

Site Context Photographs 1-13

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Published Landscape Character Assessment Extracts

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 Stantec's specialist Landscape Planning and Design group (Stantec) have been commissioned by Urban&Civic plc to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of potential expansion land at Western Expansion Area (WEA), Milton Keynes ('the Site'), in order to provide initial landscape and visual advice. This includes determining the suitability of the Site for residential development (the 'Proposed Development') and identifying strategic landscape and visual opportunities and constraints, to inform the development proposals, and enable landscape/green infrastructure enhancement so that such development could be integrated into the landscape.
- 1.1.2 The principal elements of the LVA are an analysis of the landscape context of the Site, including landform, vegetation, transport features and settlement pattern; identification and summaries of relevant landscape planning policy; analysis of published landscape character assessments encompassing the Site; an appraisal of the character of the Site itself; and a description of the visual characteristics of the Site in its context in the surrounding landscape.
- 1.1.3 The LVA process has then been used to develop a series of landscape development principles based on a robust analysis of the landscape and visual characteristics of the Site and its context, with the aim of avoiding or reducing adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity and optimising beneficial change in the landscape and in views. The methodology used for the LVA is drawn from principles of good practice in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013).

## 2 Site Context

### 2.1 Location

- 2.1.1 As shown in **Figure 1**, the Site comprises two parcels: Parcel A to the north-west and Parcel B to the south-east. The parcels are located on the western edge of Milton Keynes, to the north-west of Calverton Lane and to the north-east of the settlements of Lower Weald, Middle Weald and Upper Weald.

### 2.2 Topography

- 2.2.1 As shown in **Figure 2**, the western edge of the city of Milton Keynes, in the vicinity of the Site, extends towards the edge of a plateau formed by the edge of the valley of the Calverton Brook, a tributary of the River Great Ouse. The Calverton Brook, which lies approximately 350 metres (m) south-west of the Site (at its nearest point), flows from south-east to north-west in a broad valley. The landform rises from Calverton Brook to the south-west and north-east. The route of Calverton Road follows the edge of the upper valley slopes to the north-east. The River Great Ouse runs broadly south-west to north-east, passing approximately 850m to the north-west of the Site (at its nearest point) and continuing past the northern edge of Milton Keynes. To the south-east of the Site, the Shenley Ridge is a prominent topographical feature defining the urban edge of the city. The Shenley Ridge extends on a north-west to south-east axis extending from Site Parcel B to reach an elevation of approximately 119 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in the vicinity of Oakhill, south-east of the Site. Both parcels of the Site lie on the plateau landform to the north-east of the Calverton Brook valley, which slopes gently to the north, towards the valley of the Kiln Farm Brook which flows east-west into the Calverton Brook valley.
- 2.2.2 The Shenley Ridge to the south-east; and the steep-sided landform of the Calverton Brook valley, create a perception of strong structural separation between Milton Keynes and the wider undeveloped landscape.

### 2.3 Movement

- 2.3.1 The principal roadway in the area is Watling Street, a Roman road extending north-west from London. The orientation of Watling Street has informed the orientation of the loose grid pattern in which the planned city of Milton Keynes is set. Calverton Lane extends south-west from Watling Street to meet Calverton Road. The V4 Redway cycle route extends south-east – north-west along Watling Street, before branching south into Fairfields, north-west of the Site.

### 2.4 Settlement/Land Use

- 2.4.1 Calverton, Lower Weald, Middle Weald and Upper Weald are small settlements along Calverton Road, immediately south-west of the Site, on the upper north-eastern valley slopes of the Calverton Brook. These hamlets are collectively known as Calverton.
- 2.4.2 The very large urban area of Milton Keynes extends to the north and east of the Sites. This area is being extended by allocations that form part of the Western Expansion Area. Further development is emerging on either side of Calverton Lane, including to and north-east of Parcel B (housing); and to the south-east, most of the northern, eastern and southern areas of Whitehouse (housing). Minor areas of recreation and open space are peppered throughout the expansion zone, as are more substantial areas for District and local parks. A significant park is emerging to the north and north-east of Parcel A in the Kiln Farm Brook valley. An open amenity space is proposed to abut the north-eastern boundary of Parcel B. A significant linear park is proposed at the south-eastern site boundary of Parcel B. The expanded urban area will adjoin the Site boundaries and, notably to the north-east, will increase the urbanising influences on the Site.

2.4.3 The landscape to the west and south-west of the Site is largely agricultural. Settlements of varying scales are peppered through this rural landscape as well as scattered farmhouses and outbuildings. Hedgerows enclose fields, and generally, field patterns are small to medium in scale. Remnant areas of ridge and furrow patterns are present in the landscape.

## 2.5 Vegetation

2.5.1 Small pockets of broadleaved woodland are dispersed through the wider agricultural landscape. Strips of woodland/tree belts are present within the urban area along major routes, notably Watling Street and the A5. Ancient Woodlands at Oakhill Wood and Beechampton Grove are located further south and south-west of the Site.

2.5.2 Field boundaries in the area are typically defined by clipped hedgerows. Occasional mature canopy trees are present in these hedgerows. Former field patterns comprise tall hedgerows with sizeable hedgerow trees, including hawthorn, elm and mature tree rows with oak and ash.

## 2.6 Access

2.6.1 There is a good network of recreational access in Milton Keynes, comprising cycle routes and footpaths that link through the Sites to the surrounding landscape. Two waymarked Long-Distance Routes pass through the vicinity of the Site. Milton Keynes Boundary Walk lies west of Parcel A, and North Buckinghamshire Way lies immediately east of Parcel B (on Calverton Lane and turning south-east onto a wide path enclosed by hedgerows/treebelts).

## 2.7 Designations

2.7.1 The Site does not currently lie within any designation for landscape quality. It lies within the extent of a draft local landscape designated Special Landscape Area (SLA), as set out in the Draft Local Plan 'Milton Keynes City Plan: Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation (2024)'.

2.7.2 The north-east of the Site lies within the Plan MK Strategic Site Allocation: Western Expansion Area (WEA).

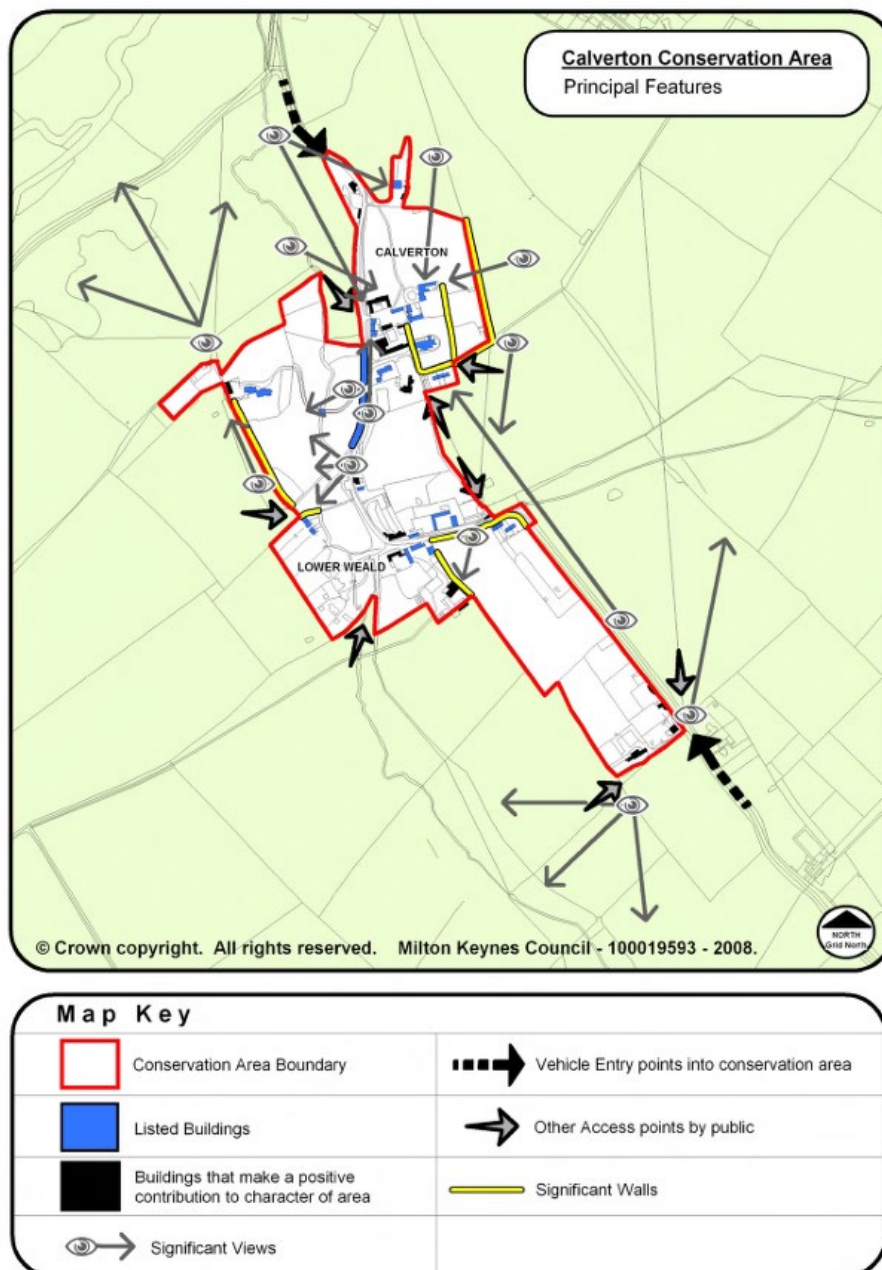
2.7.3 The Site is not subject to Green Belt designation, which lies approximately 12.2km to the south-east of the Site at its nearest extent. The land including the Site lies within an area designated as Open Countryside.

2.7.4 A number of listed buildings are located within Upper Weald and Lower Weald, within the Calverton Conservation Area, encompassing most of Lower Weald, which abuts Parcel A's western boundary.

### Calverton Conservation Area

2.7.5 The adopted Calverton Conservation Area Review was published in 2009. This included an extension of the conservation area extent which lies adjacent to the north-west and south-west of Parcel A of the Site and encompasses the village of Lower Weald.

2.7.6 Map 6 of the Calverton Conservation Area Review, as shown in the below extract (**Image 1**), identifies '*significant views from the Conservation Area*', of which the following are of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development.



**Image 1:** Extract of Map 6: Calverton Conservation Area Principal features, of the Calverton Conservation Area Review (2009).

2.7.7 As shown in **Image 1**, the Conservation Area Review identifies significant views from Middle Weald, which extend north across field F1 of the Site, described in the review as:

*‘expansive views of open countryside and important views back towards Calverton and the almshouses which stand on the same prominence as All Saints Church.’*

2.7.8 In relation to views from the east, the review notes:

*‘Looking back into Calverton from more distant vantage points it is worth noting that on the eastern flank the views inward are more open and the church tower and Manor Farm can both be picked out.’*

2.7.9 The review acknowledges the influence the development of the Western Expansion Area will have in views from the Conservation Area, and states:

*'...as Milton Keynes expands into this area the views will change markedly. For now however, the rural landscape to the east remains one of hedged fields with the A5 occasionally visible in the distance.'*

## 3 Landscape Character

3.1.1 Published Landscape Character Assessments at the National and Borough levels have been reviewed, in addition to the Historic Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Buckinghamshire County Council. The extent of relevant character areas at National and District levels is shown in **Figure 1**. Extracts from the National and Borough level assessments are included in **Appendix 1**. Characteristics and guidelines noted in these assessments of relevance to the Sites and Proposed Development are summarised below.

### 3.2 National

#### National Character Area 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands

3.2.1 The Site lies within NCA 88: Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands. The Key Characteristics of this NCA include the following of relevance to the Sites:

- *‘Gently undulating, lowland plateau divided by shallow river valleys that gradually widen ... to the east.*
- *... The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly across the landscape, and the River Nene and the Grand Union Canal are also features.*
- ...
- *Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, ...*
- *Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal.*
- *Wide variety of semi-natural habitats supporting a range of species – some notably rare and scarce – including sites designated for species associated with ancient woodland, wetland sites ... and traditional orchards and unimproved grassland supporting a rich diversity of wild flowers.*
- ...
- *Diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone...*
- *Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel...*
- *Major transport routes cross the area...’*

3.2.2 A number of the Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) are of relevance to the Proposed Development. These include:

*‘SEO 3: Plan and create high-quality green infrastructure to help accommodate growth and expansion, linking and enhancing existing semi-*

*natural habitats. Regenerate the post-industrial landscapes of the Marston Vale and Peterborough to improve and create new opportunities for biodiversity, recreation, timber and biomass provision while strengthening sense of place, tranquillity, resilience to climate change, and people’s health and wellbeing. For example by:*

- *Supporting the creation and expansion of native woodlands, orchard, parkland, grasslands, and hedgerows to improve habitat connectivity within the landscape and provide increased benefits for biodiversity and recreation.*

...

- *Supporting initiatives that include well-planned green infrastructure that will increase people’s access to and contact with the natural environment to benefit their health and wellbeing.*
- *Creating new woodland as appropriate on urban fringes to help screen and integrate new developments, and provide biodiversity and green infrastructure benefits.*

...

- *Conserving and managing traditional orchards, hedgerows, parkland, and ancient and veteran trees for the benefit of fauna (such as specialist invertebrates dependent on dead or decaying wood, pollinators and pest regulators).*

...

- *Retaining and enhancing the contrast in landscape character between the clay plateau and river valleys, aiming to maintain and enhance the balance between urban and rural landscapes.*
- *Preventing inappropriate development and promoting the use of local building stone to maintain the character of villages and historic buildings.*
- *Ensuring that any new developments incorporate well-designed green infrastructure, to include improved access and recreation opportunities for local communities and visitors.*

...’

**3.3 Character – Borough**

**Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment (2022)**

3.3.1 The 2022 Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment forms part of the evidence base for the Draft Local Plan. The Landscape Character Assessment identified Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), and Landscape Character Types (LCTs) based on those outlined in the former 2016 Landscape Character Assessment. The majority of the Site lies within LCT 4: Undulating Clay Plateaux and LCA 4b: Weald Undulating Clay Plateau. Part of the north-east of the Site lies within the Milton Keynes settlement boundary and is therefore not covered by the landscape character assessment.

#### LCT 4: Undulating Clay Plateaux

3.3.2 Key Characteristics of LCT 4: Undulating Clay Plateaux, of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development, are as follows:

- *'A gently undulating clay plateau, rising above the Ouse valley, ranging from 80m to 105m AOD...*
- *Small tributaries of the Ouse cross the landscape, including the Calverton and Chicheley Brooks, creating a rolling landform.*
- *Small, isolated blocks of broadleaved woodlands are scattered across the landscape, many recorded as priority habitat deciduous woodland and as ancient woodland, or plantations on ancient woodland.*
- *Large-scale arable fields dominate in LCA 4a, while there is a higher proportion of smaller pasture fields in LCA 4b.*
- *Fields are bound by hedgerows, with mature hedgerow trees.*
- *Limited settlement is concentrated in historic villages, often formed around manorial estates including Calverton and Astwood, with many listed buildings. Isolated historic farmsteads are also found across the landscape.*
- *A few minor roads cross the landscape, lined by hedgerows. The landscape is crossed by a number of PRow, including the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk.*
- *The elevated plateaux allow expansive open views across the LCT and surrounding countryside. The plateaux provide a rural backdrop to urban areas of Milton Keynes city.*
- *...*

3.3.3 In the 'Visual and Perceptual Characteristics' section of the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT, the assessment states:

- *'The undulating plateaux rise gently to ridges that offer panoramic views across the landscape, such as Shenley Ridge in LCA 4b... The plateaux, elevated above the surrounding landscape, provide a rural backdrop to Milton Keynes city.'*

3.3.4 The following 'Landscape Qualities' are identified for the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT, of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development:

- *'The open elevated plateaux, with an intact agricultural character that provides an intact rural setting to Milton Keynes city.*
- *The deciduous woodland copses, some of ancient origin, trees and hedgerows that support biodiversity and provide carbon capture.*
- *The small streams that cross the LCA and help control flooding downstream.*

- *The varied field patterns of irregular pre-18th century enclosure and regular Parliamentary enclosure bound by hedgerows that provide interest and time depth.*
- *The general absence of development, with an intact settlement pattern of historic estates and villages with buildings constructed from local materials that provide a connection to history, cultural identity and aesthetic value.*
- *The open character of the landscape allowing uninterrupted views from ridges on the plateaux across the surrounding landscapes that provide visual interest and a sense of place.*
- *The network of PRow, including the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, that connect the settlements and wider countryside, and provide recreational value and contribute to well-being and health.'*

3.3.5 It is noted in this respect that the plateau in the vicinity of the Site is not intact rural land, being subject of and influenced by ongoing development.

3.3.6 In the 'Landscape Condition' section, the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT states:

*'The Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT is a largely rural landscape, which has retained its agricultural character despite proximity to Milton Keynes city. Fragmentation of historic field patterns and hedgerow field boundaries reduces the condition in some areas. There is limited connectivity between semi-natural habitats, and woodland management is not obvious. Tranquillity is disrupted by the urban edge of Milton Keynes city, and modern influences on the landscape are the major road corridors of the A509 and A442, electricity pylon routes...'*

3.3.7 'Forces for Change' identified within the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development include:

*'...'*

- *The increasingly limited connections between semi-natural habitats, with scattered woodlands and fragmented hedgerows.*
- *...Expansion of built development on the urban edge of Milton Keynes city at Western Expansion Area... affecting the rural character of the landscape, increasing traffic and resulting in changes to roads and land uses in the area, as well as levels of tranquillity.*

*...'*

- *Noise from roads which cross the landscape, particularly the A509 and A442, and the nearby M1, locally impacting landscape tranquillity.'*

3.3.8 The 'Landscape Strategy' for the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT is as follows:

*'The landscape strategy for the Undulating Clay Plateaux LCT is to retain the rural character of the farmland landscape, created by a combination of tilling arable landscape with small historic villages linked by rural lanes, with long views across surrounding countryside. The rural backdrop provided to Milton Keynes city should be retained, while ensuring a sense of separation between Milton Keynes city and the agricultural landscape.'*

3.3.9 In the guidance section, the Landscape Character Assessment provides the following management points of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development:

*'Landscape Management:*

...

- *Conserve and strengthen the traditional landscape pattern and structure, as well as increasing biodiversity interest through the maintenance or restoration of hedgerows with native species.*

...

- *Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland/tree cover, particularly to link existing small deciduous woodlands, copses and hedgerows, using locally occurring, climate resilient, species.*
- *Consider opportunities for green infrastructure enhancement linking into adjacent boroughs, particularly in relation to Whaddon Chase which extends into Buckinghamshire County, as set out in the Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Strategy<sup>15</sup>.*

...

- *Protect the valued recreational use of the landscape (PRoW), further enhancing opportunities for informal access and enjoyment through well maintained linked routes through farmland, as identified in the Green Infrastructure Opportunities Mapping<sup>16</sup>.*
- *Protect and enhance heritage assets within the LCT, including listed buildings and historic parklands e.g. at Chicheley. Retain ridge and furrow earthworks under existing pasture.*

*Development Management*

- *Conserve the rural character of the landscape, ensuring it continues to play a role in providing a rural setting for Milton Keynes city.*
- *Retain framed views to local landmark buildings, including the church towers at... Calverton.*
- *Conserve the distinctive vernacular of historic buildings and their rural settings, including within the Calverton... Conservation Areas. Ensure key views within and from the villages referenced in the Conservation Area Appraisals are retained.*
- *Retain the characteristic settlement pattern of historic villages, avoiding out of scale residential developments. Reference the pattern of local buildings materials and local identity in any new development or boundary treatments.*
- *Encourage sensitive management of new development, ensuring the existing villages retain a sense of separation from new development on the edge of Milton Keynes city.*

...

- *Manage the existing PRoW network, and consider opportunities for extending it, particularly where this can tie-in with wider initiatives to*

*promote and enable sustainable transport in association with the extensions to Milton Keynes city.*

- *Ensure a strong landscape structure to the adjacent parkland areas within the Western Expansion Area..., providing a landscape buffer to soften the impact of residential areas on adjacent landscapes.'*

3.3.10 Unique characteristics of the LCA 4b: Weald Clay Plateau of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development are as follows:

*'Weald Undulating Clay Plateau LCA lies on the western edge of the borough, adjacent to the Western Expansion Area of Milton Keynes city. The plateau is incised by the Calverton Brook, a small tributary of the Ouse, which has created a steep sided valley in the centre of the LCA.*

...

*Land use is predominantly pastoral, most commonly for sheep grazing. Hedgerows are generally in good condition, although there is some reinforcement with post and wire fencing. Horse grazing in some parts of the landscape contributes a slightly unmanaged character.*

*LCA has a uniform field pattern of Parliamentary enclosure that was further sub-divided soon after legal enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries...*

*Settlement is confined to the hamlets of Lower, Middle and Upper Weald (collectively known as Calverton) – Lower and Middle Weald are designated as the Calverton Conservation Area...*

...

*The LCA still retains a strong sense of separation from Milton Keynes city, despite the recent development of the Western Expansion Area. ...there are extensive views across the Aylesbury Vale to the west and to wooded horizons to the north from higher ground. Electricity pylons and noise from the A5 to the north are intrusive modern elements which detract from the rural character.'*

## 4 Policy

### 4.1 National

#### National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

4.1.1 Paragraphs 131-141 focus on achieving well-designed places and promoting good design of the built environment. Paragraph 135 states:

*‘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; and*
- 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.’*

4.1.2 Paragraph 136 relates to trees and states:

*‘Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users.’*

4.1.3 Paragraph 139 is concerned with the quality of design and states:

*‘Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning*

*documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:*

- a. *development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b. *outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings...'*

4.1.4 Section 15 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 180 sets out that:

*'Planning policies 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 ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*

*...'*

4.1.5 Paragraph 181 states:

*'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<sup>58</sup>; 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

4.1.6 To support the policies of the NPPF, the Government has produced Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

4.1.7 Under the heading of Natural Environment, Paragraph 5 of 'Green infrastructure', 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...'*

4.1.8 Paragraph 6 states:

*'Green infrastructure can help in:*

- *Achieving well-designed places;*
- *Promoting healthy and safe communities;*
- *Mitigating climate change, flooding and coastal change; and*

- *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.*

4.1.9 Under the sub-heading 'Landscape', paragraph 37, of the PPG supports the use of landscape character assessment as a tool for understanding the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identifying the features that give it a sense of place, as a means to informing, planning and managing change. PPG makes reference to Natural England guidance on landscape character assessment.

## 4.2 Borough

### Plan Milton Keynes 2016-2031 (2019)

4.2.1 The Local Plan for Milton Keynes (Plan:MK) was adopted in March 2019 and will remain extant until the Draft Local Plan (Milton Keynes City Plan) is adopted. Plan:MK policies relevant to the Site and the Proposed Development are detailed below.

4.2.2 Policy NE4 Green Infrastructure, states;

- A. *'The network of green infrastructure throughout the Borough will be protected, extended and enhanced for its biodiversity, recreational, accessibility, health and landscape value and for the contribution it makes towards combating climate change. This is in accordance with the vision and principles (and the large-scale zone maps of Green Infrastructure Opportunity <sup>(39)</sup>) set out by the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes NEP.*
- B. *Development proposals will provide new green infrastructure or, if it is not possible, will contribute to the enhancement and strengthening of existing green infrastructure to provide wellbeing benefits to people through access to nature.*
- ...
- D. *Green infrastructure protection, improvements and creation must be prioritised in locations where it can deliver most benefits. It should be multi-functional to deliver as many ecosystem services as the Site requires, for example flood mitigation, access to nature (wellbeing benefits), plants for pollinators, carbon sequestration, and habitat for wildlife.*
- E. *The existing network of linear parks and linked parks and green spaces will be extended into the urban extensions and along the Ouse and Ouzel Valleys to the north to provide a well connected network of green infrastructure that:*
  - 1. *Is strategically planned*
  - 2. *Is attractive and enhances the surrounding landscape.*
  - 3. *Is safe and well used for recreation.*
  - 4. *Meets the needs of existing and future residents.*
  - 5. *Is designed to provide a range of ecosystem services eg. Manage flood risk or provide flower rich habitats that supports a diverse range of pollinators.*

...

8. *Is managed into the long-term.*
  9. *Where possible improves connectivity with other green infrastructure networks e.g. by linkages to the urban parks.*
- F. *...Where green infrastructure is provided outside the linear parks system, applicants should detail how it will address the above requirements.'*

4.2.3 Policy NE5 Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character, states:

- A. *'Where development in the open countryside is acceptable in principle under other policies in this plan, it will need to be undertaken in a manner that respects the particular character of the surrounding landscape.*
- B. *In particular, development proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures:*
- *The locally distinctive natural and man-made features that contribute towards the landscape character and its quality.*
  - *The historic setting and structure of the villages and hamlets.*
  - *Important views e.g. of local landmarks.*
  - *Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
- C. *Development proposals should take into account the findings of the Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment (2016) and any other relevant landscape and visual assessments or studies. Where appropriate a site specific landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) will be required as part of a planning application and it must be demonstrated that the development proposal has been informed by a LVIA written in accordance with the standard method, Guidance for LVIA version 3 from the Landscape Institute.'*

4.2.4 Policy SD1: Place-making Principles for Development, states:

*'Proposals for new strategic urban extensions, strategic scale development and, where relevant, other development within or adjoining the Milton Keynes urban area should demonstrate that the following place-making principles have been considered:*

1. *Development promotes good physical and mental health, with places and routes that are safe and perceived to be safe by creating passive surveillance and active frontages.*
2. *Development integrates well with the surrounding built and natural environments to enable a high degree of connectivity with them, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists and for access to connected green infrastructure for people and wildlife.*

- 3. *The structure and layout of development within or adjoining the urban area of Milton Keynes is based on the principles that have shaped the original city, especially the grid road system, redways, linear parks and strategic, integrated flood management with employment incorporated as part of the development or located nearby.*
- 4. *Development relates well to the surrounding area in terms of density, scale and materials, with positive Site features, views and vistas incorporated into and used to structure the new development.*
- 5. *...Existing natural assets including green infrastructure features connections and functions should be identified prior to development; and enhanced, extended, protected and connected appropriately – i.e. designed and planned for so it provides multiple benefits to the environment and wildlife, also to the health and wellbeing of residents and to supporting the local economy.*

...

- 7. *Development enhances the character of the area within which it is located. Where existing discernible or positive characteristics are lacking, new development creates positive character and identity through high quality and forward looking architecture and urban design to avoid nondescript and 'anywhere' development.*

...

- 11. *Where appropriate, different character areas are created through the use of varied densities, high quality landscaping, block and building layouts, architecture and the framing and treatment of open spaces and the public realm as informed by the surrounding context.*

...

- 13. *...Developments must identify existing green infrastructure assets and the benefits they provide and could provide for future needs, and build in the need to protect, enhance, improve and connect green infrastructure for multiple benefits to biodiversity and wildlife, access, health and well-being as a necessary component of sustainable place-making*

...'

4.2.5 Policy SD9: General Principles for Strategic Urban Extensions, states the following of relevance to landscape and visual considerations:

*'Proposals for Strategic Urban Extensions, and the documents required under SD10 to guide their development, should be prepared in accordance with the principles set out below. This policy will also be applied to any planning application(s) for unallocated strategic development sites.*

...

- 2. *To provide the necessary social, grey and green infrastructure ...*
- 3. *To be supported by or incorporate:*

...

- iii. *Design, land use, transport routes and mobility measures that integrate the Strategic Urban Extension with the existing built up area and enable future expansion beyond the Strategic Urban Extension where appropriate.*
- iv. *Where national planning policy indicates that urban expansion beyond the Strategic Urban Extension would be inappropriate and should be restricted, then the Strategic Urban Extension should incorporate layout and design features that create a permanent long-term development boundary.*
- v. *A green infrastructure and open space strategy to improve biodiversity, provide advanced structural planting, extend the “forest city” concept, create green road and street scenes, and incorporate public art and leisure and recreation facilities.*
- vi. *A management and maintenance strategy for open space and landscaping, outlining details of the owner, the responsible maintenance body, and how long term maintenance will be funded.*

...’

4.2.6 Although the Site is not within a Plan:MK Strategic Site Allocation area, it is of a strategic scale, and therefore principals of Policy SD9 are of relevance to the Proposed Development.

4.2.7 Chapter 15 of the Local Plan includes design-related policies of which, the following are relevant to landscape and visual considerations.

4.2.8 Policy D1: Designing A High Quality Place, states:

*‘Development proposals will be permitted if they meet the following objectives/principles:*

1. *The development proposals as a whole respond appropriately to the site and surrounding context.*

...

5. *Soft and hard landscaping that continues the verdant and green character of Milton Keynes...*

6. *Landscape and boundary treatments integrate with and/or enhance those of the surrounding area.*

...’

4.2.9 Policy D2: Creating A Positive Character, states:

A. *‘Development proposals will be permitted if they meet the following objectives/principles:*

1. *The layout, massing/scale, boundary treatments and landscaping of a development and appearance of buildings exhibit a positive character or sense of place for a development.*

2. *The character of the development is locally inspired where appropriate (for example in or adjacent to conservation areas, or in existing areas with a strong positive character).*
  3. *Where there is no positive built form character on the site or surrounding area, new development is designed to create its own distinctive character or sense of place using existing site features, the layout of the development and the appearance of buildings.*
- ...'

### Supplementary Planning Documents

#### *Milton Keynes New Residential Development Design Guide*

- 4.2.10 The Milton Keynes New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted 2012) sets out guidance on high-quality development. Section 2.2 Context Appraisal states:

*'The character of the new development should also be developed from an understanding of the context of the surrounding built and natural forms.'*

- 4.2.11 Under 2.6, Design Aspirations, Vision the following is stated:

*'As a general rule, a limited palette of materials is believed to lead to the creation of a stronger character for a development.*

...

*The landscape framework must provide a structuring element and framework for the entire development;'*

- 4.2.12 Section 3.5, Landscape, Public Space and Biodiversity states:

- *'The masterplanning of new developments particularly on the periphery of the city must ensure that where appropriate and achievable, existing linear open space corridors are extended into new developments. Where these do not occur, large new developments in particular should be structured around open space corridors that serve to integrate development rather than divide them and that accommodate the multifunctional uses required of modern development;*
- *The retention and use of existing landscape assets as part of new developments should be a guiding principle. This not only enhances the biodiversity where the long established features are often the richest assets, but provides a sense of maturity to developments. Using elements of former landscape character and land use helps to integrate new development within their locality;*
- *Good landscape design can help legibility, create focal and reference points, enhance biodiversity and enhance the overall quality of the external environment. The form, texture and colour of plant material can complement and enhance new and existing building materials. To help establish identity for a new neighbourhood, a palette of tree species which are predominantly native or of local provenance should be established at the design code stage of the process. Non-native species, where used, should be selected for known wildlife value;*

- *Developers should integrate landscape within the built development, rather than viewing it as a separate entity confined solely to areas of public open space. The green character of the city can be reinforced in a variety of other ways, including street trees, verges, green front gardens, green roofs and green walls;*

#### **Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure Strategy (2018)**

- 4.2.13 The Milton Keynes Green Infrastructure (GI) strategy is in part informed by the work of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership, sets out Strategic Green Infrastructure Priorities in Figure 5 on page 29. The Site does not lie within a Strategic Green Infrastructure Priority area.
- 4.2.14 Under 8.4 Protecting Landscape Value, the following is stated:

*'...there is a need to protect the qualities that contribute to the rural landscape character in MK. The Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment<sup>33</sup> highlights the extensive views over the valleys from the clay plateau farmland in the north, the tranquil character of the rural river valley...*

*Meeting the need: Protect the tranquil and open nature of the rural landscape. Identify opportunities for historic restoration and GI enhancement. Improve access to the countryside and maintain the existing paths, cycle and bridle ways, as well as identifying potential for strategic open spaces.'*

#### **Technical Studies and Background Documents for Plan:MK**

##### **Landscape Sensitivity Study to Residential Development in the Borough of Milton Keynes and Adjoining Areas (2016)**

- 4.2.15 The Landscape Sensitivity Study to Residential Development in the Borough of Milton Keynes and Adjoining Areas assessment seeks to consider the sensitivity of landscape areas within and adjacent to the Borough of Milton Keynes for residential development. The assessment considers sensitivity to residential development at a density of 35 dwellings per hectare, typically 2-storey, with some 2.5-storey buildings. The assessment identifies the Site to fall within land Area 25: Weald Plateau. The following commentary was provided regarding the susceptibility to residential development of Area 25 was provided for each of the landscape attributes as follows:
- 4.2.16 Scale was concluded to be 'medium sensitivity', stating:
- 'Medium sized regular fields.'*
- 4.2.17 Enclosure was concluded to be 'low sensitivity', stating:
- 'Generally contained by substantial hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Some hedgerows unmaintained and scrappy.'*
- 4.2.18 Landform was concluded to be 'low sensitivity', stating:
- 'Relatively level plateau with gentle undulations down to a tributary of the Great Ouse.'*
- 4.2.19 Landcover pattern was concluded to be 'low sensitivity', stating:
- 'Pasture with some untended fields near to the boundary with the Western Expansion Area.'*
- 4.2.20 Built Environment was concluded to be 'medium sensitivity', stating:

*'The ongoing development on the Western Expansion Area dominates the area. The historic hamlets of the Weald mark the western edge of the area but are enclosed within a small valley and sheltered by mature trees.'*

4.2.21 Historic landscape character was rated 'medium sensitivity', stating:

*'Small areas of ridge and furrow.'*

4.2.22 Intervisibility was concluded to be 'low sensitivity', stating:

*'Limited inward/outward views. A tributary valley of the Great Ouse provides enclosure for the hamlets of Lower, Middle and Upper Weald.'*

4.2.23 Perception/ experience was concluded to be 'medium sensitivity', stating:

*'This is a peaceful rural area with few roads, but the eastern boundary of the area is increasingly dominated by the expansion of the built edge of the Milton Keynes. There is some intrusion from overhead power lines.'*

4.2.24 Landscape Value was concluded to be 'low sensitivity', stating:

*'Open Countryside (MK) Generally of low scenic quality although there is a value attached to the adjoining historic villages.'*

4.2.25 Overall, based on the sensitivity of the above attributes, the assessment concluded that the area has 'low sensitivity' to residential development.

4.2.26 Under the heading 'capacity' the assessment concluded the following for Area 25:

*'Residential development could be accommodated without affecting key characteristics and/or values in the landscape. The landscape area physically adjoins the Western Expansion Area of Milton Keynes. The relatively flat topography of this area means that this is a discrete area visually segregated from adjoining areas and with a strong boundaries provided by hedgerows and mature trees. The landscape of the area is not distinctive and some elements are in decline.'*

*'The local topography provides enclosure for the historic hamlets of Upper Weald, Middle Weald and Lower Weald although they are still vulnerable to change from development through coalescence. Create new woodland belts and reinforce existing hedgerows to give a strong landscape framework which will reinforce visual containment of the villages and maintain a sense of separation between the villages and the settlement edge of Milton Keynes.'*

4.2.27 A low sensitivity rating is defined in Table 2 of the assessment as:

*'Absence of topographical variety. Flat or indistinct landform able to accommodate development Residential development could be accommodated without affecting key characteristics and/or values in the landscape. Proposals must follow the guidance on siting.'*

### **Draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050: Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation (2024)**

4.2.28 The draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050, if or when adopted, will form the new Local Plan for Milton Keynes, replacing Plan:MK (2019). The draft Local Plan is currently in the 'Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation' stage, and the final draft will be consulted upon in early 2025. Draft policies of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development are set out below:

4.2.29 Draft Policy CEA8: Provision and protection of accessible open space, states:

‘...’

- A. *New residential development proposals must provide new open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches and/or provide contributions towards improving existing open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches...*
- B. *The provision, management and maintenance of open spaces and formal outdoor playing pitches must be an integral part of the new residential development proposals where provision is required...*

...’

4.2.30 Draft Policy CEA11: Urban greening, trees and woodland, states:

- A. *‘All new development proposals must meet the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) standard to achieve or assist in maintaining or reaching an average green cover of 40% in the applicable residential neighbourhood.*
- B. *All new development proposals must not result in the net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods.*
- C. *All new major development proposals must meet the core Urban Greening Factor (UGF) Target Score outlined in the Urban Greening Factor Standard...*

*Urban tree canopy cover*

- D. *All new residential and commercial development proposals within defined settlement boundaries must meet the urban tree canopy cover standard of at least 19%.*
- E. *Development proposals resulting in the creation of new residential or commercial floorspace, or hard surfaces, must seek to retain existing landscape features and trees unless it can be demonstrated that replacement tree planting elsewhere on the site would be preferable.*

*Protection and creation of woodland*

- F. *All new development proposals must protect and, where possible, enhance existing woodland within the site.*
- G. *Major residential development proposals must contribute to meeting the Woodland Trust’s Woodlands Access Standard in line with the Milton Keynes Nature, Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, through either provision on site or offsite contributions that:*
  - 1. *Increases the provision of accessible woodland that is greater than two hectares in size within 500 metres of the proposed development site; and/or*

2. *Increases provision of accessible woodland that is greater than 0 hectares in size within 4 kilometres of the proposed development site.'*

4.2.31 Draft Policy CEA12: Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character/Special Landscape Areas, states:

*'Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character*

- A. *"Development proposals must demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and, where possible, enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures. Proposals should take into account:*
  1. *The key natural and man-made characteristics and features that contribute towards the landscape character and its quality;*
  2. *The historic setting and structure of the villages and hamlets;*
  3. *Important views, including local landmarks; and*
  4. *The tranquillity of the area and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*
- B. *Where a site-specific landscape and visual impact assessment is required as part of a planning application, this must be prepared in accordance with the standard method set out in Landscape Institute guidance.*

*Special Landscape Areas*

- A. *Development affecting Special Landscape Areas, as defined on the Policies Map, will only be permitted where it:*
  1. *Conserves and, where possible, enhances the special character and key landscape qualities of the area;*
  2. *Safeguards important views, features and landmarks;*
  3. *Safeguards the tranquillity of the area; and*
  4. *Retains and, where possible, improves public access to the countryside.*
- B. *Development proposals will be expected to incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate landscape and visual impacts. Proposals should have regard to the Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment and the Statements of Significance for each of the Special Landscape Areas, and any other relevant landscape and visual assessments or studies.*
- C. *A site-specific landscape and visual impact assessment will be required for development within Special Landscape Areas to show how the proposed change will conserve and enhance the special character and qualities of the landscape, including conservation and protection of valued views.'*

4.2.32 The evidence base for the Draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050 includes a green and blue infrastructure study and a review of valued landscape designations, as detailed below. The updated landscape character assessment also forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and is referenced in the landscape character section of this report.

***Milton Keynes Nature Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023)***

4.2.33 Location Specific actions in the NGBI Strategy are presented in Table and Figure 8.1 of the report identifies the following action of relevance to the Site, as follows:

*‘Maintain and enhance the potential green corridor to prevent fragmentation along the western flank of Milton Keynes, focused on the North Bucks Way and providing a link from the Hazeley Wood area to connect with Stony Stratford.’*

4.2.34 Section 20 of the strategy identifies the Location of Future Country Parks, and states the following of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development:

*‘Land west of the city  
MKCC Open Space Assessment (unpublished draft, 2023) identifies a potential location for a country park to the west of the city. There exists an area of countryside to the west of the city (and within the Milton Keynes local authority boundary) comprising mostly fields of improved grassland and cultivated/disturbed land, divided with hedgerows and trees. This area stretches from Stony Stratford in the north to Oakhill Wood (Ancient Woodland) in the south. This area includes the villages of Lower Weald and Upper Weald. A network of PRow (footpaths and bridleways) cross through this area. This area is mostly located within 2km from areas of existing Wider Neighbourhood Greenspace.’*

4.2.35 Appendix D: The context for Green Infrastructure in Milton Keynes states that “the original landscape design policy, devised in 1971, had four objectives:

- *‘To achieve a visual character consistent with the vegetation of lowland UK*
- *To create species zones in the city to create a sense of place and for zones to have comprehensible boundaries aiding navigation through the zones*
- *To achieve a plant mixture within each zone which is capable of responding to the full range of situations that might arise, as envisaged at the time*
- *To make it possible to forecast plant requirements with reasonable accuracy for years to come.’*

4.2.36 The appendix also states that ‘the city aspires to be a unique ‘City in a Forest’ with 40% green space and more biodiversity in the modern city than was found in the agricultural land it replaced’.

***Valued Landscapes Policy Review (2022)***

4.2.37 The Valued Landscapes Policy review was conducted in 2022 to ‘review the effectiveness of current landscape policy in relation to valued landscapes within the borough, and to provide recommendations towards new policies which would allow for the protection of these valued landscapes.’ Local landscape designations were first recognised in 1995 by Milton Keynes Local Plan as ‘Areas of Attractive Landscape’ (AAL). They were supported in Local Plan policy until the designation was dropped in the 2019 Local Plan. The Review of Local Landscape

Designations (2024) states the following regarding the Council's decision not to retain the AAL Policy in the 2019 Local Plan:

*'This was in line with government guidance at the time, which directed local authorities away from using local landscape designations to protect landscape towards a criteria-based approach to the assessment of the impact of development on landscape character (see para 2.1 above). MKC decided that the updated 2016 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)<sup>5</sup> could provide sufficient evidence by which development could be assessed. However, the 2016 LCA did not set out landscape qualities for each of the identified Landscape Character Types as part of the evaluation stage of the assessment, as suggested in later LI guidance published in 2021 (see para 1.4). This has subsequently been addressed in the current Milton Keynes LCA (2022).'*

- 4.2.38 The review drew upon previous planning decisions to assess the effectiveness of the former AAL designation in upholding Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011 Policy S11 VS the landscape character approach in upholding Policy NE5L Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character, of Plan: MK (2016-2031). From this, recommendations were made on the council's future approach to local landscape designations.
- 4.2.39 It should, however, be noted that conclusions drawn in several of the cases note the effectiveness of the local landscape designation in 'protecting the landscape from development'. Whilst in these cases, the SLA designation prevented development, protecting the landscape from development was not mentioned in the relevant Policy S11 of the Milton Keynes Local Plan (2016) in place at that time, which stated:

*'Within these areas, development should:*

- i. Not damage the special character of the areas*
- ii. Enhance important landscape features where possible*
- iii. Protect and enhance features of nature conservation value*
- iv. Retain and improve public access and opportunities for countryside recreation.'*

- 4.2.40 The policy does not state that development should not take place within an AAL; therefore, the fact that a Site was not developed cannot be used to conclude the effectiveness of the policy.
- 4.2.41 The recommended option to the council was *"creating a new local landscape designation broadly based on the existing evidence from the 1999 LDA study. This should be developed with reference to the 2022 landscape character assessment"*. The review also gave input to the suggested policy wording to be included in the Milton Keynes Local Plan. The wording used in the Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Plan for Consultation (2024) is not the same as the suggested wording but does reflect its principles.

#### ***Milton Keynes Review of Local Landscape Designations (2024)***

- 4.2.42 LUC undertook a review of the existing local landscape designations in 2024. The scope of the assessment sought to provide recommendations on landscapes that could merit local landscape designation. The merit of each LCA identified in the 2022 LCA was considered against the following local landscape designation criteria: natural heritage, cultural heritage, recreation, landscape quality (condition and intactness), local distinctiveness, perceptual and scenic and functional.

4.2.43 The Review of Local Landscape Designations section outlines how LCA 4b, performs against the local landscape designation criteria. The following extracts are of relevance to the Site:

- *'Natural heritage: An area with important natural features... Smaller linear woodlands and riparian woodland along the Calverton Brook also provide ecological interest. Traditional orchards and unimproved species-rich calcareous grassland, designated as an LWS, are surviving semi-natural habitats. These provide evidence of ecological interest which contributes positively to landscape character.*
- *Cultural heritage: A landscape with important cultural features. The historic field pattern was formed by Parliamentary enclosure, which was further sub-divided in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some ridge and furrow field patterns are still evident within the landscape. Historic hamlets, designated as a Conservation Area, contain a number of listed buildings... These features provide evidence of cultural interest which contributes positively to landscape character...*
- *Recreation: The Milton Keynes Boundary Walk provides the main public access through the landscape, and local public rights of way connect to the small settlements and Milton Keynes city.*
- *Landscape quality (condition and intactness): Hedgerows are in mixed condition, some reinforcement by post and wire fencing. Conversion of pasture to horse grazing has created a slightly unmanaged character in parts. Electricity pylons are the main detracting features in the landscape.*
- *Local distinctiveness: ...The rural character of the plateau contrasts with the built-up area of Milton Keynes city, a contrast which makes this area distinctive.*
- *Perceptual and scenic: This is a rural landscape, which retains a strong separation from Milton Keynes city, although road noise from the A5 reduces tranquillity. Enclosure along the Calverton Brook contrasts with extensive views across the Aylesbury Vale to the west and wooded horizons to the north, contributing to a strong visual character.'*

4.2.44 In Table 3.11 of the assessment, the extent to which LCA 4b meets the criterion states: 'Take forward'.

4.2.45 The assessment of each LCA against the local landscape designation criteria was used to help inform the location and extent of the candidate Special Landscape Areas. This evidence resulted in the entirety of LCA 4b being included within the Calverton Clay Plateau candidate SLA. The majority of the Site lies within the Calverton Clay Plateau candidate SLA; however, the northern corner of Parcel A is not included in this draft designation. This Candidate SLA does not correspond with a former AAL.

#### **Candidate Calverton Clay Plateau SLA Statement of Significance**

4.2.46 The Statement of Significance for the Candidate Calverton Clay Plateau SLA includes the following points of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development.

4.2.47 The rationale for including the land within LCA 4b within the SLA designation is identified within the 'extent of area' section as the following:

*‘The candidate SLA encompasses the undulating clay plateau in the west of the Borough and is contiguous with a two areas of local landscape designation in Buckinghamshire to the west and south west.’*

4.2.1 The summary of special landscape qualities for the Calverton Clay Plateau Candidate SLA comprises:

- *‘The open, elevated plateau, with an intact agricultural character, has a strong sense of place and provides a rural setting to Milton Keynes city.’*
- *Small deciduous woodland copses, trees and hedgerows support biodiversity, form part of an important green infrastructure network and create a strong landscape structure.*
- *Small streams cross the area providing topographic and ecological interest and contributing to green infrastructure.*
- *Historic estates and small villages with a strong local vernacular provide a connection to history, cultural identity and aesthetic value. There are historic links to the Whaddon Chase forest and parkland in the south.*
- *The open character of the plateau allows long-distance views from the ridges to the surrounding landscapes both within and outside of Milton Keynes and contributes to a strong visual character.*
- *The network of Public Rights of Way, including the promoted Milton Keynes Boundary Walk, connects the settlements and provides recreational access through the landscape from Milton Keynes city.’*

4.2.2 The full evaluation of the Candidate Calverton Clay Plateau SLA states the following of relevance to the Site in relation to each of the SLA assessment criteria:

*‘Natural heritage qualities: The area has important natural heritage features. Oakhill Wood in the south is an important area of woodland, recorded as ancient woodland (although largely replanted), which is part of the North Bucks Way Wildlife Corridor, and forms part of the wider green infrastructure network. Smaller linear woodlands, riparian woodland and meadows along the Calverton Brook also provide ecological interest. Priority habitat traditional orchard and unimproved species-rich calcareous grassland, designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) at Old Limestone Quarry, are surviving semi-natural habitats. These provide evidence of ecological interest which contribute positively to landscape character, where they occur.*

*Cultural heritage qualities: The area has considerable heritage interest. The historic field pattern was formed by Parliamentary enclosure, which was further sub-divided in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some ridge and furrow field patterns are still evident within the landscape.*

*Historic hamlets at Lower Weald, Calverton and Upper Weald contain a number of listed buildings and are designated as part of the Calverton Conservation Area. A distinctive local vernacular of limestone also contributes to the cultural interest of the landscape. There is a distinctive parkland landscape around Calverton House.*

...

*These features all provide evidence of cultural interest which contribute positively to landscape character. There are no known associations with notable people, events or the arts.*

*Recreation value: Recreational access is good across the area. The Milton Keynes Boundary Walk is the main public access through the landscape and provides important recreational links into the countryside from Milton Keynes city. The North Bucks Way also crosses the south-east of the area.*

*Landscape quality (condition and intactness): The rural landscape is generally in good condition with some local detractors. The parkland at Calverton House is in good condition, with parkland features such as mature trees in pasture. Hedgerows across the landscape are generally in good condition, with a strong network of hedgerow trees. However, there has been some reinforcement by post and wire fencing, and some localised loss of hedgerows. Wire fencing along the Calverton Brook is sometimes unsightly. Conversion of pasture to horse grazing has created a slightly unmanaged character in parts.*

*Electricity pylons between Calverton and Upper Weald are the main detracting features in the landscape. ...*

*Local distinctiveness: The plateau topography, which falls gently west into Buckinghamshire, is incised by the Calverton Brook forming a steep sided valley in the centre of the LCA, which contributes positively to the landscape. The parkland character around Calverton and Lower Weald provides a sense of place. The vernacular of brick and limestone also contributes to local character. The landscape forms a strong rural setting to Milton Keynes city, especially the recently constructed Western Expansion Area.*

*Perceptual and scenic: This is a rural landscape, which retains a strong sense of separation from Milton Keynes city which lies to the east. There is also a sense of tranquillity, despite recent development of the Western Expansion Area. The A5 to the east and A422 to the north are occasionally audibly intrusive.*

*Settlement is concentrated in historic villages located along a single local road resulting in a traditional rural character. Enclosure along the Calverton Brook contrasts with the open character on higher ground in the north and south which enables extensive views across the Aylesbury Vale to the west and wooded horizons to the north. This contributes to a strong visual character.*

*Functional: The small streams, woodlands and hedgerows form part of the healthy functioning of the landscape, and the multifunctional green infrastructure network.'*

4.2.3 Management guidelines for the Candidate Calverton Clay Plateau SLA of relevance to the Site and the Proposed Development are as follows:

*'Protect*

- *Protect and enhance the historic character of the landscape, including historic parkland at Calverton House and ridge and furrow earthworks under existing pasture.*
- *Conserve the distinctive vernacular of historic buildings and their rural settings, including within the Calverton Conservation Areas. Ensure key views within and from the villages referenced in the Conservation Area Appraisal are retained.*

- *Conserve the long views and intervisibility within the historic Whaddon Chase landscape between the Calverton Plateau and Buckinghamshire.*
- *Retain framed views to local landmark buildings, including the church tower at Calverton.*
- ...
- *Conserve and enhance the biodiversity interest of wetland habitats and watercourses. Ensure a whole valley approach is taken, identifying opportunities for green infrastructure enhancement.*
- *Manage and enhance floodplain meadows. Protect existing meadows from ploughing, grassland improvement or further mineral extraction.*
- *Protect and restore boundary hedges by coppicing, laying and gapping up to improve the network of linkages between habitats.*
- *Protect the valued recreational use of the rural landscape through PRow, exploring further opportunities for informal access and enjoyment.*
- *Conserve the open character of the landscape.*
- ...

#### *Plan*

- *Promote the introduction of new hedges following roads, PRow and historic boundaries. Plant individual hedgerow trees to provide replacement for mature and over mature stock.*
- *Plan to increase the extent of native deciduous woodland and tree cover, particularly to link existing small woodlands, copses and hedgerows. Use locally occurring, climate resilient species.*
- *Plan for climate change, researching appropriate species mixes and designing woodland to minimise damage as a result of increased storms.*
- *Retain the characteristic settlement pattern of small historic ridgetop villages, avoiding out of scale residential developments.*
- *Avoid the introduction of large-scale elements, or development which breaches the ridge along the urban edge of Milton Keynes, which would have a visual impact over a wide distance.*
- *Encourage sensitive management of new development, ensuring the existing historic villages retain a sense of separation from new development on the edge of Milton Keynes city.*
- *Ensure a strong landscape structure to the adjacent parkland areas within the Western Expansion Area, providing a landscape buffer to soften the impact of residential areas on adjacent landscapes.*
- *Reference the pattern of local buildings materials and local identity in any new development or boundary treatments.'*
- ...

### **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2024)**

- 4.2.4 In the 2024 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), the Site is identified as 110007 'Land west of western expansion area, Calverton Valley park', which states the following regarding the suitability of the Site for housing:

*'Partially Suitable - northern section of the site deemed unsuitable as it has no suitable access point either from the Calverton Road or the WEA. Furthermore, the western half of the northern part of the site also forms part of the linear park land associated with the WEA, which is needed to fulfil the recreation open space and biodiversity mitigation calculations for development of the western expansion areas. Overlapping these areas would be double counting. Site falls within the Calverton Clay Plateau Special Landscape Area designation which will require further consideration and may further limit the suitability of the site, whilst need to avoid coalescence between the urban area of MK and Upper Weald may have also have an impact.'*

- 4.2.5 Under the Constraints Summary section, the assessment states:

*'remaining suitable area of the site will need to be considered in light of potential special landscape area designation.'*

- 4.2.6 The Overcoming Constraints section of the assessment states:

*'A positive allocation of the site would be required through the new Local Plan or via a Neighbourhood Plan to overcome the existing open countryside designation and the impacts on the special landscape area designation would need further consideration to see if site is suitable.'*

## **4.3 Local**

### **Neighbourhood Planning**

- 4.3.1 The Site does not lie within or adjacent to an area covered by a Neighbourhood Plan.

## 5 Site Appraisal

### 5.1 Site Appraisal

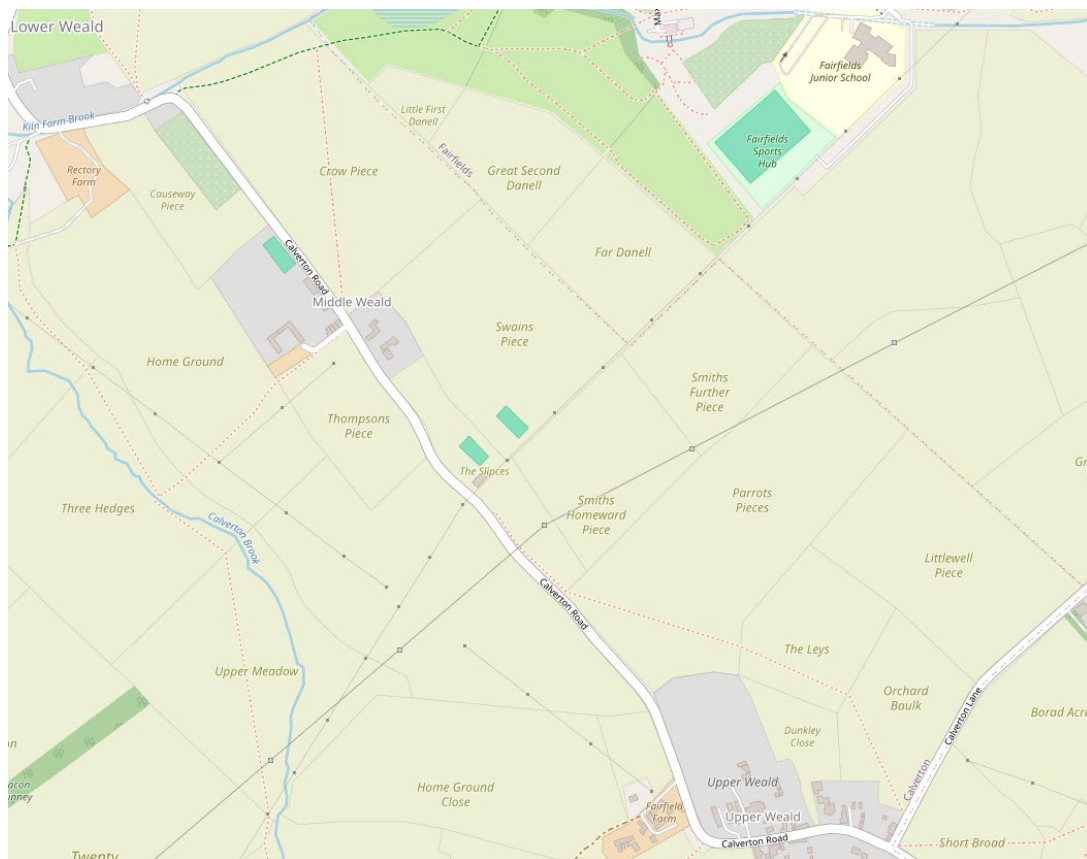
- 5.1.1 The Site is separated into two parcels A (comprising approximately 16.2 Ha) to the north-west; and B (comprising approximately 23.4 Ha), to the south-east, incorporating agricultural fields numbered Fields 1-8, as shown in **Figure 4** and **Site Appraisal Photographs A-I**.

#### Landform and Hydrology

- 5.1.2 Both parcels of the Site lie on the plateau landform north-east of the Calverton Brook valley. The landform is gently sloping, falling into a small tributary valley of the Calverton Brook, Kiln Farm Brook, which flows to the north of the Site, between the Site and the recently developed Fairfields neighbourhood. The brook flows through a heavily engineered check dam and basin, before joining Calverton Brook at Lower Weald. The Site slopes gently down from approximately 105m AOD on the eastern boundary of Parcel B to approximately 75m AOD in the north-western corner of Parcel A. Kiln Farm Brook provides a degree of separation from residential development in Fairfields.

#### Land Use

- 5.1.3 The Site comprises some areas of pasture, including ridge and furrow in the north-west of Parcel A (**Site Appraisal Photographs A, B and D**); and arable land (**Site Appraisal Photographs C and E-I**). Fields in the Site and its vicinity are named, as shown in the below extract Open Street Map extract (**Image 2**).



**Image 2:** Open Street Map extract showing field names (© OpenStreetMap, available under the Open Database License).

- 5.1.4 Parcel A has an exposed edge along its north-eastern boundary (**Site Appraisal Photographs B and C**), which increases the influence of existing development at Fairfield on this part of the Site, an influence accentuated by the fact that the landform of Fields F2 and 3 slopes towards this development.

### Infrastructure

- 5.1.5 Calverton Road lies on the edge of the plateau landform. Beyond this road to the south-west, there is a marked change in local character to a more rural valley landscape where settlement is sparse, and small strips and blocks of woodland emerge.
- 5.1.6 Calverton Road lies immediately south of the two parcels, parallel to the Calverton Brook valley landform and the orientation of the main roadways within Milton Keys on a north-west south-east trajectory. Calverton Lane, which flanks the south-eastern boundary of Parcel B, is perpendicular to and connects Calverton Road and Watling Street.
- 5.1.7 A line of overhead cables and pylons traverses the landscape between the two parcels.

### Settlement

- 5.1.8 There is no existing built form within either parcel of the Site.
- 5.1.9 Calverton comprises three distinct, small settlements along the southern and south-western Site boundaries: Lower Weald, Middle Weald and Upper Weald. The largest of these settlements is Lower Weald, situated west of Parcel A. Lower Weald has a more distinct historic character, protected by the Conservation Area it resides in. Materials include white/cream render, painted brick, hung tiles and stone. Roofs are tiled or, in some cases, thatched. From field F1 in Parcel A, there is a strong visual relationship with Lower Weald, as shown in **Site Appraisal Photograph A**.
- 5.1.10 Middle Weald lies directly south-west of Parcel A and includes a cluster of roadside dwellings and some set back in private gardens (**Site Appraisal Photograph D**).
- 5.1.11 Upper Weald, located south of Parcel B, is also historic, comprising several listed buildings with old brickwork and roofs, sometimes thatched. Plots are generally spacious, including large back gardens adjoining the Site to the north. The south-eastern edge of Upper Weald is visible from Parcel B, as shown in **Site Appraisal Photograph H**.
- 5.1.12 Fairfield lies approximately 200m to the north-east of the Site, separated by an area of open space along the Kiln Farm Brook valley. Whitehouse to the north-east of the Site has been partially built-out. Fairfield and Whitehouse are typical residential developments to the north-west of the Sites, formed of 1 to 4-storey semi-detached and detached properties and flats. Built form is generally dense (**Site Appraisal Photographs B and D**). Land to the north-east of the parcels (between Fairfield and Whitehouse) also lies within the WEA. Once built-out this area will intensify the dense nature of surrounding settlement and reinforce the edge of settlement influences on the vicinity. There are views towards the recently developed settlement edge at Fairfield from Parcels A and B of the Site, as shown in **Site Appraisal Photographs B-D, F and I**.

### Activity, Cultural Associations and Connectivity

- 5.1.13 Numerous Public Rights of Way (PRoW) traverse the local area, although only two PRoW pass through the Site. PRoW 046 traverses Parcel A, extending north from Middle Weald; and a bridleway (PRoW 041) traverses the north-western part of Field F1, extending into accessible land in the urban area to the north of the Site. PRoW 047 crosses Parcel B from Calverton Road at the western corner of the parcel, broadly following the southern Site boundary before meeting Calverton Lane to the east.

### Pattern/Texture/Line/Scale/Enclosure

- 5.1.14 The Site includes rectilinear field patterns of a relatively small scale. Hedgerows are a common feature in the landscape, delineating field boundaries. Fields in the valley landscape to the south-west are larger and afford more open views.
- 5.1.15 The gentle slope north in Parcel B allows long-distance views out to the north over enclosing hedgerows. In Parcel A, the gentle slope allows views over the valley vegetation to Fairfields (**Site Appraisal Photographs G-I and B-D**).

### Green Infrastructure

- 5.1.16 A network of hedgerows within the Site and surrounding area links to adjacent fields bounded by hedgerows. Hedgerow trees form part of the Site boundaries in some areas (**Site Appraisal Photographs A, D, E-I**). A belt of mature trees follows parts of the north-eastern boundary of Field F1, as shown in **Site Appraisal Photographs A & D**.
- 5.1.17 There is limited woodland vegetation amid the field pattern in the vicinity of the Site. In the north-east of the Calverton Brook valley, the edge of the plateau is accentuated by strongly vegetated field boundaries along Calverton Road and surrounding Upper Weald.
- 5.1.18 There is a small pond on the western edge of Parcel A (As shown in **Site Appraisal Photographs A & D**), a pond at the southern Site boundary of Parcel B, and a drain along the western edge running to the centre. A tributary of the River Great Ouse runs its course south of the Sites.
- 5.1.19 A belt of woodland planting has been introduced in the open space north of F1 and F2 of the Site, comprising mostly dense understorey species such as dog rose, blackthorn, red current, birch and hazel.

### Tranquillity

- 5.1.20 This is limited on the plateau owing to the extensive urban infrastructure, pylons, floodlit sports and close proximity of built development (**Site Appraisal Photographs B, C and D**). There is some sense of tranquillity in the valley landform to the south-west, where settlement and infrastructure impact the landscape less.

## 6 Visual Appraisal

- 6.1.1 A set of representative areas likely to obtain views towards the Site were identified from the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) shown in **Figure 5**. The ZTV illustrates areas from which a viewer would potentially obtain views of built form within the Site (assumed at 10m height for the purposes of this exercise), based on existing landform but not accounting for existing barrier features such as woodland and built form.
- 6.1.2 Areas highlighted in the ZTV as being from where views of built form within the Site may be obtained were then visited in a visual appraisal exercise undertaken in September 2024 to check the actual visibility of the Site, accounting for localised screening from vegetation and built form, as relevant. Of the photographs taken from these locations, 13 were selected as **Site Context Photographs**. The location of these viewpoints is shown in **Figure 6**, along with indications of the degree of visibility of the Site from the surrounding area. From the visual appraisal exercise, it is noted that elements screening the Site are typically landform, built form and substantial structural vegetation (woodland blocks and belts). A summary of the visual appraisal is provided below.
- 6.1.3 From open space off Apollo Avenue in Fairfield, partial views of the gently sloping, grass field of F3 (Parcel A) are obtained over low-level, gappy field boundaries adjoining existing allotments (**Site Context Photograph 1**).
- 6.1.4 There is partial visibility of Field F1 from the path south of Balbina Way/Pompeii Grove, Fairfield, as the northern boundary of Field F2 is devoid of substantial vegetation, and filtered views are obtained through the boundary between Fields F1 and F2 (**Site Context Photograph 2**). These views are experienced in the context of extensive residential development in Fairfield. On the southern edge of Fairfield, there are glimpsed partial views into Parcel A, where hedgerow boundaries allow. This includes views across drainage infrastructure to F1 from south of Gladius Grove (**Site Context Photograph 3**). The north-western boundary of Field F1 is set in the Kiln Farm Brook stream corridor, allowing open views of Field F1 from PRoW FP039 (**Site Context Photograph 4**). A small part of F2 can also be seen in **Site Context Photograph 4** due to the lack of vegetation along the northern Site boundary of Parcel A. In **Site Context Photograph 4** residential development at Lower Weald, Middle Weald and Fairfield is perceptible to either side.
- 6.1.5 On the western flank of the Calverton Brook valley, the view from PRoW FP017 includes residential development at Fairfield in the distant background (**Site Context Photograph 5**). The Site is not visible from here, being screened by intervening vegetation, fields and built form. Similarly, the Site is not visible in summer conditions in **Site Context Photograph 6** from PRoW 018 further south. In these views, the tree-lined horizon along the edge of the plateau largely screens onward views. However, Fairfield is visible in the distance, and bright colours of built form in Lower and Middle Weald are prominent. Further south, in **Site Context Photograph 7** from PRoW FP018 the Site is largely screened by vegetation, although the western edge of Field F6 is visible. Industrial buildings are visible along the skyline. There are no views into the Site from PRoW FP19 on the valley floor due to the intervening landform and vegetation, as shown in **Site Context Photograph 8**.
- 6.1.6 The south-western part of F6 is visible in a glimpsed view between woodland blocks from Calverton Road at the edge of Upper Weald (**Site Context Photograph 9**). Unlike from points further north along the road, near Lower Weald, the angle of view allows visibility over the roadside hedgerow. Trees and hedgerows along the north-western boundary of Field F6 are visible, obscuring any further views aside from the pylons beyond the north-western boundary of Parcel B.
- 6.1.7 The glimpsed, transient view from Calverton Lane from within Upper Weald (**Site Context Photograph 10**) shows the generally flat Field F8. Trees associated with rear garden plots obscure further views of the Site. There are views over the low hedgerow along Calverton

Lane into the Site and toward the gradual fall of land in the distance and development at Fairfield (represented by **Site Appraisal Photograph I**).

- 6.1.8 The Site is not visible in **Site Context Photograph 11**, from PRoW FP048 to the south-east of Calverton Lane, due to intervening vegetation along both sides of the roadway. Built form at Whitehouse is visible above the vegetation.
- 6.1.9 In long-distance views from the wider landscape, the Site is not readily visible in summer conditions from PRoW WHA/1/2 at a distance of 3km (**Site Context Photograph 12**). Above the rising terrain of the north-eastern flank of the Calverton Brook valley, development at Fairfield is perceptible in the distance.
- 6.1.10 In views from the south of Deanshanger (approximately 3km to the south-west of the Site), as shown in (**Site Context Photograph 13**), there are distant views toward the Site and parts of the Calverton settlements, albeit intervening landform and vegetation, notably along the upper valley slopes at Calverton Road, screens the majority of views to fields within the Site.
- 6.1.11 At a distance of 4km from PRoW RH/048 to the north of Deanshanger (**Site Context Photograph 14**) the Site can barely be perceived amid the network of vegetation. Rural character is evident in the right-hand side of this view above Deanshanger, in the form of undulating hills and vegetated field patterns. To the left, built development within Milton Keynes forms much of the skyline.

## 7 Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints

7.1.1 On the basis of the above analysis and with reference to published character assessments and associated guidelines, it is considered that the Site has potential in landscape and visual terms for substantial development, subject to a sensitive and sympathetic approach. This is also the conclusion reached in the MK Futures 2050 strategy and the evidence base on which it relies. A number of strategic landscape and visual opportunities and constraints are set out below.

### 7.2 Site-wide Principles

7.2.1 The Site, whilst currently open and comprising agricultural land, lies in an area that is increasingly subject to urbanising influences, as noted in published character assessment and sensitivity studies. Contrary to the commentary for LCA 4b, the vicinity of the Site does not retain a 'strong sense of separation from Milton Keynes city', as set out above.

7.2.2 The western edge of the city of Milton Keynes is situated on the plateau. The upper extent of the valley landform demarks a clear transition point in character between the plateau influenced by existing and ongoing development in Milton Keynes; and the Calverton Brook valley, which is a distinctive landform, strongly rural in character and provides a robust physical containment to the city. The transition in landform is accentuated by the Calverton Road corridor, flanked by vegetation and the linear settlement that follows the route.

7.2.3 Therefore, this landform transition marks a logical edge to the City of Milton Keynes, providing the same function as the more pronounced Shenley Ridge to the south-east (which is also part of the upper Calverton Brook valley slope).

7.2.4 Given that the existing ongoing expansion of Milton Keynes towards the plateau edge, continuing to the south-east of the Site, is perceptible from the wider landscape beyond the valley to the south-west, further expansion towards the plateau edge, in the vicinity of the Site, would result in minimal additional influence on the wider undeveloped landscape. This can in any case be mitigated by reinforcement of the existing pattern of vegetation at the point of landform transition which provides effective containment and partial screening of the existing urban edge.

7.2.5 The Site lies to the south-west of Watling Street Roman road, the roadway which has part-informed the alignment of the loose grid pattern of Milton Keynes. Settlement extensions in the Site vicinity have broadly followed the grid city pattern, extended from the alignment of Watling Street which forms a logical basis for expansion. The valley landform and route of Calverton Road, in addition to local field patterns, coincide with the orientation of the grid. Therefore, the development of the Site could be logically integrated into the existing pattern of the city as well as aligning with existing patterns in the landscape.

7.2.6 The strong network of dense hedgerow boundaries in the Site vicinity, with potential to be strengthened and enhanced, including through the introduction of canopy trees, could be utilised to provide an integrating framework for the proposed built form, which would further respond to Milton Keynes' grid pattern.

7.2.7 The use of locally characteristic building materials, including brick and limestone in line with character assessment and SLA recommendations, should be considered.

7.2.8 Over and above these proposed landscape and visual development principles, there is a need to provide positive management of existing and proposed landscape features, including the potential for community involvement in this, in the form of community gardens, orchards and woodlands. As part of a multi-functional green infrastructure, provision should also be

considered for educational use of a range of natural habitats including involvement in their management.

## **Parcel A**

### **Field 1 (Crow Piece and Little First Danell):**

- 7.2.9 This part of the Site extends onto the landform sloping north-west towards the Kiln Farm Brook as it meets the Calverton Brook at Lower Weald; and therefore opens out towards the wider landscape as it turns towards the Calverton Brook valley.
- 7.2.10 Furthermore, this part of the Site has a strong visual relationship with and forms part of the rural setting of Middle and Lower Weald. It also maintains the sense of separation between Lower Weald and the urban edge of Milton Keynes.
- 7.2.11 There is evidence of ridge and furrow land use here identified as locally characteristic and to be protected within the Milton Keynes character assessment.
- 7.2.12 For these reasons, built development should be avoided in this part of the Site.
- 7.2.13 By leaving this part of the Site undeveloped, there is the opportunity to extend the existing open space of the Kiln Farm Brook around the landform towards the Calverton Brook valley, emulating the character of linear parks present elsewhere in the city and providing a continuous green and blue infrastructure recreational route and space, connecting the city to the wider undeveloped landscape.
- 7.2.14 There are opportunities to retain views of the church in Calverton from this field, in line with published character guidance.
- 7.2.15 There is an opportunity to incorporate SUDS features in lower-lying parts of this field, thereby strengthening the landform legibility and sense of place.

### **Fields 2 and 3 (Great Second Danell and Far Danell):**

- 7.2.16 The landform of these fields slopes north towards Kiln Farm Brook, which means that this part of the Site has a visual relationship with existing development at Fairfield, on the opposite valley slope, rather than with the wider landscape.
- 7.2.17 There are numerous examples in Milton Keynes of where the urban area has extended either side of an undeveloped valley landform. Therefore, development of this part of the Site could form part of a logical expansion of the city of Milton Keynes by flanking a watercourse corridor to form an urban linear park.

## **Parcel B**

- 7.2.18 This area of the Site lies adjacent to the Western Expansion Area. As such, development of this part of the Site would have a strong physical and perceptual connection to the city.

### **Field F6 (Parrots Pieces (southern area):**

- 7.2.19 The landform of this field slopes to the south-west towards the wider landscape of the Calverton Brook valley. The proposed built form should avoid this lower-lying part of the Site, formed of the side valley that contains the northern edge of Upper Weald. By retaining this area for the Site as open space, there will be the opportunity to retain the rural setting of PRoW 047 passing through this part of the Site, long-distance frame views to the north from this part of the Site and a sense of separation from Upper Weald.

7.2.20 Built form could, however, be accommodated in the north-east of this field, where the landform does not slope so markedly towards the wider landscape, subject of planting that would reflect the containment of built form in Upper Weald from the wider landscape by vegetation.

7.2.21 There is an opportunity to incorporate SUDS features in the lower-lying southern parts of this field, thereby strengthening the landform legibility.

**Fields 4, 5, 7 and 8 (Parrots Pieces (northern)), Littlewell Piece, The Leys and Orchard Baulk):**

7.2.22 These fields are more obviously situated on the gently sloping plateau. The more even landform and dense substantial hedgerow boundaries create a sense of visual enclosure in this part of the Site, facilitating the sensitive integration of built development into this part of the Site.

7.2.23 Built form should maintain a set-back from the settlement edge of Upper Weald, to maintain a physical separation from the village and a rural setting to PRoW 047, reinforcing the perception of a distinct character of the hamlet already provided through vegetated enclosure and long back gardens/paddocks.

7.2.24 In the south of Field F8, the built form should be set back from the Site boundary to maintain a robust sense of separation from Upper Weald. The introduction of a woodland copse on the south-eastern corner of this area would also help to create a visual and character separation between the proposed development and Upper Weald; softening the visual influence of the proposed development when moving along Calverton Lane; and introducing a locally characteristic landscape feature. Further planting in Field F8, notably along the southern edge of the space, adjoining the PROW corridor, could also include areas of orchard tree planting as its name 'Orchard Baulk' indicates it was at one point an area in which orchards were characteristic.

7.2.25 Introduce a belt of woodland planting along the south-eastern edge of Field F8, to visually enclose the Proposed Development and provide a strong sense of transition between the rural hamlet of Upper Weald and the expanded Milton Keynes. This should vary to a belt of canopy trees on the boundary of Field F5 to provide a more formal, domesticated character, as well as a setting for potential site access from the roadway of Calverton Lane.

7.2.26 Seek to conserve long-distance views to the north/north-west where present in this part of the Site through careful placement of built form away from the southern edge and the orientation of streets to frame views.

## 8 Response to Candidate SLA Evidence Base

### 8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 This commentary responds to published documents, primarily examining the extent to which the Candidate SLA designation in the vicinity of the Site and its associated policy are needed. The omission of reference to any part of the 'Milton Keynes Review of Local Landscape Designations' and/or 'Milton Keynes Valued Landscapes Policy Review' should not be interpreted as agreement with it.

### 8.2 Need for Designation and Supporting Policy

- 8.2.1 The Valued Landscapes Policy Review considered previous planning decisions to assess the effectiveness of the former Area of Attractive Landscape (AAL) designation in upholding Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011 Policy S11, versus the landscape character approach in upholding Policy NE5L Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character of Plan: MK (2016-2031). From this, recommendations were made on the council's future approach to local landscape designations.
- 8.2.2 It should, however, be noted that the previous Policy S11 of the Milton Keynes Local Plan 2001-2011, which underpinned the then AAL designation, stated:
- ‘Within these areas, *development* should:
- *Not damage the special character of the areas*
  - *Enhance important landscape features where possible*
  - *Protect and enhance features of nature conservation value*
  - *Retain and improve public access and opportunities for countryside recreation.*
- 8.2.3 It is clear that the test of the ‘effectiveness’ of the policy was not that development be prevented by default but that development if it took place, be accommodated appropriately within the landscape (mindful that there may be other significant reasons in the planning balance which affect whether or not development takes place. With the exception of National Landscapes, any one policy related to landscape cannot reasonably be expected to prevent development in any case if other benefits outweigh any harms to the landscape).
- 8.2.4 It is therefore erroneous in the Valued Landscapes Policy Review to have set the test of the effectiveness of the local landscape designation to be ‘protecting the landscape from development’. Whilst in the cases mentioned, the AAL designation prevented development, preventing development was not the object of Policy S11.
- 8.2.5 The policy does not state that development should not take place within an AAL; therefore, the simple fact that a proposal was not consented for development should not be used to conclude the effectiveness of the policy.
- 8.2.6 Valued Landscapes Policy Review Chapter 4, Paragraph 4.6 states:

*‘...local designation is a long established and well-regarded means of identifying areas with particular landscape value, as has been shown in some (but not all) of the appeals illustrated Chapter 3 above, such as the appeal at Eaton Leys which was successfully dismissed within AV (but not within MK) and the appeal at Linford Lakes which was dismissed by the*

*Inspector due to its location within both the Ouse Valley AAL and Ouse Valley Linear Park.'*

- 8.2.7 As well as being factually incorrect (there was no appeal in relation to land at Eaton Leys – as paragraph 3.11 on p.10 makes clear, the application was consented in Milton Keynes and withdrawn in Aylesbury Vale), this commentary highlights that the clear line of thinking within the document that the prevention of development is the measure of effectiveness of the former AAL designation.
- 8.2.8 Instead of this approach, the assessment should have looked at the design of proposed schemes and the extent to which they had conserved the special qualities of the AAL and if the design incorporated any features that would strengthen the character of these special qualities to determine the effectiveness of the policy in protecting valued landscapes. However, the LUC assessment did not provide any commentary on the landscape quality of any proposed development design within the AAL.
- 8.2.9 Three future approach options were provided in Chapter 4 of the Valued Landscapes Policy Review (2022), as follows: 'Option 1: Set out a criteria-based policy relating to information in the updated MK LCA 2022' (a landscape character-based approach without SLA designation), 'Option 2: Retain and refresh the existing AALs' and 'Option 3: commission a new local landscape designation study'. The Valued Landscapes Policy Review (2022) recommended Option 2 was followed, albeit the rationale for why this option was preferable was unclear. However, the council instead opted for 'Option 3' and commissioned a new local landscape designation study.
- 8.2.10 The resulting Review of Local Landscape Designations (2024) (RLLD) assesses the landscape on an LCA-level (as per the LCAs defined in the 2022 Landscape Character Assessment), evaluating the extent to which each area meets the AAL designation criteria. The review document utilises the information collected within the 2022 landscape character assessment to help identify the extent of the Candidate SLAs.
- 8.2.11 Neither part of draft Policy CEA12 seeks to prevent development, but instead relies on understanding key characteristics (a character-based approach) to consider how change can be managed.
- 8.2.12 In fact, the potential for landscape character improvements as set out in draft Policy CEA12 in the draft Local Plan is predicated on the policy enabling development which can deliver such changes, whilst also mitigating any harm arising from the development.
- 8.2.13 Given that a character-based approach is proposed to be used for land subject of SLA designation in any case, there is limited, if any, benefit in the underlying SLA designation relating to the second part of the policy.
- 8.2.14 To cover any specific features or characteristics of particular sensitivity, the limited additional detail in the RLLD could be incorporated into the LCA to provide further clarity on such points.

### **8.3 Calverton Plateau Candidate SLA**

- 8.3.1 As noted above, it is not considered that there is a need for an SLA designation, as a comprehensive character-based approach would suffice.
- 8.3.2 However, if the Council deemed the designation appropriate, consideration should be given to the extent of that designation.
- 8.3.3 The Candidate Calverton Plateau SLA is an entirely new designation. No part of the Candidate Calverton Plateau SLA designation area was previously designated as an AAL, as illustrated in Figure 4.23 of the RLLD.

- 8.3.4 The Candidate Calverton Plateau SLA designation covers the entirety of LCA 4b: Weald Undulating Clay Plateau.
- 8.3.5 The primary weakness in this Candidate SLA designation is the continued reference to it being a plateau landscape, including in SLA name. This appears to have been drawn from the Landscape Character assessment, which also identified this area as a plateau landform. Whilst the eastern part of LCA 4b and the SLA designation does lie on a plateau landscape, the majority of this character area is centred on the Calverton Brook valley, a clear valley landform as acknowledged in the 2022 Landscape Character Assessment which states: *'The plateau is incised by the Calverton Brook, a small tributary of the Ouse, which has created a steep sided valley in the centre of the LCA.'* In reality, there is a small area of plateau to the north-east of the valley, but the rest of the LCA and SLA is dominated by the valley of the Calverton Brook.
- 8.3.6 It is unclear why the emphasis of the SLA Special Qualities relates to *'the open elevated plateau'* rather than the Calverton Brook Valley landform, especially noting that within the full evaluation, the SLA states: *'The plateau topography, which falls gently west into Buckinghamshire, is incised by the Calverton Brook forming a steep sided valley in the centre of the LCA, which contributes positively to the landscape'*, which indicates that the 'special' part of the candidate SLA relates to the valley landform.
- 8.3.7 SLA Special qualities largely relate to features in the valley or on the valley slopes, including the woodlands, streams, historic estates, views (albeit from the upper valley slopes, not ridges) and the majority of the PRoW network in the area.
- 8.3.8 The SLA Statement of Significance notes the elements of local distinctiveness of the Calverton Brook valley which *'contributes positively to the landscape'* and the *'strong rural setting to Milton Keynes city'*. In reality, the landscape of the plateau to the north-east does not provide a strong rural setting given the influences of existing and emerging development which logically extends across the plateau. The key part of the Candidate SLA area is the point of landform transition, including the Weald hamlets of Calverton and the valley to the south-west.
- 8.3.9 The route of Calverton Road, flanked by vegetation and intermittent settlement, follows the plateau edge. As highlighted earlier in this appraisal, this combination of features is a clear marker of the transition in landscape character from an area of plateau landscape with a strong association with the city of Milton Keynes and the valley landscape associated Calverton Brook which has a more rural character.
- 8.3.10 For the above-stated reasons, it can therefore be concluded that if an SLA designation is adopted in policy, its extent should not include Parcel B or Fields F2 and F3 of Parcel A of the Site, which have a greater association with the plateau landform on which the adjacent edge of Milton Keynes is situated. In this scenario Field F1 could be included within the SLA designation.

## 8.4 Development within Candidate SLA

- 8.4.1 Even in the event that an SLA was adopted by the Council, including land within the Site, it is considered that the Site could be sensitively developed (as set out in section 7 above) to ensure the introduction of the Proposed Development retains the valued characteristics of the SLA, which are focused on the valley landform and associated characteristics to the south-west. As such, there is potential to *'incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate landscape and visual impacts'*, in accordance with draft Policy CEA12.
- 8.4.2 It is furthermore noted that a draft allocation as a Strategic City Extension area south of Milton Keynes lies entirely within a Candidate SLA, indicating in principle that the Council is comfortable that land within an SLA can be developed without harm to the valued characteristics of the SLA, which the Candidate SLA and allocation policies allow for.

- 8.4.3 The Proposed Development would respond in the following ways to the Special Qualities of the Candidate SLA:
- The Proposed Development will only influence a small area of the Candidate SLA and one where urbanising influences are already present, therefore the agricultural character of the majority of the area will be retained.
  - The Proposed Development would increase woodland cover and connectivity between the existing woodland resources, extending and linking these features.
  - The Proposed Development will accentuate the topographical interest of the Kiln Farm Brook by retaining an open setting to the brook with publicly accessible open space , with potential for SUDS features in this area to strengthen the landform legibility of this feature.
  - The Proposed Development will not inhibit long-distance views from elevated parts of this SLA at the plateau edge and in the wider landscape and provides potential for framed long-distance views out over the wider landscape.
  - The Proposed Development will provide additional recreational opportunities, including an expansive area of open space in the north-west that was previously private land connecting to the existing open space network at Fairfield.
- 8.4.4 Overall, it is considered that, whilst a change from undeveloped to developed land would take place within parts of the Site, this can be done in a sensitive way that would mitigate landscape and visual impacts and maintain the most important elements of the Candidate SLA.

## 8.5 Conclusions on Evidence Base

- 8.5.1 In conclusion, local landscape designations in Milton Keynes are unnecessary as a character-based approach can be used to sensitively manage change in the landscape, as draft Policy CEA12 sets out. Furthermore, the policies for the former landscape designation and the proposed Candidate SLA do not seek to prevent development, contrary to the basis for the designation, as set out in the Valued Landscapes Review (2022), which mistakenly focused on prevention of development as a test of the effectiveness of the policy.
- 8.5.2 If the Council deemed that the designation was necessary, consideration should be given to the extent of that designation. The emphasis of the Candidate SLA evaluation relates to features within the Calverton Brook valley and the upper valley slopes rather than the plateau, which conversely, its name highlights. Therefore, the inclusion within any Candidate SLA of Fields F2 and F3 of Parcel A; and Parcel B of the Site is not necessary as these areas have a limited association with the wider landscape of the Calverton Valley and greater association with the urban edge. This urban edge is extending across the plateau to the north-east which forms a logical basis for expansion of the city, contained from the wider landscape by a point of transition at the plateau edge, reinforced by vegetation.
- 8.5.3 Finally, in the event that a Candidate SLA designation were adopted by the Council, including land within the Site, it is noted that development can be accommodated within the Site in a way that sensitively mitigates impacts on the Special Qualities, in accordance with draft Policy CEA12.

## 9 Summary and Conclusion

- 9.1.1 The Site lies on the western edge of Milton Keynes, adjacent to the Fairfields area of the Western Expansion Area Strategic Site Allocation, which has been partially built out. The Site comprises two separate parcels, A in the north-west and B in the south-east. Both parcels of the Site lie in an area of gently sloping plateau to the north-east of the Calverton Brook Valley and the string of small settlements collectively known as Calverton. The route of Calverton Road, south-west of the sites, broadly demarks the point at which the landscape character transitions from a plateau landscape with a strong association with Milton Keynes and the more rural Calverton Brook valley.
- 9.1.2 The local area already has been subject to recent expansion in the form of residential development to the north/north-east at Fairfields and north-east at Whitehouse, with more development planned between the two.
- 9.1.3 Published character assessments identify the following key characteristics of this area:
- Gently undulating plateau landform dissected by tributary valleys.
  - Scattered woodland.
  - Arable landscape of mostly pasture, bound by hedgerows.
  - Limited settlement connected by a few minor roads.
  - Views across the LCT from elevated areas.
  - Network of interconnected PRoW.
- 9.1.4 Key guidelines set out in published assessments relate to:
- Conserve and strengthen landscape pattern and structure.
  - Increase native tree cover.
  - Protect PRoW.
  - Conserve rural character.
  - Retain framed views of churches and key views from Conservation Areas.
  - Retain the settlement pattern of villages and their separation from Milton Keynes.
- 9.1.5 Key themes of relevant policy include the need for green infrastructure network enhancement, including extending the Milton Keynes 'forest city' concept; and respecting landscape character in the countryside, especially natural features, the historic setting and structure of villages, important views and tranquillity.
- 9.1.6 The review of Local Landscape Designations (2024) identifies the majority of the Site to lie within the proposed Calverton Valley SLA (a local landscape designation), supported by draft Policy CEA12 in the Draft Milton Keynes City Plan 2050.
- 9.1.7 The parcels of the Site comprise a series of agricultural fields, most of which are arable, with the exception of the sloping field F1 in the north-west of Parcel A, which is ridge and furrow occupied by pasture. Fields are mostly bounded by hedgerows with some post and wire fencing enclosing the north-east of Parcel A. Two PRoW Cross the Site, allowing public access to parts of both parcels. The Site is influenced by the recent residential development of

Fairfields to the north-east and Whitehouse to the east. In the north of the Site, notably in F1 there is a visual and character relationship with the adjacent Lower Weald and Calverton village. There is a more distinct sense of separation between Parcel B the Site and the adjacent Upper Weald, which is largely enclosed by mature vegetation.

- 9.1.8 Owing to the extent of structural vegetation in the Site vicinity, notably along the plateau edge, flanking Calverton Road, there is limited visibility of the Site from the surrounding area. Partial views over existing vegetation are obtained from the edge of Fairfields and from limited parts of Calverton Road and Calverton Lane. More open views into the north-western part of Parcel A are obtained from PROW in the vicinity of Lower Weald. Glimpsed, longer-distance views are obtained from the western side of the Calverton Brook valley and on gently rising land to the north of the River Ouse. However, the Site is typically not readily perceptible in these views, amid existing vegetation and the vicinity of the Site is seen in the context of the existing development on the plateau in Milton Keynes.
- 9.1.9 The Site, whilst currently open and comprising agricultural land, lies in an area that is increasingly subject to urbanising influences, as noted in published character assessment and sensitivity studies.
- 9.1.10 The western edge of the city of Milton Keynes is situated on the plateau. The upper extent of the valley landform demarks a clear transition point in character between the plateau influenced by existing and ongoing development in Milton Keynes; and the Calverton Brook valley, which is a distinctive landform, strongly rural in character and provides a robust physical containment to the city. The transition in landform is accentuated by the Calverton Road corridor, flanked by vegetation and the linear settlement that follows the route.
- 9.1.11 Therefore, this landform transition marks a logical edge to the City of Milton Keynes, providing the same function as the more pronounced Shenley Ridge to the south-east (which is also part of the upper Calverton Brook valley slope).
- 9.1.12 Given that the existing ongoing expansion of Milton Keynes towards the plateau edge, continuing to the south-east of the Site, is perceptible, from the wider landscape beyond the valley to the south-west, further expansion towards the plateau edge, in the vicinity of the Site, would result in minimal additional influence on the wider undeveloped landscape. This can in any case be mitigated, by reinforcement of the existing pattern of vegetation at the point of landform transition which provides effective containment and partial screening of the existing urban edge.
- 9.1.13 The Site lies to the south-west of Watling Street Roman road, the roadway which has part-informed the alignment of the loose grid pattern of Milton Keynes. Settlement extensions in the Site vicinity have broadly followed the grid city pattern, extended from the alignment of Watling Street, which forms a logical basis for expansion. The valley landform and route of Calverton Road, in addition to local field patterns, coincide with the orientation of the grid. Therefore, the development of the Site could be logically integrated into the existing pattern of the city as well as aligning with existing patterns in the landscape.
- 9.1.14 The strong network of dense hedgerow boundaries in the Site vicinity, with the potential to be strengthened and enhanced, including through the introduction of canopy trees, could be utilised to provide an integrating framework for the proposed built form which would further respond to Milton Keynes' grid pattern.
- 9.1.15 It is therefore concluded that, subject of a sensitive design approach, which avoids development in the north-western part of Parcel A and draws the development edge back from the more sloping south-western edges of Parcel B, the Site provides an opportunity for logical expansion of the urban area to a natural settlement edge. There is also potential to expand the open space associated with Kiln Farm Brook into Field F1, which occupies landform turning out to the south-west into the wider landscape and also provides a setting to the existing hamlets at Lower and Middle Weald. With regard to the Candidate SLA, it is considered that local landscape designations in Milton Keynes are unnecessary as a

character-based approach can be used to sensitively manage change in the landscape, as draft Policy CEA12 sets out. Furthermore, the policies for the former landscape designation and the proposed SLA do not seek to prevent development, contrary to the basis for the designation, as set out in the Valued Landscapes Review (2022), which mistakenly focused on the prevention of development as a test of effectiveness of the policy.

- 9.1.16 If the Council deemed that the designation was necessary, consideration should be given to the extent of that designation. The emphasis of the SLA evaluation relates to features within the Calverton Brook valley and the upper valley slopes rather than the plateau, which conversely, its name highlights. Therefore, the inclusion within any SLA of Fields F2 and F3 of Parcel A; and Parcel B of the Site is not necessary as these areas have a limited association with the wider landscape of the Calverton Valley and greater association with the urban edge. This urban edge is extending across the plateau to the north-east which forms a logical basis for the expansion of the city, contained from the wider landscape by a point of transition at the plateau edge, reinforced by vegetation.
- 9.1.17 Finally, in the event that an SLA were adopted by the Council, including land within the Site, it is noted that development can be accommodated within the Site without harming the character of the valley landform to the south-west which is the most important part of the SLA.