settings;*
- *Identify and protect trees or groups of trees that significantly contribute to the character of the village;*
- *New development should incorporate street trees or trees within gardens;*
- *A review of non-designated heritage assets in the area should be carried out and those worthy of protection should be listed within the neighbourhood plan; and*
- *High quality materials and a high standard of workmanship should be applied in the repair, or other works, to the public realm.*

5.22 Potential projects are listed as including the following:

- *Explore opportunities to create parkland on the land of disused and backfilled gravel pits to the east of Thorpe.*

## 6.0 VISUAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 A visual appraisal of the Site was undertaken in June 2016 to consider the nature of the views towards the Site from publicly accessible viewpoints, including roads, Public Rights of Way, Thorpe Conservation Area and St Ann's Hill. A series of **Site Context Photographs** have been taken to illustrate the character and views towards the Site. A representative selection of views towards the Site. The location of **Site Context Photographs 1-11** are indicated on **Figure 3: Visual Appraisal Plan**.
- 6.2 **Site Context Photograph 1** is taken from close to the route of PRow FP49 as it enters the Site and, in this view, the eastern parts of the Site are clearly visible. In the distance the boundary vegetation on Ten Acre Lane can be seen, as well as the roof of Manor Farm Cottage at the junction of Ten Acre and Coldharbour Lanes.
- 6.3 **Site Context Photograph 2** is taken from Green Lane to the north of the Site on the edge of Thorpe Industrial Estate. This illustrates the lack of visibility to the Site from the north due to landform and vegetation.
- 6.4 **Site Context Photograph 3** shows the dense boundary vegetation which surrounds the field to the west of Ten Acre Lane. The residential properties on Ten Acre Lane on the left of the view are two storey detached properties set in generous gardens. Trees within the cemetery are visible in the distance. The Site itself is not visible from this location.
- 6.5 **Site Context Photograph 4** is taken from within the cemetery and shows the generous plantation of evergreen and deciduous trees which filter views to the Site. The earth bund on the south western boundary can be seen beyond the boundary hedge. In winter, when the deciduous trees lose their leaves, views to the Site would be more open.
- 6.6 **Site Context Photograph 5** is taken at the entrance to the TASIC School through a break in the Site boundary vegetation on Ten Acre Lane. The earth bund within the Site can be seen beyond the hedgerow line. The photograph shows the dense nature of the boundary vegetation along Ten Acre Lane, filtering views to the Site. Winter-time views will be more open.
- 6.7 **Site Context Photograph 6** is taken from in front of Thorpe Village Nursery on Coldharbour Lane looking towards the Site from within the Conservation Area and the Historic Core of Thorpe. The Grade II listed "North Wall" can be seen on the left hand side of the view with typical overhanging vegetation as noted in the Urban Character Appraisal. Manor Farm Cottage at the junction of Coldharbour Lane and Ten Acre Lane is in the centre of the view. The Site is located beyond this property and the dense vegetation along Coldharbour Lane to the right of Manor Farm Cottage forms the southern boundary of the Site. On the right hand side of the view the perimeter walls of the farms on the southern side of Coldharbour Lane can be seen.

- 6.8 **Site Context Photograph 7** shows an entrance to the Site through the dense roadside vegetation on Coldharbour Lane. The earth mounding can be seen through this gap. **Site Context Photograph 11** is taken from the far side of the gate, demonstrating the rise in the landform within the Site.
- 6.9 **Site Context Photograph 8** shows the entrance to Manor Cottage on the southern boundary of the Site. Native and ornamental vegetation, as visible within the property, forms a boundary with the Site and reduces views from the road.
- 6.10 **Site Context Photograph 9** is taken from PROW FP51 which runs between Manor Lake and St Ann's Lake and Britannia Arena, from Thorpe Village towards Chertsey PROW51 is bounded by a chain-link on its northern side, preventing access into Thorpe Park amusement park and to the edge of the adjoining Manor Lake. Much of the lakeside is well-vegetated with trees and scrub, such that views out through the chain-link fence are intermittent and relatively limited. **Site Context Photograph 9** is from an elevated part of the path where there is a break in the lakeside vegetation allowing views to the north, across Manor Lake towards the Site. The well-vegetated northern edge of Manor Lake is visible on the other side of the lake. There are partial views of the upper parts of Eastley End House and Meadlake House, seen above the lakeside vegetation. These views will be more open in winter and, although the existing Site may not be visible, there is potential for development within the Site to be visible.
- 6.11 **Site Context Photograph 10** is taken from the viewpoint at 'The Beacon' on the northern side of the summit of St Ann's Hill. The eastern parts of the Site are visible from this location. However, the Site is seen in the context of a panoramic view development within the River Thames Valley, including the extensive urban developments on the western fringe of the wider conurbation of London, in particular Staines; and the extensive expanse of Heathrow Airport, including views of Heathrow Terminal 5, the air traffic control tower, and the numerous planes parked at the airport terminals, which, along with associated airport infrastructure and development, forms a back drop and horizon to the view. This view was taken in January 2013 and at that time the Site was a working mineral extraction Site. The eastern part of the Site is visible as brown coloured earth on the left hand side of the view.

### **Visual Appraisal Summary**

- 6.12 Visibility into the Site is largely curtailed by the combination of the very flat flood plain and intervening existing vegetation, land form and development including Thorpe Village, Thorpe Industrial Estate Park, and the M25 and M3 road corridors and interchange in the immediate vicinity of the Site, as illustrated by **Site Context Photographs 2-3 and 6-8**.
- 6.13 Glimpses of the Site are obtained from Ten Acre Lane on the Site's south western boundary as illustrated by **Site Context Photographs 4 and 5**.

- 6.14 A glimpsed view towards the Site is obtained from an elevated part of the PROW FP51, Monks Walk as illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 9** although views along this route are generally restricted by the chain-link fencing and vegetation which separates it from Thorpe Park and Manor Lake.
- 6.15 Further to the south of Site, immediately to the south of the M25, there is an open view of the Site from a vantage point at 'The Beacon' on the summit of St Ann's Hill, as illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 10**. The upper parts of the buildings along Coldharbour Lane and the CEMEX headquarters are visible set within the trees and vegetation. The view of the Site (seen on the left) from the summit of St Ann's Hill is seen in the context of the surrounding expanse urban development within the River Thames Valley on the western edge of the conurbation of London; including, in particular, Staines, and the extensive expanse of Heathrow Airport, including views of Heathrow Terminal 5, the air traffic control tower, and the numerous planes parked at the airport terminals, which, along with associated airport infrastructure and development, forms a back drop and horizon to the view.

## 7.0 GREEN BELT APPRAISAL

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

### Published Green Belt Reviews

- Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review (2014)
- Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review Part 2 (March 2017)
- Runnymede 2035 Green Belt Boundary Technical Review (March 2016 with 2018 Addendum)
- Runnymede 2035 Green Belt Village Review Stage 1 (February 2016)
- Runnymede 2030 Green Belt Village Review Stage 1 Update (January 2018)
- Runnymede 2035 Green Belt Village Review Stage 2 (May 2016)
- Runnymede 2030 Green Belt Village Review Stage 2 Update (January 2018)

#### *Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review 2014<sup>10</sup>*

7.2 The Site forms part of General Area 12 in RBC's 2014 Green Belt Review. This general area between the M25 to the west, the A320 to the east, the M3 to the south and Staines upon Thames to the north was found to score highly (10 out of 10) in fulfilling the first purpose of the Green Belt, "to check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas". Stating that ***"The northern part of the land parcel is contiguous with Egham Hythe/Egham and Staines upon Thames, therefore protects open land from urban sprawl."***

7.3 In terms of Purposes 2 (To prevent neighbouring towns from merging) General Area 12 scores 3 out of 5. It is noted that: ***"The western portion of the land parcel ... provides a largely essential gap between Egham and Thorpe and prevents ribbon development along the B388. The scale of the gap may allow some scope for development."***

7.4 General Area 12 scored 3 out of 5 for the third purpose of the Green Belt to "assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment" noting that ***"The land parcel includes the village of Thorpe and the Thorpe Park Theme Park, a designated Major Developed Site. However, it does retain a largely open character to the north of the parcel. Between 15-20% of the land parcel is covered by development."***

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<sup>10</sup> Arup (December 2014) Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review Annex Report 1 – Phase 1 Assessment

*Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review Part 2 (March 2017)<sup>11</sup>*

- 7.5 The above document was produced to further the 2014 Green Belt Review and was intended to identify individual land parcels and assess them against the first three of the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF, i.e. to check unrestricted sprawl, prevent neighbouring towns from merging and to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Parcels were assessed and given a score of between 0 (does not meet the criterion) to 5 (meets the criterion strongly or very strongly).
- 7.6 The Site is situated within parcel 78 of the GBR, which comprises the Site and a small area of land to the east. Parcel 78 was assessed in table 3.4 as making no contribution to purpose 1 (0), making a strong or very strong contribution to purpose 2 (5) and a weak contribution to purpose 3 (2). The overall contribution was assessed as strong. As such, it was rejected for review.
- 7.7 In the proforma in the Annex, the assessment highlights the parcel's role as forming ***"a substantial part of the essential gap between the settlements of Egham/Englefield Green (Staines) and Thorpe, preventing development that would significantly visually and physically reduce the perceived and actual distance between these settlements"***.

*Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review 2016 with 2018 Addendum<sup>12</sup>*

- 7.8 This review is made up of a series of documents that were produced to support the emerging 2030 Local Plan. It is intended to be read alongside the Borough Wide Green Belt Review (Parts 1 and 2) carried out by Arup in December 2014 and March 2017. The GBR Parts 1 and 2 carried out by Arup identified the areas that the Council could remove from the Green Belt to meet development needs. The 2018 Addendum identifies the areas proposed for removal within the Draft Local Plan. The amendment makes reference to the Runnymede Green Belt Villages Review which proposes the removal of Thorpe from the Green Belt.

*Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Village Review 2016<sup>13</sup>*

- 7.9 The RBC Green Belt Village Review includes a detailed assessment of the townscape character of Thorpe and its contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. Paragraph 4.20 of the assessment summarises that ***"On balance, it is recommended given that the larger area of the village demonstrates a lower degree of open character or lower contribution to the openness of the Green Belt, that the Village of Thorpe should be excluded from the Green Belt. As such, it is considered that 'exceptional circumstances' exist to alter Green Belt boundaries to the village of Thorpe."***

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<sup>11</sup> Arup (2017) Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Review Part 2

<sup>12</sup> Runnymede Borough Council (March 2016 with 2018 Addendum) Runnymede 2030 Green Belt Boundary Technical Review

<sup>13</sup> Runnymede Borough Council "Runnymede 2035: Green Belt Village Review" February 2016

*Runnymede 2030 Green Belt Village Review Stage 1 Update (January 2018)*

- 7.10 The villages review aims to determine whether any built up areas currently outside of the designated settlements should be removed from the Green Belt or remain washed over. Table 4-4 on page 18 considers Thorpe and concludes that the village should be reviewed for removal from the Green Belt. Table 4-5 concluded that Thorpe had a less open central and eastern areas with the peripheries more open in character. It further concluded that the village made a medium contribution to the openness of the Green Belt. The review recommended that Thorpe be excluded from the Green Belt and that the stage 2 review recommend detailed boundaries.

*Runnymede Borough Council Green Belt Villages Review Stage 2 2016<sup>14</sup>*

- 7.11 The Thorpe Settlement Boundary Review proposes a Green Belt boundary to the settlement of Thorpe as shown on 'Plan 3-2: Proposed Boundaries for Thorpe Village with Options'. The proposed boundary broadly follows the line of the settlement boundary as designated by policy GB2. A 'proposed boundary alternative' includes land on the eastern edge of Thorpe adjacent to the Site. These include TESIS land to the west of Ten Acre Lane up to the northern edge of the tennis courts, Manor Farm Cottages at the corner of Ten Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane, and land to the south of Coldharbour Lane covering Thorpe Farm and Westholme.

- 7.12 Justification for the TESIS north site includes that:

***"is not considered to maintain open characteristics and inclusion into the village would not encourage encroachment into the countryside and is considered to be infill. Neither would it see towns merging or affect the quality which contributes to the distinct identity of separate settlements...."***

***Neither would inclusion see towns merging or affect the quality which contributes to the distinct identity of separate settlements. Both the school buildings, tennis courts and car park are considered to form a defensible/durable boundary to the north with a clear distinction between town and country."***

- 7.13 Justification for Thorpe Farm and 1&2 Manor Farm Cottages includes:

***"it is considered that Thorpe Farm could deliver sustainable development opportunities and as such, given the current impact on the overall integrity and function of the Green Belt, its protection is outweighed by the need for sustainable development in this instance, having taken account of Green Belt purposes. The placing of the village boundary up to and including Westholme would also form a boundary capable of enduring"***

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<sup>14</sup> Runnymede Borough Council "Runnymede 2035: Green Belt Village Review Stage 2" May 2016

*beyond the plan period and would form a clear distinction between town and country.*

*Further, with inclusion of Thorpe Farm it would be logical to include 1 & 2 Manor Farm Cottages within the village boundary. The property boundaries at 1 & 2 Manor Farm Cottages are considered to be permanent physical features which are defensible/durable.”*

*Runnymede 2030 Green Belt Village Review Stage 2 Update (January 2018)*

7.14 The Stage 2 Village Review continues the assessment process undertaken in Stage 1, seeking to identify the new Green Belt boundary for Thorpe. This document considers smaller reined parcels of Green Belt Land. The findings of the 2018 update are as per the original 2016 document set out above.

**Barton Willmore Assessment of the Contribution of the Site to the Green Belt**

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

**Table 7.1: Review of Contribution of the Site to the Purposes of the Green Belt**

Criteria	Discussion	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose
Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>The proposed boundary to the Green Belt as put forward by the Runnymede Green Belt Villages Review Stage 2 would be along Ten Acre Lane to the west of the Site, include Manor Farm Cottages at the corner of Ten Acre Lane and Coldharbour Lane and continue along the southern side of Coldharbour Lane as far as Westholme.</p> <p>The northern Site is adjacent to existing settlement on the eastern side of Ten Acre Lane and opposite the proposed Green Belt Boundary on Ten Acre Lane. The northern limit of the Site is marked by treed hedgerows, beyond which is a notable local landform. Further north is the well vegetated edge to Thorpe Industrial Estate along Green Lane. To the east of the northern Site is the densely vegetated boundary to Coldharbour Rosery and Fleetmere. The southern western limit of the northern Site is formed by Coldharbour Lane and the dense vegetation along this edge and Manor Cottage. The boundary which extends eastwards from Manor cottage is undefined.</p> <p>The land to the north of the northern site containing a 15m high hill contributes to the Greenbelt function of restricting sprawl to a greater extent than the Site itself. The existing hedgerow lines on the northern edges of the Site form a secondary restriction. Limited development on the parts of the Site adjacent to existing development could be contained within a robust boundary of structure planting. Whilst resulting</p>	<p>Northern Site: Limited</p> <p>Southern Site: none</p>

Criteria	Discussion	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose
	<p>in an extension to the eastern edge of Thorpe, this would relate to existing residential built form and set within a comprehensive landscape framework, including Green Infrastructure, reflecting the overall scale of development in this part of Thorpe.</p> <p>The southern Site is bounded by existing development on its western edge at Westholme, which is the proposed boundary of Green belt. The northern edge is defined by Coldharbour Lane, the east Fairacre and the south is marked by a hedgerow line.</p> <p>The southern site does not contribute to the function as the site is restricted on its extents along Coldharbour Lane by existing development.</p>	
Prevent nearby towns from merging into one another	<p>The settlements of Thorpe and Egham Hythe to the north are separated by landform, vegetation and the built form of Thorpe Industrial Estate. Residential and leisure development on the south western part of the Site would be contained within a strong landscape framework reinforced by defensible boundaries of woodland. Potential development would not result in the merging of Thorpe with Egham Hythe and the intervening landscape would continue to provide separation between the two settlements.</p> <p>The southern site is contiguous with existing development to the south of Coldharbour Lane and does not extend as far north towards Egham as existing development of the northern side of the road.</p>	none
Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>The character of the northern land parcel is influenced by its former use as a quarry including the artificial bunds on its boundaries. Surrounding mineral extraction workings have an influence including the large earth works to the north of the Site, haul roads and industrial sheds. There is limited public access as noted in the Runnymede GB Villages Review. PROW 49 to the south of the Site is currently impassable.</p> <p>Development of the south western corner of the northern Site would result in the localised loss of agricultural land of poor landscape quality. However, the development would give the opportunity to improve the overall quality of the landscape of the Site through restoration of natural contours, native hedgerow planting and improvement to public access.</p> <p>Development of the southern site would involve loss of a limited area of agricultural land contiguous with existing built development on Coldharbour Lane. Creation of a strong defensible boundary on the southern edge will contain development which will not encroach any further to the south than existing development.</p>	Northern site: none Southern Site: Limited
Preserve the setting and special	Although the Sites are within Thorpe Conservation Area there are no features of historic significance in or visible from the Sites. The northern Site, due to its very contained visibility makes a limited contribution to the	Northern Site: very limited Southern site: limited

Criteria	Discussion	Contribution to Green Belt Purpose
character of historic towns	<p>setting of Thorpe. The hedgerow boundaries on Coldharbour Lane and Ten Acre Lane contribute to the vegetated nature of the lanes. These would be preserved as part of any development proposals.</p> <p>The southern Site is contained visually by hedgerow vegetation on its northern boundary. It forms part of the open northern shore of Manor Lake in views towards from the south, in the context of existing built development along Coldharbour Lane.</p> <p>Neither Site is visible from within the historic core of Thorpe Village.</p>	

7.16 The below table makes an assessment against the two additional criteria set out in the Site Selection Methodology and Assessment.

**Table 7.3: Assessment of Site Against Additional SSMA Criteria**

Criteria	Discussion
Cumulative impact when considered with other sites against the settlement hierarchy and/or whether the total or cumulative area of Green Belt for release is proportionate to the amount of land which is actually developable.	<p>The LVIA was undertaken alongside, and informed, the masterplanning process. The design and assessment stages are iterative, with stages overlapping in part.</p> <p>Mitigation measures were embedded within the design of the Development as a result of the desk-based study and field work. These measures, such as the building layout, massing and height, and arrangement of open spaces and new structural planting are included within the Site Layout Plan (Appendix A.5) and Site Landscaping Proposals (Appendix A.6) which define the application. Effective primary mitigation strategies avoid or reduce adverse effects by ensuring the key principles of the design of the Development, as noted above, are sympathetic with the existing baseline.</p>
Whether the site forms a 'rounding off' of a settlement edge or is infill, to ensure settlements remain compact and protect the Green Belt from further fragmentation.	<p>Thorpe is not a typical 'nucleated' village that has spread evenly from a historic core. The core is accepted as being the Church and Village Hall. However, development to the east of this has previously been limited owing to mineral working that has now ceased. More recent development has principally been to the west towards the M25 away from the historic core and Conservation Area. The Site is located on the north east corner of the Ten Acre Lane/ Coldharbour Lane junction, immediately to the rear of a pair of existing dwellings and contiguous with the settlement edge. The Site is well located in the context of existing built development and the historic core, and will focus development around this key gateway into the Village, providing for a logical 'rounding off' of the settlement.</p>

- 7.17 Whilst there would be a limited loss of countryside and reduction in 'technical openness' compared to the existing character this would only be perceived in the immediate vicinity, from existing residential properties and distant views from PROWs.
- 7.18 Development of the Sites would not limit the ability of surrounding land to maintain the purposes of the Green Belt. Furthermore, development would be set within a robust landscape framework, with the provision of new planting, recreation and landscape improvements to create a robust defensible boundary to the edge of Thorpe and the Green Belt.

### **Contrasts Between Published and Barton Willmore Green Belt Reviews**

- 7.19 The differences between the findings of the above Barton Willmore review and that contained within the Local Plan evidence documents can be explained by the extent of what is to be assessed and the timeframe of what is to be assessed.
- 7.20 The Arup GBR reviewed parcel 78 as a whole, as if it were to be removed wholesale from the Green Belt. As such, parcel 78 would make a large contribution to the second purpose of the Green Belt. In addition, the Arup report rightly considers the current situation, not the potential for the creation of new defensible boundaries as proposed within the Site.
- 7.21 Due to the findings of the Arup report, the Site was not considered further for the review of sub-parcels and is therefore not considered in the Green Belt Village Review Stage 2. This is due to the methodology used and the discounting of the entire parcel and the assessment of the Site 'as is', rather than its potential. The Barton Willmore Green Belt Review is site specific, has been able to focus entirely on the local issues within and around the Site and is able to take into account the potential for the creation of new defensible boundaries through new green infrastructure. **Figure 6: Green Infrastructure Plan** demonstrates how new GI can be established within the Site, creating new defensible boundaries to development to accord with paragraph 139 of the NPPF and further reducing the perception of merger.

## 8.0 CONSIDERATION OF POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

8.1 The landscape and visual appraisal of the Site has identified the landscape and visual opportunities and constraints to be considered and to inform the potential re-development of the Site. The landscape and visual opportunities and constraints for the Site are illustrated on **Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**.

### Landscape Features

8.2 With regard the landscape features on the Site, the dense hedgerow boundaries are the most noteworthy features on the Site. As required by Runnymede Borough Local Plan (Second Alteration April 2001) Policies NE12 and NE14 significant hedgerows should be protected and new planting provided for within development proposals.

### Thorpe Conservation Area

8.3 In compliance with Policy BE5: Development in Conservation Areas, any proposed development on the Site will be required to:

- be considered in terms of its impact on the townscape of the conservation area,
- protect trees which contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and
- respect the scale, height, materials and architectural details characteristic of the Conservation Area

### Landscape Problem Area

8.4 As part of the designation NE10 the Site is classified as a landscape problem area requiring substantial and comprehensive landscape treatment. The policy specifically refers to the setting of Thorpe Village. The development of part of the Site creates an opportunity to implement such landscape enhancement in line with the strategies promoted through the national regional and local landscape character assessments. These include:

- conserving and enhancing key landscape features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees,
- creating a positive relationship between buildings and settlements edging the rural landscape,
- ensuring physical and biodiversity connections between river valley floor and river floodplain.

### Views

8.5 Views of the Site are generally very restricted, limited to PROW FP49 and St Ann's Hill to the south. Where the Site is visible, it is generally glimpsed through the existing trees and vegetation surrounding the Site. These views are identified **Figure 3: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**. From St Ann's, a prominent local feature, and a well-used area for recreational walking, the views of the

eastern part of the Site from St Ann's Hill are also seen in the context of the surrounding expanse urban development within the River Thames Valley on the western edge of the conurbation of London; including, in particular, Staines, and the extensive expanse of Heathrow Airport, including views of Heathrow Terminal 5, the air traffic control tower, and the numerous planes parked at the airport terminals, which, along with associated airport infrastructure and development, forms a back drop and horizon to the view, and Thorpe Park amusement park is also visible in the foreground.

- 8.6 Proposed development should be predominantly contained close to the existing built development on Ten Acre and Coldharbour Lane, maintaining the existing limits of development on these lanes. This south western part of the Site is also the most visually contained. The eastern parts of the Site are visible from St Ann's Hill and potentially from PROW FP 51 in wintertime views. The siting of proposed development should utilise the screening provided by the significant hedgerows surrounding the Site, and the scale, massing and materials for the proposed development be carefully considered, to limit potential visual impact. The selection of materials, in keeping with those of the Conservation Area, should also be considered.
- 8.7 Proposed development could therefore be accommodated on site, with no significant increase in the extent of development visible in existing views of the Site and would not result in greater visibility of the Site within the immediate or wider context.

### **Green Belt**

- 8.8 Views of the Site, from the Green Belt which includes and surrounds the Site, are very limited, with views of the Site only obtained from areas in the Green Belt as described above. Ensuring that there is no increase in visibility of development on the Site in views from the immediate east and from the south will assist in accommodating development on the Site.
- 8.9 Green Belt Policy GB5 notes that outdoor sport and recreation uses which utilise landscape problem areas and provide for its restoration will be encouraged. The Thorpe Urban Character Assessment notes that the green belt surrounding Thorpe provides "limited" public access and that key areas of public realm are limited to Church Approach and the Thames Towpath.
- 8.10 Figure 4: **Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan** illustrates the potential extent of area suitable to accommodate proposed development, in landscape and visual terms, taking into account the screening effect of boundary vegetation; and without significantly increasing the potential visibility of development on the Site or reducing the contribution the Site makes to the purpose or functions of the Green Belt in this locality.

## 9.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The northern Site is a former mineral extraction site, it is predominantly flat, with the exception of man-made mounds which follow the boundaries of the Site and are a remnant of its use as a quarry. The dense hedgerows are the most noteworthy feature of the Site which is currently in agricultural use. The southern Site is on the southern side of Coldharbour Lane adjacent to residential properties Westholme to the west and Fairacre to the east.
- 9.2 The Site is located within and surrounded by the western fringe of the wider conurbation of London, within the valley floor of the River Thames, with the River Thames running approximately 1 km to the east of the Site. The Site is located within the National Character Area No. 115 – Thames Valley.
- 9.3 The context of the Site is influenced by the surrounding urban development including the village of Thorpe to the east, and the settlements of Staines, Egham, Virginia Water, Addlestone and Chertsey. The Site is also located to the north-east of the major interchange junction between the M25 and M3, with the M25 running north-south and the M3 running east-west in the vicinity of the Site. The Staines Road, A320, also runs to the east of the Site, connecting Staines with Chertsey, to the north-east and to the south-east of the Site, respectively.
- 9.4 The Sites adjoins Coldharbour Lane on the northern edge of a complex of lakes, including Manor Lake, Fleet Lake, Abbey Lake, Britannia Arena, and St Ann's Lake formed from previous mineral extract activities, and which extend between the M3 and the Site. The Thorpe Park amusement park is located in the centre of the complex of lakes, approximately 500 metres to the south-east of the Site. An active quarry is located to the immediate north of Coldharbour Lane and Norlands Lane, to the north of the Site.
- 9.5 The Sites are located within Metropolitan Green Belt and the Site are included within Thorpe Conservation Area. They are also included as part of a Landscape Problem Area.
- 9.6 Visibility into the Sites is largely curtailed by the combination of the very flat flood plain and intervening existing vegetation, land form and development including Thorpe Village, Thorpe Industrial Estate Park, and the M25 and M3 road corridors and interchange in the immediate vicinity of the Site.
- 9.7 Glimpses of the Site are obtained from Ten Acre Lane on the Site's south western boundary as well as filtered view towards the Site is obtained from an elevated part of the PROW FP51, Monks Walk although views along this route are generally restricted by the chain-link fencing and vegetation which separates it from Thorpe Park and Manor Lake.
- 9.8 Further to the south of Site, immediately to the south of the M25, there is an open view of the Site from a vantage point at 'The Beacon' on the summit of St Ann's Hill. The upper parts of the buildings along Coldharbour Lane and the CEMEX headquarters are visible set within the trees and vegetation. The view of the Site (seen on the left) from the summit of St Ann's Hill is seen in the context of the surrounding

expanse urban development within the River Thames Valley on the western edge of the conurbation of London; including, in particular, Staines, and the extensive expanse of Heathrow Airport, including views of Heathrow Terminal 5, the air traffic control tower, and the numerous planes parked at the airport terminals, which, along with associated airport infrastructure and development, forms a back drop and horizon to the view.

- 9.9 **Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan** identifies the key landscape and visual considerations for accommodating proposed development on the Sites. Dense hedgerows on the southern and northern boundaries of the Site should be maintained and protected.
- 9.10 As part of the Conservation Area (Policy BE5) any proposed development on the Sites will be required will be considered in terms of its impact on the townscape of the conservation area, protect trees which contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and respect the scale, height, materials and architectural details characteristic of the Conservation Area.
- 9.11 Proposed development should be predominantly contained close to the existing built development on Ten Acre and Coldharbour Lane, maintaining the existing limits of development on these lanes. This south western part of the Site relates to the proposed Green Belt boundary on Ten Acre Lane and is also the most visually contained part of the Site. The Green Belt Village Review Stage 2 made an assessment that ***"these areas could deliver sustainable development opportunities and would have limited affect upon the integrity and function of the green belt"***.
- 9.12 The eastern parts of the Site are visible from St Ann's Hill and potentially from PROW FP 51 in wintertime views. The siting of proposed development should utilise the screening provided by the significant hedgerows surrounding the Site, and the scale, massing and materials for the proposed development be carefully considered, to limit potential visual impact. The selection of materials, in keeping with those of the Conservation Area, should also be considered.
- 9.13 Proposed development could therefore be accommodated on Sites, with no significant increase in the extent of development visible in existing views of the Sites and would not result in greater visibility of the Sites within the immediate or wider context.
- 9.14 By containing the extent of proposed development on the northern site, the existing contribution that the Site makes to the functions of the Green Belt would be maintained. Views of the Site, from the Green Belt which includes and surrounds the Site are, in any event, very limited. Ensuring that there is no increase in visibility of development on the Site in views from the immediate east and from the south will assist in accommodating development on the Site.
- 9.15 Proposed development could therefore be successfully accommodated on the Sites, limited to the south western extent of the northern Site; and set within an existing and enhanced framework of mature trees

and vegetation; without significantly increasing the potential visibility of development on the Sites or reducing the contribution the Sites makes to the purpose or functions of the Green Belt in this locality.