

## LAND WEST OF SHIFNAL, SHROPSHIRE

# PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

ON BEHALF OF WALLACE LAND INVESTMENTS



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Terms of reference**

- 1.1. Pegasus Group have been instructed by Wallace Land Investments (Wallace) to undertake a preliminary appraisal of landscape and visual matters in relation to land to the west of Shifnal, Shropshire, in support of representations being made to the Local Plan Partial Review 2016-2038.
- 1.2. The wider site area being considered comprises ca. 60.15 hectares (ha) of predominantly agricultural land located on the western and southern edges of the town of Shifnal, to the south of the A464 (Priorslee Road) (to the west) and to the west of Park Lane. Shifnal itself is located ca. 3km to the east of the centre of Telford, with the landscape surrounding the settlement generally forming part of the Birmingham Green Belt.
- 1.3. This report sets out a preliminary appraisal of landscape and visual matters (PLVA) which has been undertaken to determine the various landscape and visual constraints and opportunities regarding the wider site area and its context.
- 1.4. The PLVA considers existing landscape and visual receptors in the study area, including: physical landscape resources; landscape character; and, views/visual amenity experienced by residents, recreational users (including visitors and tourists) and road users.
- 1.5. Having determined the various constraints and opportunities, the PLVA proceeds to consider how these might serve to influence the 'development potential' of the wider site area in respect of a residential masterplan, and to influence an inherent landscape led strategy as part of that masterplan.
- 1.6. Principles and good practice for undertaking landscape and visual impact assessment are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013). The concepts and procedures set out in this guidance have been adopted where appropriate.

## 2. APPROACH

### Overview

- 2.1. The approach and methodology used for this PLVA has been developed using best practice guidance, as set out in the following documents:
- Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition;
  - Natural England (2014) An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment; and
  - Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19 (September 2019) Visual Representation of Development Proposals.
- 2.2. Reference has also been made to additional sources of data and information; these are referred to in the relevant sections of the baseline information. Supporting drawings have also been produced as part of this PLVA and are included as **Figures 1 to 6**.

### Level of assessment

- 2.3. Principles and good practice for undertaking landscape and visual impact assessment are set out in the Landscape Institute (LI) and the Institute of Environmental Management (IEMA) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013).
- 2.4. The third edition of the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) acknowledges that landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) can be carried out either as a standalone assessment or as part of a broader EIA. The GLVIA3 note that the overall principles and core steps in the process are the same but that there are specific procedures in EIA with which an LVIA must comply.
- 2.5. This report has been prepared as a preliminary appraisal of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities. The report addresses matters of individual landscape resources, landscape character areas/types and representative viewpoints. The PLVA draws on professional judgement in relation to sensitivity of receptors (both landscape and visual), the nature of impacts and consequential likely effects. This process informs judgements on a landscape mitigation strategy which will avoid, reduce or remedy adverse impacts.
- 2.6. Landscape features and elements provide the physical environment for flora and fauna and the associated importance of biodiversity assets. This PLVA does not consider the

value, susceptibility or importance on ecology and biodiversity, nor does it consider impacts from an ecological stance.

- 2.7. Heritage assets such as Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas all contribute to the overall present-day landscape character, context and setting of an area. These aspects have been given consideration in the PLVA in terms of physical landscape resources (for example trees and hedgerows) and landscape character. However, this PLVA does not address the historic significance, importance or potential impacts on heritage assets and designations; these assets are assessed in the context of landscape and visual matters only.

### **Collating baseline information**

- 2.8. To capture a comprehensive description of the baseline position for landscape and visual receptors, information has been collated using a process of desk study and field survey work.
- 2.9. The desk study includes reference to published landscape character studies and other published policy documents relevant to landscape and visual matters.
- 2.10. Field survey work was completed during January 2020. A series of representative photographs were taken with a digital camera with a 50mm lens (equivalent focal length) at approximately 1.8 metres in height. These are presented as a series of representative viewpoints and have been used to inform both the landscape and, separately, visual assessment (included as **Figure 4: Viewpoint Photographs 1 to 8 and A to D**).

### **Consideration of effects**

- 2.11. Having established the relevant baseline position, the appraisal process then considers landscape receptors and visual receptors, specifically in response to the nature of the proposed development in question, it identifies the nature of potential impacts and consequently, how these can inform an iterative approach to design and mitigation.

### **3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE**

#### **Site Overview**

- 3.1. The wider site area extends to ca. 60.15 ha, is predominantly in agricultural use and comprises a number of medium scale arable and pasture agricultural field enclosures with an irregular field pattern and straight boundaries. These field enclosures are located along the south-western and southern edges of the existing settlement of Shifnal. A small section in the north-western corner of the site comprises an existing cemetery and allotment site off Priorslee Road (A464).
- 3.2. The site can broadly be divided into three parts, including the north-western area, central area and south-eastern area. These sub-divisions are defined by the alignment of the local road network, including the A4169 (which extends south-west from the town of Shifnal) and Park Lane extending south from Shifnal. The site is defined to the north by Priorslee Road (A464), beyond which lies wider agricultural field enclosures. The site is bound to the east by the existing settlement edge of Shifnal and by Park Lane in the east. To the west, the site is generally bound by agricultural field enclosure boundaries, a mix of mature vegetation and low-level hedgerow boundaries. There is no defining boundary in the north-western corner of the site. The southern site boundary is also defined by agricultural field enclosures. Lodgehill Farm and two properties off the A4169 road corridor are not included within the site boundary.
- 3.3. In terms of topography, the landform of the site broadly falls from the north-western corner towards the centre of the site, associated with the Wesley Brook watercourse. The landform then rises to the south-east. The north-western corner of the site lies at ca. +97m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), which falls to ca. +78m AOD along the course of Wesley Brook and then rises to ca. +100m AOD at the southern boundary. The overarching feature of the local topography is a localised ridgeline that extends around the southern edge of the settlement, and physically contains much of the wider site area.

#### **Site Context**

- 3.4. The site is located on the western and southern edges of the existing settlement of Shifnal and is enclosed by existing residential development along the majority of its northern-eastern boundary. Two public footpaths extend from the southern boundary of the site and provide access to the wider landscape. A railway line (served by West Midlands Trains and Transport for Wales between Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton) runs through the northern part of the site.

- 3.5. To the west of the site, irregularly shaped agricultural field enclosures extend into the wider landscape, with interspersed pockets of development and farmsteads. Development is located near to the western and south-western site boundary, The Manor House and sewage works, located near to mature vegetation associated with the watercourses interspersed within the wider agricultural field network.
- 3.6. The settlement edge of Shifnal is located to the east and north of the site. This edge predominantly comprises residential development, as well as educational and recreational land uses. Residential development on the south-eastern edge of Shifnal comprises new development off the A464 road corridor. The south-eastern part of the site borders a Park Lane which is characterised by a section of ribbon development comprising existing residential dwellings. The north-western part of the site borders Shifnal Cricket Club grounds, with the residential edge further to the east.
- 3.7. The M54 road corridor runs to the north of Shifnal, located ca. 1km to the north of the site. The M54 corridor connects to Priorslee Road (A464) which continues south-east from the eastern edge of Telford into the town of Shifnal. The A4169 and A464 road corridors also form main transport corridors into Shifnal from the south-west and south-east respectively, which both influence the context of the wider site area.
- 3.8. Additional information and a more detailed description of the physical components, landscape character and visual amenity of the site and its context within the study area are set out in later sections of this PLVA.

## **Policy Context**

### **Landscape Planning Framework**

- 3.9. In the context of the relevant planning framework, the following section sets out a summary of planning policy relevant to the development of the site and which will have implications for the landscape mitigation strategy presented in this PLVA (refer to **Figure 1: Site Location and Planning Designations**).

### ***European Landscape Convention***

- 3.10. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. The ELC was adopted on 20 October 2000 and came into force on 1 March 2004. It defines landscape as:

- 3.11. *“...an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors).”*
- 3.12. This definition is important in that it focuses on landscape as a resource in its own right and moves beyond the idea that landscapes are only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity.

### ***National Planning Policy Framework***

- 3.13. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in February 2019, setting out the Government’s planning policies for England and providing a framework within which the appropriate local council can produce local and neighbourhood plans; the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.14. The NPPF sets out three dimensions to achieving sustainable development that include economic, social and environmental considerations. It places an onus on the planning system to perform a role in relation to the environment that ‘contributes to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic environment...’ going on to note that sustainable solutions should take account of local circumstances and reflect the character of each area. This underpins the strategic guidance set out in the NPPF in relation to landscape and visual matters.
- 3.15. In relation to landscape and visual matters, achieving well-designed places (Section 12) aims to ensure that developments are ‘visually attractive’, are sympathetic to local character (including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting) and to establish and maintain a strong sense of place<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.16. Section 15 of the NPPF addresses on ‘conserving and enhancing the natural environment’ stating that policies and decisions should contribute to this by ‘protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (noting that this should be commensurate with a statutory status or identified quality identified in a development plan) and also recognising the ‘intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside’<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Para 2, MHCLG, NPPF (February 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Para 127, MHCLG, NPPF (February 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Section 15 and para 170, MHCLG, NPPF (February 2019)



3.17. NPPF notes the importance that designs 'evolve' in response to local issues and to the views of the community<sup>4</sup>.

## **National Planning Practice Guidance**

### ***Natural Environment***

3.18. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource prepared by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The NPPG sets out guidance across various topics and effectively supersedes previous guidance on many aspects of planning; topics are updated as required.

3.19. The PPG for the 'Natural Environment' was updated in July 2019 and addresses agricultural land, green infrastructure, biodiversity and landscape.

3.20. In relation to green infrastructure (GI) the PPG acknowledges how a 'range of spaces and assets' can provide 'environmental and wider benefits'. The PPG states that GI can include:

3.21. *"...parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies."*

3.22. The PPG goes on to recognise how GI can help achieve well designed spaces, and conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. The PPG also recognises the benefit of considering GI 'at the earliest stage of development proposals, as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision, and taking into account existing natural assets'.

3.23. In relation to landscape, the PPG reiterates the requirements of the NPPF in terms of 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'. The PPG states that:

3.24. *"Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary."*

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<sup>4</sup> Para 128, MHCLG, NPPF (February 2019)

3.25. The PPG also notes the relevance of landscape character assessment, landscape sensitivity/capacity assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment. However, whilst recognising these different aspects of landscape analysis, the PPG does not reflect the subtle variations in these and potential overlap between their different uses and requirements.

3.26. This PLVA includes reference to published landscape character assessments which have been prepared at a range of scales and detail. Reference has also been made to the local landscape character by reference to the key characteristics of the site and its immediate context, including existing, enhanced and potentially new green infrastructure. Therefore, this report responds fully to the requirement of the PPG.

### **Local Policy Context**

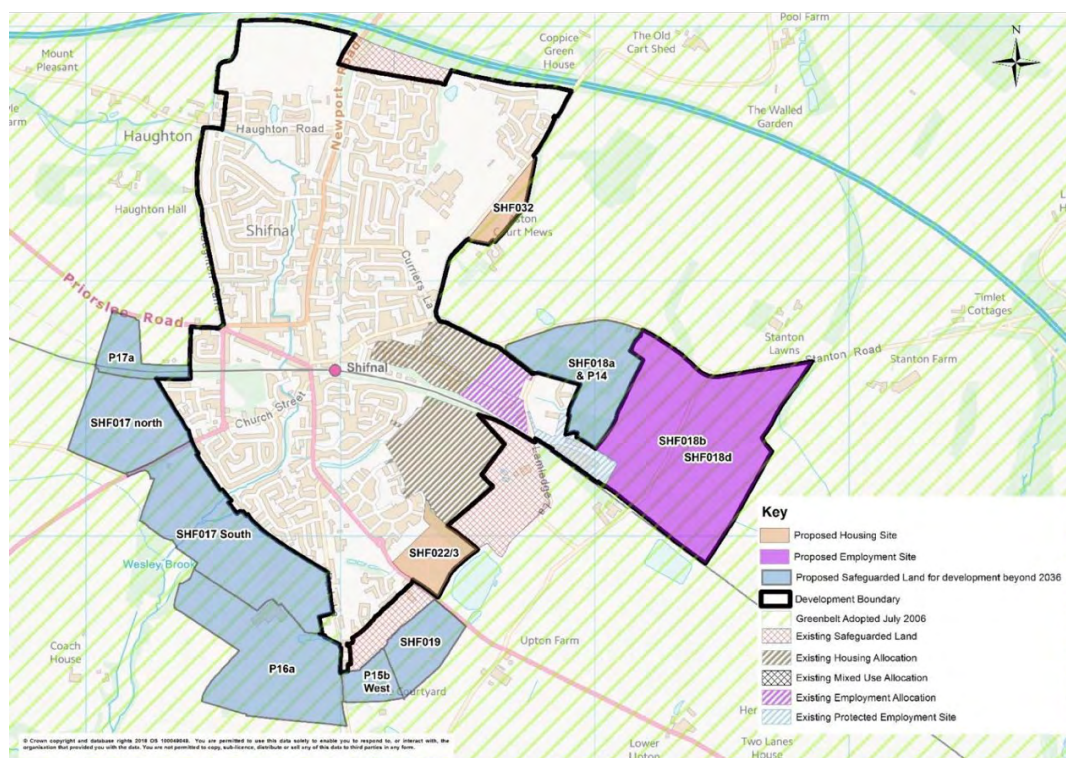
3.27. The site is located within the administrative area of Shropshire County Council (SCC). The adopted Local Plan prioritises and shapes development in the County up until 2026.

### ***Local Plan Partial Review***

3.28. SCC are currently undertaking a Local Plan Partial Review (2016-2038). The site is referred to directly within the third stage of consultation on the Local Plan Review (November 2018 - January 2019). The 'Consultation on Preferred Sites' document produced includes a section on 'Shifnal Place Plan Area'.

3.29. The wider site area is defined as a series of smaller scale parcels. These include Parcels 'P17a, SHF017 North, SHF017 South, P16a, , which are all identifies within the document as 'Proposed Safeguarded Land for development beyond 2036' (refer to **Plate 1**, below). Parcels P15b West and SHF019 have some relevance as they form part of an area of land adjoining the site which are being promoted jointly with Miller Homes, as part of the wider safeguarding designation.

**Plate 1: Extract from Shropshire Local Plan Review: Consultation on Preferred Sites for Shifnal**



3.30. The guidelines for the grouping of these parcels is stated in the document as follows:

3.31. *"Land safeguarded for new housing, commercial and community services and facilities, providing a new strategic highway link from the A464 (south) to the A464 (west) intersecting Park Lane, the B4169 and the rail line between parcels SHF017 north and P71a, with related highway improvements at Five Ways and Innage Road, creating a one way gyratory system via the rail line underpasses at Innage Road and between parcels SHF017 north and P71a"*.

3.32. The safeguarding of the land would appear to accept some form of development in these areas, in principle.

***Shropshire landscape & visual sensitivity assessment***

3.33. The evidence base for the Local Plan Partial Review, includes a 'Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study (LVSS) (Gillespies, 2018) gives an indication as to the rationale behind area to be safeguarded in landscape and visual terms.

3.34. The introduction to the LVSS defines its purpose, noting that:

- 3.35. *"The conclusions of this study when considered alongside the other information being gathered as part of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) will enable Shropshire Council to determine which areas warrant further planning appraisal and ultimately inform spatial development options for the Local Plan and provide a sound basis for decision making in the determination of planning applications."*
- 3.36. Going on to state that:
- 3.37. *"This is a strategic assessment which provides the context for more detailed studies of individual sites. It does not make judgements on the appropriateness of specific developments on individual sites (and does not consider specific development proposals where these might exist). More detailed studies relating to specific site allocations and development proposals will be undertaken at a local authority level as part of the Development Plan and development management process."*
- 3.38. It should be noted that this PLVA fulfils part of this recommendation, in that it considers the wider site area more specifically in relation to the landscape and visual matters.
- 3.39. The LVSS defines the settlement of Shifnal (reference 16SHF) as one of eleven 'key centres', around which the landscape is divided into four parcels for the purposes of the study: 16SHF-A to the north-west; 16SHF-B to the west and south-west; 16SHF-C to the south and south-east; and 16SHF-D to the east and north-east. The wider site area falls within parcels B and C (noting that the wider site area only forms a relatively small proportion of the overall parcel areas).
- 3.40. In relation to residential development, the LVSS concludes that for Parcel C, the landscape sensitivity is 'low to medium' and visual sensitivity is 'medium to high', whilst for parcel D the LVSS concludes that landscape sensitivity is 'medium' and visual sensitivity is 'medium to high'.
- 3.41. The judgements on sensitivity, supports the proposals for the safeguarding of the land.

#### **Landscape related designations**

- 3.42. The wider site area and study area are not subject to any specific statutory or non-statutory landscape planning designations. The site and wider landscape context is included in the Birmingham Green Belt which has some relevance to landscape and visual matters.
- 3.43. Other related designations present in the wider study area include:

- Shropshire Hills AONB – at its closest point the AONB boundary is between 8km and 1km to the west of Shifnal, and to the west of the wider settlement of Telford and Ironbridge;
- Ancient Woodland – including several woodland blocks in the surrounding area, the closest being Knowl Wood located ca. 900m to the north-west;
- Listed Buildings – numerous within the town of Shifnal to the east and in the wider landscape, the closest being the Grade II ‘The Terrace with Water Tower and Retaining Wall Adjoining to South’ located ca. 50m to the south;
- Conservation Areas – several in the surrounding area, the closest being Shifnal Conservation Area which is located ca. 130m to the east;
- Scheduled Monuments – several in the surrounding area, the closest being the ‘Roman fort 300m east of Drayton Lodge Farm’ which is located ca. 2.5km to the north-east; and
- Registered Parks and Gardens – Grade II Hatton Grange located ca. 1.7km to the south-east.

3.44. In general, whilst these have some relevance to considerations of sensitivity of the wider character of the landscape, they are only considered further in terms of the analysis of constraints and opportunities.

### **Physical landscape resources**

3.45. The following section describes the physical landscape resources that are present in the study area, including individual landscape elements and more distinctive landscape features. This helps to establish an understanding of the existing landscape baseline and is instrumental in identifying landscape receptors to be included in the appraisal.

### ***Topography and Landform***

3.46. The topography of the site gradually falls from ca. +97m AOD at the north-western site boundary, adjacent to Priorslee Road (A464) and the wider agricultural landscape, towards the centre of the site. The landform falls to ca. +78m AOD along the course of Wesley Brook, which continues to the south of the site. The landform then rises to ca. +100m AOD at the south-eastern boundary, also generally bordering the wider agricultural landscape with pockets of development.

3.47. In the surrounding area, the landform is characterised by a gently undulating landscape, which rises relatively steeply in parts to localised highpoints. These include Lodge Hill ca. 450m to the south of the site at a height of ca. +114m AOD. The landform gently

falls where watercourses exist in the surrounding landscape, including the Wesley Brook which flows into the town of Shifnal from the south-west and north-west.

### ***Hydrology and Water Features***

- 3.48. Wesley Brook flows broadly through the centre of the site. A small field pond is located close to the eastern area of the site.
- 3.49. In the wider landscape, streams are common and are largely located along field boundaries and through pockets of woodland. Wesley Brook, fed by the River Worfe further to the south, flows into the town of Shifnal from the north-west and south-west. Field ponds are also common in the surrounding area, notably to the north-east of the site beyond the M54 corridor. Larger waterbodies include several fisheries and reservoirs to the south-east of Shifnal, as well as several pools such as Ruckley Pool, located ca. 2.1km to the east of the site. Priorslee Lake is located ca. 2.1km to the north-west of the site, beyond the M54 corridor.

### ***Land Use***

- 3.50. The site comprises a number of agricultural field enclosures, which are irregular in plan form and are of mixed farming use. A small section in the north-western corner of the site comprises an existing cemetery and allotment site off Priorslee Road (A464). The site is situated on the western and southern edge of Shifnal with the settlement edge bordering the majority of the eastern and partially northern site boundaries. This comprises predominantly residential development, including recent development on the southern edge, but also educational and recreational land uses.
- 3.51. In the surrounding area, land uses reflect the transition from the settlement to the wider rural landscape. The wider landscape context of Shifnal is open countryside, typically mixed agricultural in terms of use, but with two extensive leisure developments which are Houghton Hall Hotel and Country Club to the north-west and Shifnal Golf Course to the north of the M54 corridor. Isolated pockets of development are also common including farmsteads such as Lower Upton Farm off the A464 road corridor to the south-east of Shifnal. Parklands with associated country houses are characteristic of this landscape, including Manor House ca. 350m to the south-west of the site.
- 3.52. Further to the west, the land uses are typically associated with the urban fringe of Telford. This includes extensive industrial estates, such as Stafford Park which is located ca. 1.8km to the north-west of the site. The A464 and A4169 road corridors, which run

adjacent to the site, as well as the M54 transport corridor, which is located ca. 1km to the north, are notable land uses.

### ***Vegetation Patterns***

- 3.53. Vegetation across the site comprises predominantly agricultural grassland and some field trees within the eastern parts of the site. Such agricultural field enclosures tend to be divided by low-level hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. Contrastingly to the remainder of the site, considerable mature vegetation in the form of linear tree groupings are located broadly in the centre of the site, along the course of Wesley Brook. Mature vegetation also exists along the railway line in the northern part of the site. Vegetation along site boundaries varies, this includes low-level hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees and some more mature with frequent hedgerow trees, notably surrounding the south-eastern part of the site. Where present, this vegetation contributes to visual screening of the site.
- 3.54. In the wider landscape, the agricultural field enclosures also tend to be bounded by low-level hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. These relatively open areas are divided by areas of woodland and mature vegetation aligning watercourses in the wider landscape, including Wesley Brook which runs partially through the centre of the site and into the wider landscape to the south. Parkland vegetation with frequent field trees are also interspersed within the wider landscape, including Haughton Hall Hotel and Country Club, located to the north of the site beyond the Priorslee Road (A464) road corridor. Within the residential areas, including the settlement of Shifnal, the vegetation infrastructure is primarily associated with the front and rear gardens of houses.

### ***Public Access***

- 3.55. There are two public footpaths which partially run through the central part of the site. These public footpaths extend into the wider rural landscape to the south, towards Lodge Hill and broadly along the course of Wesley Brook respectively.
- 3.56. In the local context, another public footpath is located ca. 550m to the west of the northern part of the site. This route connects Priorslee Road (A464) to Shaw Lane, crossing the railway line which also runs through the northern area of the site. Another public footpath is located ca. 740m to the east of the northern part of the site, which runs through the settlement area of Shifnal.

3.57. In the wider landscape, public access across the landscape is available via a network of public rights of way (PROW), including footpaths, bridleways, recreational routes, National Cycle Network and other routes with public access (refer to **Figure 3: Viewpoint Locations and Public Rights of Way**). The PROW network is generally sparse in the wider landscape to the north, west and east. The National Cycle Network Route 81 extends through the town of Shifnal to the north of the site and continues to the east, west and north-west. The PROW network is denser to the south of the site towards the settlement of Kemberton. This includes the route of the Monarch's Way recreational route, located ca. 760m to the south of the site at its closest point, which continues to the east and south-west of the site.

### ***Settlement and Transport Patterns***

3.58. The site is located on the western and southern edge of the settlement of Shifnal. The town of Shifnal is broadly a rectangular shape, with areas of new development extending to the north-east and south-east. Several main transport corridors extend into Shifnal from the wider area. These include Priorslee Road (A464) from the north-west (which extends from the M54 corridor and edge of Telford), the A4169 corridor (which extends from the wider countryside to the south-west), both of which influence the wider site area. The A464 corridor extends to the south-east of Shifnal, into the wider countryside. Park Lane is a smaller scale route that extends south from Shifnal and borders the eastern edge of the site.

3.59. In terms of settlement pattern in the surrounding landscape, these vary considerably in size and shape. The broadly rectangular shape of Shifnal contrasts to the smaller settlements and isolated pockets of development in the surrounding area, including Kemberton to the south, which are generally linear and concentrated along transport corridors. Notable settlements in the surrounding area include the large town of Telford to the west and Cosford (RAF Base) to the south-east. A number of local roads connect the various settlements in the surrounding landscape, as well as the main transport corridors noted above, including the M54, A4169 and A464 corridors. The influence of the road network, along with interspersed development in the wider landscape, contribute to the perception of the urban fringe and results in an urbanising influence on the local character.



## Landscape character

3.60. Reference has been made to published guidance on landscape character for the area. The site is located in the following landscape character types/areas (refer to **Figure 2: Landscape Character**):

- National level - NCA 66: Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau; and
- County level - The Shropshire Landscape Typology, 'Sandstone Estatelands, Incised Sandstone Valleys and Estate Farmlands' Landscape Types (LT).

### Plate 2: Summary of landscape character hierarchy



### ***National Landscape Character***

3.61. At a national level, the site is situated within the National Character Area (NCA) 66: Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau<sup>5</sup>. Where relevant to the site and its landscape context, the key characteristics of NCA 66 are summarised as follows:

- *"Extensive sandstone plateau in the core and east of the NCA underpins an undulating landscape with tree-lined ridges; this contrasts with the irregular topography and steep, wooded gorges of the Severn Valley in the west;*
- *The plateau is drained by the rivers Worfe and Stour and fast-flowing streams in small wooded, steep-sided streamside dells;*

<sup>5</sup> NCA Profile 66: Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau (NE472), March 2015

- *The main river is the fast-flowing Severn, flowing north to south in the west of the NCA;*
- *Interlocking blocks of mixed woodland and old orchards provide a well-wooded landscape and conifer plantations combine with parklands to give an estate character;*
- *Large, open arable fields with a weak hedgerow pattern on the plateau contrast with mixed arable and pasture land with smaller, irregular-shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and hedgerow oaks in the west;*
- *Characteristic lowland heathlands associated with acid grassland and woodland;*
- *Post-industrial sites, disused coal mines and mineral quarries are important habitats around Telford and urban areas in the Black Country;*
- *Traditional buildings constructed of brick vary in colour; and*
- *Important manmade features include the M54 and railway line that links the urban areas of Birmingham and the Black Country in the east with Shrewsbury in the neighbouring NCA in the west".*

3.62. Given the scale of the NCA these physical components and characteristics are likely to be represented across the wider context of the NCA; therefore, in this context, changes at a site level will be small scale and not likely to impact upon landscape character as defined by the NCAs. The NCA guidance does however give an indication of key characteristics relevant to the surrounding landscape context and the design of the masterplan can contribute positively to the delivery of the SEOs.

3.63. To complete a more detailed assessment of potential landscape and visual impacts, reference has been made to the published landscape character assessment prepared at a finer grain and more local scale.

### ***County Landscape Character***

3.64. At a county level, reference is made to 'The Shropshire Landscape Typology'<sup>6</sup> (SLT) as published by Shropshire County Council. The SLT provides a description of the landscape character of Shropshire and identifies 27 LTs.

3.65. A very small/minor part of the north-western area of the site is designated as 'Urban' within the SLT, where the site boundary comprises part of the railway line which runs through the town of Shifnal.

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<sup>6</sup> Shropshire County Council, The Shropshire Landscape Typology (September, 2006)

3.66. The majority of the site is located within the 'Sandstone Estatelands' LT (refer to **Figure 2: Landscape Character**). This LT is situated surrounding the 'Urban' town of Shifnal and continues to the south-west of the site. The key characteristics of the LT, relevant to the site and study area, are described within the SLT as:

- *"Arable land use;*
- *Regular field patterns;*
- *Parkland with associated country houses;*
- *Clustered settlement pattern; and*
- *Medium-large scale, open landscapes".*

3.67. In its overview description, the SLT describes the LT as a 'gently rolling, open landscape'. The LT is used predominantly for arable farming with mixed farming in some areas. Historic cover of plant species associated with heathland and acid grassland are now generally limited to hedgerows and roadside verges.

3.68. The SLT states that beyond the parklands, tree cover tends to comprise thinly scattered field and hedgerow trees with occasional woodland blocks. It also highlights that field patterns within the LT are generally regular defined by straight hedgerows. The SLT does note that during the 'later 20th century these landscapes have undergone a period of rapid change' which has resulted in 'enlarged fields and open vistas'.

3.69. A minor part of the south-western area of the site, where the landform rises relatively steeper than the rest of the site, is located within the adjacent 'Estate Farmlands' LT. This LT surrounds the 'Sandstone Estatelands' LT and comprises the majority of the wider agricultural landscape surrounding the site. The key characteristics of the LT, relevant to the site and the study area, are described within the SLT as:

- *"Mixed farming land use;*
- *Clustered settlement pattern;*
- *Large country houses with associated parklands;*
- *Planned woodland character;*
- *Medium-large scale landscapes with framed views".*

3.70. In its overview description, similarly to the adjacent 'Sandstone Estatelands' LT, the SLT describes the LT as a 'gently rolling' landscape. The SLT identifies that this LT occurs across extensive areas of Shropshire. It states that 'as with the Sandstone Estatelands, landscape character is largely determined by an ordered pattern of fields and woods', however the prevailing pattern is 'sub-regular'. Framed views are created by mainly

'planned' woodlands in the LT and field enlargements have 'created a larger scale and more open views'. The site shares some similarities with this LT however it only comprises a minor area of the site, as such, the adjacent 'Sandstone Estatelands' LT is more relevant.

3.71. A minor part of the central areas of the site, where the Wesley Brook extends from the south into the town of Shifnal to the north, is located within the adjacent 'Incised Sandstone Valleys' LT. This LT comprises a small area of wider landscape surrounding the site, following the watercourse to the south. The key characteristics of the LT, relevant to the site and study area, are described within the SLT as:

- *"Shallow, steep sided valleys;*
- *Planned woodland character;*
- *Linear tree belts along watercourses;*
- *Clustered settlement pattern;*
- *Parklands; and*
- *Small-medium scale landscape with filtered views".*

3.72. In its overview description, the SLT highlights that this LT is 'confined to the valley of the River Worfe and its tributaries' which 'contrasts markedly with the surrounding plateau'. This LT only comprises a minor area of the site, as such, the adjacent 'Sandstone Estatelands' LT is more relevant.

3.73. Given the context of the site adjacent and slightly overlapping the western and southern 'Urban' edges of the settlement of Shifnal, it is necessary to understand its more specific context. In relation to the matters discussed in the SLT, the site is more enclosed in comparison to the wider agricultural landscape with 'open vistas' due to containment from the settlement edge of Shifnal and mature vegetation, notably along the railway line, through the northern part of the site, and associated with the Wesley Brook, extending south from where it crosses the site broadly in the centre.

3.74. The historic plant species generally limited to hedgerows and roadside verges and existing field pattern defined by straight hedgerows, as set out within the SLT, are of low susceptibility to residentially led development as they have the potential to be incorporated into the green infrastructure proposals.

3.75. Reference to the identified landscape components informs the analysis of constraints and opportunities in relation to the site. The matters identified in character guidance at the

county level can be incorporated into a landscape and visually led site masterplan. This approach will respond appropriately to the context of the local landscape character.

- 3.76. The benefit of the more local level assessment of the LCA over the broader NCA guidance (from Natural England) is that it undertakes the assessment of landscape character at a more detailed level.
- 3.77. Therefore, the finer grain of analysis accounts for the context of the wider landscape and places the site in a more specifically defined area of character. The characteristics and guidance can be used to inform the proposals for development, positively influencing the quality of the masterplan.

### ***Local Landscape Character***

- 3.78. The following section sets out an analysis of the landscape character of the site in its immediate context (refer also to **Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Analysis**).
- 3.79. The site currently comprises a number of medium scale, mixed agricultural field enclosures, similar to that of the surrounding landscape to the west, south and east. Green infrastructure across the site and its boundaries varies and, where less extensive, allows a strong relationship and influences from the existing residential edges of the surrounding settlement of Shifnal to the east and north.
- 3.80. The site is located on the western and southern settlement edges of Shifnal. These edges predominantly comprise residential development, in the form of detached and semi-detached estates, notably newer development along the southern edges of Shifnal, but also educational land uses in these areas in the form of the local school. Several main transport routes into the town of Shifnal from the west and south pass through or are adjacent to the site, including Priorslee Road (A464), A4169 and Park Lane road corridors and the Shrewsbury – Wolverhampton railway line.
- 3.81. Beyond the immediate urban fringe landscape, within which the site is located, there is a varied framework of existing vegetation. The majority of agricultural field boundaries comprise low-level hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees which creates an open landscape. However, mature vegetation located in pockets of woodland, parkland settings and along watercourses, including the Wesley Brook which passes through the centre of the site, divides such open landscapes and offers visual screening.

3.82. The transition from where the site is located on the settlement edge of Shifnal to the wider landscape varies considerably. To the east and partially north, the landscape comprises mainly urban settlement land uses. This contrasts to the west, south and further east where the landscape predominantly consists of agricultural land interspersed with pockets of mature vegetation, farmsteads and parklands with associated houses.

### ***Landscape Character Summary***

3.83. Based on the evaluation of the site and surrounding context undertaken for this PLVA, it is evident that the site and its immediate context include some landscape elements and features which contribute to local landscape character. However, the strong framework of the surrounding settlement context reflects substantially on the character of the site.

3.84. Published character guidance recognises the juxtaposition of these influences and this is highlighted by the diversity of key characteristics including:

- Large, open arable fields with a weak hedgerow pattern;
- Medium-large scale, open landscapes;
- Predominantly arable farming with mixed farming;
- Regular field patterns;
- Undulating landscape with tree-lined ridges;
- Thinly scattered field and hedgerow trees with occasional woodland blocks;
- Interlocking blocks of mixed woodland and old orchards provide a well-wooded landscape; and
- Containment of the wider site area by topography (including localised ridgeline to the south and west, and valley formations to the south-west).

3.85. Having made reference to the landscape components of the site and surrounding area as part of the appraisal process, these factors can be evaluated as constraints and opportunities in relation to the site and its context. The design evolution for the site masterplan will respond appropriately to the landscape character.

3.86. In landscape character terms the site is located within an area that has potential for housing development and consequently, landscape sensitivity matters do not form an absolute constraint for the site, but instead can be used to influence the design process of an emerging masterplan. Consequently, the landscape character and sensitivity studies are considered in relation to the landscape strategy for the site, as described later in this PLVA.

## Visual baseline

- 3.87. This section provides a description of the nature and extent of the existing views from, towards and between the site and the surrounding area. It also includes reference to specific locations that will potentially be subject to potential impacts arising from proposed development of the site.
- 3.88. Establishing the specific nature of these views provides an understanding of the context and setting of representative viewpoints and the nature of views in terms of distance, angle of view, and seasonal constraints associated with specific visual receptors. The identification of key sensitive receptors and links to the representative viewpoint are carried forward to the appraisal process (refer to **Figure 3: Viewpoint Locations and PROW** and **Figure 4: Viewpoint Photographs 1 to 8 and A to D**).
- 3.89. Principal visual receptors include:
- Local residents in properties along the western and partially northern site boundaries, including (but not limited to) those along Manor Close and Brimstree Drive and Park Lane;
  - Users of PROW, including the two public footpaths which partially run through the wider site and extend into the wider agricultural landscape to the south; and
  - Road users, including those on the settlement fringes of Shifnal and those which run adjacent to or separate the parts of the wider site area, including Priorslee Road (A464), A4169, Park Lane corridors.
- 3.90. Receptors of the highest sensitivity include residents; people engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention is likely to be focused on the landscape, for example, users of PROW in the open countryside; and visitors to heritage or tourist attractions where views of the landscape are important to their setting or experience.
- 3.91. Receptors of intermediate sensitivity include users of local roads and sign-posted scenic routes where views of the landscape are likely to be important.
- 3.92. Receptors of lowest sensitivity include people engaged in outdoor sport where an appreciation of the landscape is not important to the activity; office workers who are focused on their job; and road and rail users travelling through a landscape at speed.
- 3.93. The following viewpoints have been included as representative locations (refer to **Figure 3: Viewpoint Locations and PROW** and **Figure 4: Viewpoint Photographs**).

- Viewpoint 1: View looking south-west from Shifnal Cemetery;
- Viewpoint 2: View looking south-west from Talbot Close;
- Viewpoint 3: View looking east from public footpath off the A4169 corridor;
- Viewpoint 4: View looking west from Park Lane;
- Viewpoint 5: View looking south-west from Park Lane;
- Viewpoint 6: View looking north-west from Upton Lane;
- Viewpoint 7: View looking north from public footpath south of Lodgehill Farm; and
- Viewpoint 8: View looking north from Monarch's Way recreational route east of Evelith Mill.

3.94. The following viewpoints have been included as contextual locations.

- Viewpoint A: View looking south-west from public footpath south of Lodge Hill;
- Viewpoint B: View looking east from A464 corridor;
- Viewpoint C: View looking south-west from public bridleway at the junction of National Cycle Route 81 and Upton Lane; and
- Viewpoint D: View looking south-west from public bridleway adjacent to the M54 corridor.

3.95. Further analysis is set out in later sections of this appraisal.

### ***Visual envelope***

3.96. The visual envelope is the area of landscape from which a site or a proposed development will potentially be visible. It accounts for general judgements on the theoretical visibility of a site or proposed development and sets a broad context for the study area within which to address landscape and visual impacts.

3.97. The extent of a visual envelope will be influenced by the physical landscape components of an area, such as hedgerows, woodlands or buildings and can also be influenced by distance from a site.

3.98. Given the scale of the wider site area, there is a greater or lesser degree of visibility subject to the location and context to the particular part. For example, views from within the Wesley Brook valley are more heavily screened, whilst from Lodge Hill there are more open views available.

3.99. As an overarching point, in relation to the wider site area, the settlement edge largely restricts views to the north and east; to the south, there is a localised ridgeline concurrent



with Upton, Brimstree Hill and Lodge Hill which restricts views from the wider countryside around Shifnal. To the west, the landform similarly rises with the initially steep slope, beginning to slacken further west and this also screens longer distance views from the wider countryside.

- 3.100. Aside from these generally restrictions on views, other physical features limit visibility, including tree and woodland blocks as well as the rail corridor (situated on embankment) and road corridors (often lined with vegetation).
- 3.101. Overall, considering the wider site area, the overall visibility is considered to be limited. Notwithstanding this, proposals for an emerging masterplan will need to consider the different parts of the site and context of the existing settlement edge in order that the perception of the settlement does not unduly increase.
- 3.102. Proposals for some form of built development would introduce elements that are situated above the existing ground plane of the site and consequently may be more visible from the local and wider landscape. The difference in the visual envelope of the ground plane of the site and the potential visibility of built elements is considered through the process of desk study and field survey work, and using professional judgement, subsequently appraised in relation to any likely visual effects and consequent mitigation.

## **4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ANALYSIS**

- 4.1. This section comprises an analysis of the landscape and visual attributes of the wider site and its context, including an analysis the role of the site in the local landscape context, highlighting pertinent points where relevant; and the subsequent identification of the key (development) constraints and opportunities in landscape and visual terms.
- 4.2. Green Belt matters are considered as part of the constraints and opportunities, however more detailed appraisal of the role of the site in respect of the Green Belt is provided in the following section of this PLVA.

### **Landscape and Visual Analysis**

- 4.3. The contextual landscape and visual analysis can be summarised as follows:
- The wider site and safeguarded land comprise an extensive part of the landscape surrounding the settlement, as such there are variations at a more local level in terms of sensitivity (both landscape and views) and potential capacity for some form of development;
  - Overall the western and southern areas around Shifnal, are relatively less constrained in terms of landscape sensitivity on the basis of the physical features in these parts of the landscape, including natural landform/topography and also components such as road and rail infrastructure;
  - Transport infrastructure emanates from Shifnal and in places is a notable feature, particularly the rail corridor to the west of the town where it is situated on embankment – overall transport infrastructure frames gateways to the settlement and compartmentalises parts of the landscape;
  - There is variety across the landscape in terms of land use, generally associated with agriculture but of varying forms. Hedgerow field boundaries associated with field patterns tend to be well managed and reflect positively on the condition of the landscape;
  - In terms of scale, layout and as a landscape characteristic, the hedgerow field pattern contributes to the local landscape character and should be used positively to influence the layout and massing of the masterplan;
  - To the south, the localised ridgeline provides a vantage point for more extensive views, including longer distance views across the wider landscape context to Shifnal;

- Green infrastructure varies around the settlement, but the mix of linear vegetation, woodland compartments, and the strong hedgerow network combine to create discreet pockets of landscape around the settlement edge;
- The settlement edge and interface between existing built form and the agricultural context has an influence on the discreet pockets – to the south and south-west this is characterised by late twentieth century housing, whilst to the west there is a mix of housing and local amenities (such as the cemetery and sports clubs); and
- Overall visibility to the wider site area from the landscape surrounding Shifnal is limited – or at least is restricted to discreet parts and experienced independently of the wider site area.

4.4. Points in relation to the analysis described above are illustrated on **Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Analysis**.

#### **Development Proposals**

- 4.5. In the Local Plan Partial Review, the wider site area is identified as being ‘safeguarded’ for development in the longer term. Consequently, the site is being promoted for residential development in relation to the Local Plan Partial Review.
- 4.6. This PLVA assumes a typical approach whereby a residential masterplan would incorporate a residential layout, associated infrastructure and public open space (including green infrastructure).
- 4.7. Considering landscape and visual matters at the early stage of the process enables related constraints and opportunities to be considered as part of the design process and to embed mitigation within the design (including green infrastructure and open space); this enables the proposals to be integrated with the local landscape context and avoid or minimise potential impacts on landscape and visual receptors.
- 4.8. On this basis, the proposals considered in this PLVA include the delivery of a sustainable, residential-led masterplan in the landscape around Shifnal which address the site-specific context and character and appearance of the local landscape.
- 4.9. To inform judgements on the capacity of any given landscape to accommodate specific types of development (without an undue degree of landscape and visual impact) it is necessary to understand the nature and characteristics of the type of development proposed.

4.10. This section of the PLVA considers the specific type of development proposed (i.e. residential led development) and the nature of the impacts that are likely to occur; thereafter it draws the landscape and visual baseline information together and summarises the key constraints and opportunities in the existing landscape and incorporates these as part of an early strategy for development and mitigation.

#### **Likely Causes of Impact**

4.11. Temporary impacts during construction will occur due to site clearance and accommodation works (including limited vegetation clearance where required), construction activity, construction compounds, earthworks and early phase infrastructure.

4.12. Permanent impacts relate to the built form of residential development, incorporating highways infrastructure. Other, positive impacts, will relate to mitigation integrated into the proposed development (i.e. green infrastructure and strategic landscaping), including retained trees, hedgerows, open space provision, SUDs and attenuation areas and new planting.

#### **Constraints and Opportunities**

4.13. In the context of the likely impacts the following key constraints and opportunities have been identified during the landscape and visual analysis (including reference to field work and to landscape character guidance) (refer to **Figure 5: Landscape and Visual Analysis**).

4.14. As set out at the start of this section, having undertaken an analysis of the landscape and visual baseline and considered the context of the site in this part of the Green Belt, the following section sets out the constraints and opportunities in respect of landscape and visual matters.

#### ***Constraints***

4.15. Landscape and visual constraints for the site are summarised as follows:

- Existing vegetation within, and on the boundaries, of the wider site area and which divide the site internally – these contribute to the scale, pattern and green infrastructure network of the landscape and should, where possible, be retained as part of an overarching green network;

- Approach to the settlement from the wider countryside and the need to present an attractive and consistent settlement edge from these (including both rights of way and roads);
- Potential visibility (albeit variable) from nearby sensitive visual receptors, including the local PROW network and also residential receptors on the existing settlement edge – also some specific views such as view corridors to the local church; and
- Limited views/visibility from lower sensitivity receptors and from discreet parts of the wider landscape.

### ***Opportunities***

4.16. Landscape and visual opportunities for the site are summarised as follows:

- The majority of the wider site area is contiguous with the existing settlement edge, and several parcels of the wider site are more strongly contained by the existing settlement pattern and/or by landscape features such as green infrastructure and topography;
- On the western approach to Shifnal, the railway embankment is a substantial feature which detracts from the local landscape but also creates physical containment to adjacent land parcels;
- The valley formation of Wesley Brook, associated with the existing woodland, provides a strong natural piece of green infrastructure that connects with the edge of Shifnal, furthermore the natural lie of the topography falls into the valley, reducing the prominence of adjacent land parcels;
- In some instances, appropriate edges to the proposed development require creation of new green infrastructure boundaries, which will contribute to the network of hedgerows, trees and woodland in the area;
- The landform at Lodge Hill forms part of a localised ridgeline extending north-east which contains much of the wider site area and separates it from the wider landscape context of Shifnal; and
- There is potential for landscape and biodiversity improvements and enhancements as part of a comprehensive masterplan with an inherent landscape strategy.

### **Summary**

4.17. Based on the analysis of landscape and visual constraints and opportunities, it is considered that there are two important issues in respect of strategic development potential for the site.

- 4.18. Firstly, is the need to identify the extent of an appropriate ‘development envelope’ that can accommodate built form and infrastructure; and secondly, the need to establish a robust and enduring green infrastructure framework to balance with that.
- 4.19. Both elements can develop in response to the local landscape context which will in turn help to avoid or reduce impacts. These two aspects have largely defined the preliminary development and landscape strategy, as set out in the following section.

## 5. PRELIMINARY DEVELOPMENT AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

### Overview

5.1. The preliminary development and landscape strategy for the site considers landscape components, landscape character and visual amenity and how these can influence a proposal. This process draws on the baseline analysis of the PLVA and the early identification of constraints and opportunities identified for the site and study area.

### Primary aims and principles

5.2. Adopting this approach ensures that the preliminary development and landscape strategy incorporates mitigation as an inherent component of the proposals, intending to avoid or reduce the adverse effects of a development proposal from the outset, including potential impacts on the Green Belt.

5.3. The principles for landscape and visual mitigation measures aim to:

- Retain and make best use of existing landscape elements and features and promote new green infrastructure and open space on and around the site;
- Optimise protection and screening for visual amenity receptors and recreational opportunities, which will also limit the perception of built form and its influence on the 'openness' of the area in Green Belt terms;
- Include green infrastructure and open space which promote an appropriate transition between urban and rural environments, and also form a robust and enduring edge/buffer to the Green Belt; and
- Avoid loss or damage to retained landscape elements and features (consequently also conserving and enhancing ecological fabric).

5.4. Together these place a particular emphasis on existing green infrastructure around and within the site. This also places an emphasis on the role that landscape characteristics and green infrastructure have in determining an appropriate boundary to the Green Belt. This is also consistent with the aims for landscape character at a strategic level.

5.5. The aims and principles can be taken forward through an iterative approach to inform an evolving design process at an increasing level of detail through the planning process.

## Preliminary landscape and visual strategy

5.6. The components of the preliminary development and landscape strategy incorporated into the emerging proposals are summarised in the following table.

**Table 1: Summary of inherent landscape and visual mitigation**

Strategy component	Key points
Development envelope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets the spatial footprint for the residential development parcels, incorporating built form and road infrastructure;</li> <li>• In the northern part of the wider site area, drawn back from the route of the A464 so as to present a landscape buffer and attractive settlement edge on this approach to the settlement;</li> <li>• To the west and to the south, drawn back from the site boundary so as to incorporate a generous stand off for green infrastructure and open space that provides an appropriate interface with adjacent agricultural land;</li> <li>• In general, includes set backs from the boundaries of the site so as to maintain sufficient stand-off to ensure boundary vegetation can be retained and potentially enhanced; and</li> <li>• Internal parcels, blocks and road alignments within the overall development envelope to make reference to the natural contours, so that potential built form sits more naturally along the local topography.</li> </ul>
Existing vegetation strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As far as possible, retain existing green infrastructure around the site boundaries (and internal field parcels) to maintain the degree of enclosure to which this currently contributes; and</li> <li>• Enhance the existing vegetation through a programme of supplemental planting and improved landscape management practices in the long term, to create greater density, diversity and longevity of vegetation.</li> </ul>
Green infrastructure and open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of green infrastructure and open space as part of a connected network across the wider site – inclusive of area for attenuation.</li> </ul>
Environmental considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A landscape strategy incorporating enhanced management of retained areas of existing green infrastructure, to improve density, diversity and longevity; and</li> <li>• Supplemental planting using native species to create diversity within habitat types and a mosaic of different habitat areas across the different parts of the landscape strategy (for example, hedgerows, tree planting and wildflower areas).</li> </ul>
Green Belt considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing an integrated landscape strategy for the masterplan which avoids or minimises potential impacts in terms of both spatial and visual considerations;</li> <li>• Incorporating additional access around the site and to the network of connected open spaces, including new and enhanced recreational provision;</li> </ul>



Strategy component	Key points
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New planting and enhanced green infrastructure; and</li> <li>• Inclusion of a generous belt of open space, concurrent with a natural landscape feature, which presents a robust and enduring Green Belt edge.</li> </ul>

- 5.7. In the context of the overall need for greenfield development, a degree of landscape and/or visual impact is an inevitable consequence for most, if not all, sites that come forward.
- 5.8. In relation to landscape and visual matters, for appropriate sites to come forward it is necessary to consider those where impacts are limited and where mitigation can be incorporated that can successfully minimise residual impacts.
- 5.9. It is considered that, with an appropriate approach to mitigation and the implementation of a robust landscape and green infrastructure strategy, a residentially led masterplan for the wider site area will be physically contained and show clear defensible boundaries. Green infrastructure and open space as part of the proposals can also complement the existing recreational aspects of the landscape in respect of the transition to the wider landscape. Overall a proposed development at this location is considered to be acceptable in landscape and visual terms.

## 6. GREEN BELT APPRAISAL

### Overview of Green Belt matters

- 6.1. Previous sections of this PLVA consider the constraints and opportunities of the site and its surrounding context in order to inform a preliminary masterplan for the site. This is considered on the strengths and weaknesses of the site and incorporates mitigation to avoid or minimise potential adverse effects.
- 6.2. This section considers Green Belt matters in terms of the role and function of the site and its contribution to Green Belt purposes. It also considers how an appropriate Green Belt boundary can be defined using robust and enduring features within the landscape.
- 6.3. This PLVA includes reference to local landscape character and visual amenity and identifies constraints and opportunities for the site which are then considered throughout the design process and contribute to good design.
- 6.4. This illustrates how the process of PLVA can respond to the requirements of the NPPF through an iterative process of design and masterplanning.

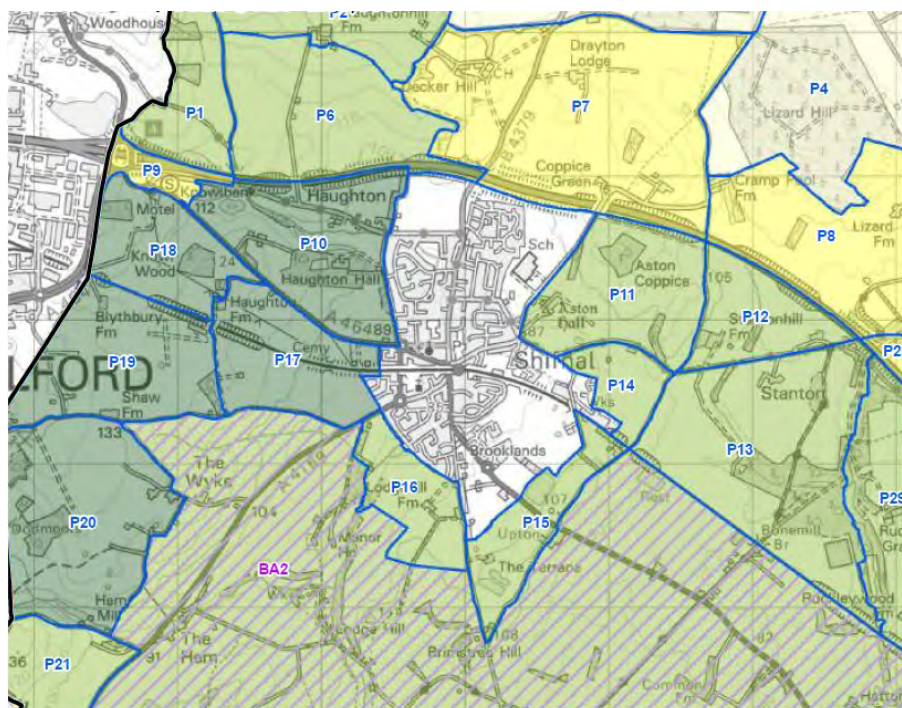
### The Site in the Green Belt

- 6.5. It is recognised that Green Belt designation is one of land use control, with policy designed to retain the essential characteristics of Green Belts: their openness and their permanence (NPPF para. 133). Green Belt is not a designation that seeks to protect a landscape of any particular quality or amenity value.
- 6.6. Notwithstanding the differentiation, the PPG on Green Belt (updated July 2019) recognises a connection between landscape and visual matters. The PPG addresses three areas in respect of Green Belt, including factors to be considered for potential impacts on openness, potential for compensatory measures to offset impact of removing land from the Green Belt; and mechanisms for securing such measures. The PPG states that:
- 6.7. *"...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..."*
- 6.8. The previous sections of this PLVA have dealt with the issues of landscape resources (i.e. elements and features), character and visual amenity. This section considers the site and its landscape context in relation to openness and the purposes of the Green Belt.

## **Green Belt Policy for Shropshire**

- 6.9. The evidence base for policy within Shropshire includes a Green Belt Assessment, undertaken by LUC on behalf of the Council, initially undertaken in 2017, with a subsequent Green Belt Review, completed in 2018.
- 6.10. The 2017 Green Belt Assessment assess the extent to which the land within the Shropshire Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green Belt, as set out in the NPPF (noting that this was the former version of the NPPF). In terms of its scope, the report states that:
- 6.11. *“This assessment will assist Shropshire Council to evaluate strategic options for sustainable development in Shropshire but will not advise on the suitability or potential of land in the Green Belt for development, either in the short term, or by safeguarding Green Belt land for future use. If this assessment identifies land parcels that perform less well against the purposes of the Green Belt they should not automatically be removed from the Green Belt, nor would they have to be safeguarded for future use. However, these findings would indicate the need for a Green Belt Review which in turn, would supplement the recommendation of the Inspector in the Examination Report of 2015.*
- 6.12. *There is an important difference between a Green Belt Assessment which is to assess the relative performance of the Green Belt, and a Green Belt Review which considers what adjustments could be made to the Green Belt.”*
- 6.13. The study divides the landscape around Shifnal into several parcels, those relevant to the wider site area include P16 and P17 (a and b) (refer to **Plate 3**).

**Plate 3: Extract from Green Belt Assessment, showing Shifnal Parcels (and GB Purpose 2)**



6.14. In relation to the relevant assessment parcels, the findings of the Green Belt Assessment are summarised in the following table.

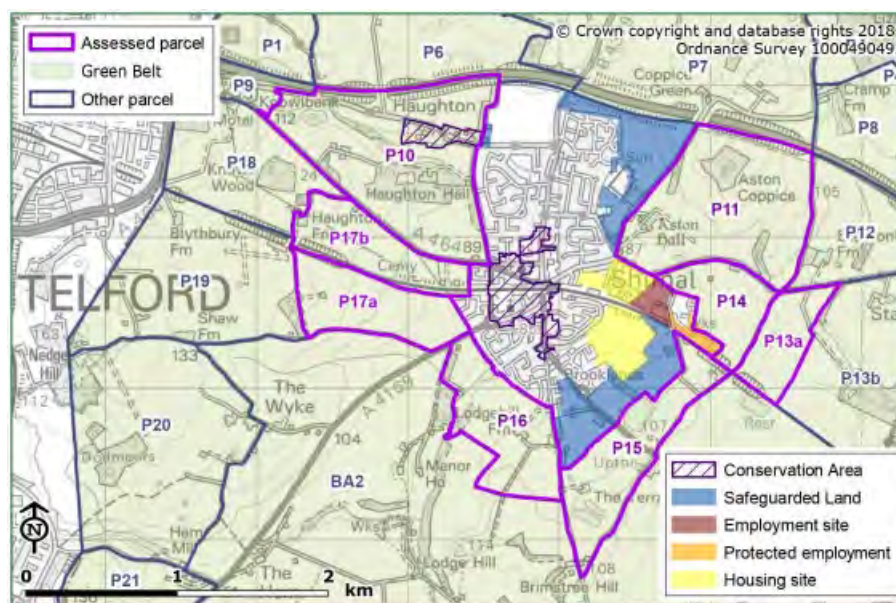
**Table 2: Summary of Green Belt Assessment**

Green Belt parcel	1a. Protection of open land	1b. Features to contain sprawl	2. Prevent towns merging	3. Safeguard from encroachment	4. Preserve historic character
P16	None	None	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
P17a	None	None	Strong	Moderate	Strong
P17b	None	None	Strong	Moderate	Strong

6.15. The study draws some generic conclusions in respect of maintaining openness and preventing encroachment into the countryside, as much of the landscape will contribute to these Green Belt purposes by their inherent nature. The study goes on to set out the context of a 'Green Belt Review'.

6.16. In respect of the parcels at Shifnal (refer to **Plate 4**) the Green Belt Review (LUC, 2018) considered in further detail an assessment of harm to the Green Belt as a consequence of releasing land for development.

**Plate 4: Extract for the Shropshire Green Belt Review, showing assessment parcels around Shifnal**



6.17. The Green Belt Review (GBR) re-defines the land parcels previously worked to as 'Opportunity Areas'. For the assessment parcels at Shifnal these translate as:

- P16 – included within Sh2 and Sh3;
- P17a – included within Sh2 and Sh3; and
- P17b – included within Sh3.

6.18. The GBR goes on to define harm against each of the opportunity areas, concluding that:

- Opportunity Area Sh1-1 – Moderate harm;
- Opportunity Area Sh2 – High Harm; and
- Opportunity Area Sh3 – High harm.

6.19. A concern in relation to this approach relates to the 'overlapping' or double counting between the different land parcels and their contribution to each of the Opportunity Areas. Given that certain parcels are included in more than one Opportunity Area, it is not possible to have a clear and consistent judgement on each spatial area.

6.20. Overall, a more detailed appraisal of landscape and visual matters, at a strategic level, is required in relation to the wider site area.

### **Strategic Analysis**

6.21. To establish whether a site is suitable for release from the Green Belt, it is necessary to understand the 'role or function' of the wider site in Green Belt terms when considered against landscape and visual issues. This is important because there is an inherent link between the perception of 'openness' and the physical components of a landscape, its character, and views to, from and within a landscape.

### ***Purposes of the Green Belt***

6.22. The following strategic analysis provides an appraisal of the site's contribution towards Green Belt purposes in respect of landscape and visual matters.

6.23. The analysis considers the potential impact of changes on site in terms of introducing built form and the impact of removing the site from the Green Belt. This is undertaken on the basis of determining to what extent the site can accept residential development without an undue degree of impact on the landscape.

6.24. The NPPF sets out under paragraph 134<sup>7</sup> the five functions of the Green Belt, as follows:

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

6.25. Each of these aspects is considered in the following table.

**Table 3: Appraisal of Green Belt functions and the wider site area**

<b>Green Belt Purpose</b>	<b>Appraisal of wider site area</b>
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To the west, landform rises gradually away from the settlement edge creating a degree of natural containment;</li> <li>• Proposals include for an access road on this edge which would create a defined physical boundary;</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> MHCLG, NPPF (July 2018)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing local road and rail network also provide physical containment;</li> <li>To the south-west, natural topography (both valleys and ridgelines) along with woodland and other green infrastructure provide robust and enduring features that prevent sprawl in terms of its physical spread as well as perception;</li> <li>To the south and south-east, a strongly defined ridgeline prevents sprawl with potential development being set well back from this local landscape feature; and</li> <li>Mitigation provides opportunities for new green infrastructure to reinforce the emerging settlement edges.</li> </ul>
To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matters of merging has relevance to Telford, to the west, and the western extent of the proposals;</li> <li>Considerable distance physically retained between the two, with no physical or visual coalescence resulting from potential development of the wider site area; and</li> <li>Mitigation opportunities to create a robust edge to the emerging settlement with a strong element of green infrastructure.</li> </ul>
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference to, and relationship with, the existing settlement edge is strong across the western and south-western parts of the wider site area;</li> <li>Transport infrastructure is influential in the west of the settlement, which contributes to a slightly degraded context for this part of the countryside; and</li> <li>Notwithstanding these influences, the wider site and its context remain 'countryside', however this is considered to be relatively 'ordinary' in landscape and visual terms.</li> </ul>
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To the west and south-west, the closest conservation area remains separated from the wider site area by the existing residential edge;</li> <li>Mitigation can address views across the town, incorporating view corridors into open spaces and the overall development framework; and</li> <li>Mitigation presents opportunities to create a distinctive (and high quality) character at settlement gateways on the arrival to Shifnal.</li> </ul>
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This purpose, and the principles behind it, are applicable to all sites within the Green Belt.</li> </ul>

### ***Openness and Visual Aspects***

- 6.26. Openness is not defined in the NPPF. It is commonly taken to be “an absence of development”. Development can mean built form of many types, to include buildings of various function, style, scale and merit; engineering operations; infrastructure to include roads and the highways network in general together with supporting infrastructure including lighting and signage; and utilities including electricity pylons and line, or telegraph poles and lines.
- 6.27. The overall scale and presence/absence of these elements, and how they present themselves in a given part of a Green Belt, serves to generate an understanding of the spatial dimension of openness.
- 6.28. Visual connectivity, view corridors, and public views can also contribute to the visual dimension in terms of what can be seen from specific locations, including public viewpoints, and how this serves to influence the openness of the Green Belt.
- 6.29. In the vicinity of the site, the spatial dimension of the openness of the Green Belt is influenced locally by:
- The existing settlement edges, which are more or less prominent to varying degrees, but particularly prominent at the settlement gateways (A464-west and A4169) and with residential development visible on edges at Talbot Close/Careswell Gardens, Manor Close/Stafford Avenue, Brimstree Drive/Lodge Close and also the linear development along Park Lane (which extends some distance to the south);
  - Transport infrastructure, particularly the A464-west as it crosses up the sloping ground as it rises to the west and the rail corridor which is constructed on a substantial embankment on the western edge of the settlement;
  - By the natural valley formation and woodland associated with Wesley Brook; and
  - Smaller scale field patterns and associated green infrastructure (and enclosure) along Park Lane to the east.
- 6.30. In the vicinity of the site, the visual dimension is enclosed by virtue of the various combinations of landform and vegetation which serve to screen or foreshorten views to the site.



### **Green Belt strategy**

- 6.31. In accordance with the NPPF, Green Belt boundaries should be defined clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 6.32. This PLVA, and the process of its preparation, have informed emerging proposals for the site, a key consideration being the nature and appropriateness of the interface between the potential development and the adjacent landscape.
- 6.33. This is reflected through the analysis of constraints and opportunities and subsequent development of the preliminary development and landscape strategy (refer to **Table 1** and **Figure 6: Preliminary Development and Landscape Strategy**).
- 6.34. Such an approach includes incorporated mitigation that addresses the interface between the settlement edge and the wider countryside and how this can influence prospective amendments to the Green Belt boundary.
- 6.35. Consequently, the use of existing landscape components to guide the landscape strategy and subsequent augmentation of these components can define an appropriate, robust and enduring boundary to the Green Belt.

### **Summary**

- 6.36. The potential conflict of proposed development on the site with aspects of Green Belt policy will be limited to the site level. Notwithstanding some conflict with the purposes of Green Belt, the impact of a potential development on the wider site area would be very limited due to the containment of the site by existing and established physical features, including the existing settlement edge as well as other elements such as the road network, landform and green infrastructure.

## **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

- 7.1. This report has been prepared to consider constraints and opportunities of land to the west of Shifnal, Shropshire, in respect of landscape and visual matters.
- 7.2. The PLVA identifies the key constraints and opportunities in respect of the site and surrounding landscape context. The analysis considers the specific nature of the type of development being considered and informs the inherent proposals for a preliminary development strategy. The indicative development consequently incorporates a landscape mitigation strategy which will avoid, reduce or remedy adverse impacts.
- 7.3. Given the scale of development required, any location for growth in the area is likely to result in some harm in relation to landscape and visual matters and also likely to require release of Green Belt land.
- 7.4. However, this analysis shows that the site can accommodate a sensitively designed residential scheme with only limited landscape and visual effects at a localised level and that such impacts can successfully be avoided or reduced through effective mitigation.
- 7.5. The preliminary development and landscape strategy aims to maintain and enhance the existing green infrastructure network and provide a series of proposals for existing and green infrastructure and open space that respond to local landscape characteristics such as landform, field boundaries, tree belts etc; all physical features in the landscape.
- 7.6. Consequently, the use of existing landscape components to guide the landscape strategy and subsequent augmentation of these components can set an appropriate, robust and enduring boundary to the Green Belt.

## FIGURES