MICK GEORGE ®

Landscape and Visual Appraisal for:

Proposed Mineral Allocation Site on Land off Pincet Lane, North Kilworth, Leicestershire

Report Reference: CE - NK-0945-RP01a- FINAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 SITE LOCATION AND SCOPE OF WORKS

1.1.1 Crestwood Environmental Ltd ('Crestwood'), a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute, were commissioned by Mick George Ltd. ('the Client') to provide a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) in relation to a proposed sand and gravel quarry ('the Proposed Development' – see below) as a site allocation within the emerging Leicestershire County Council Minerals and Waste Plan. The Site is located on land off the Pincet Lane, North Kilworth, Leicestershire ('The Site') (NGR: SP 62623 86287).

Diagram 1 Site location and PRoWs referred to in the text

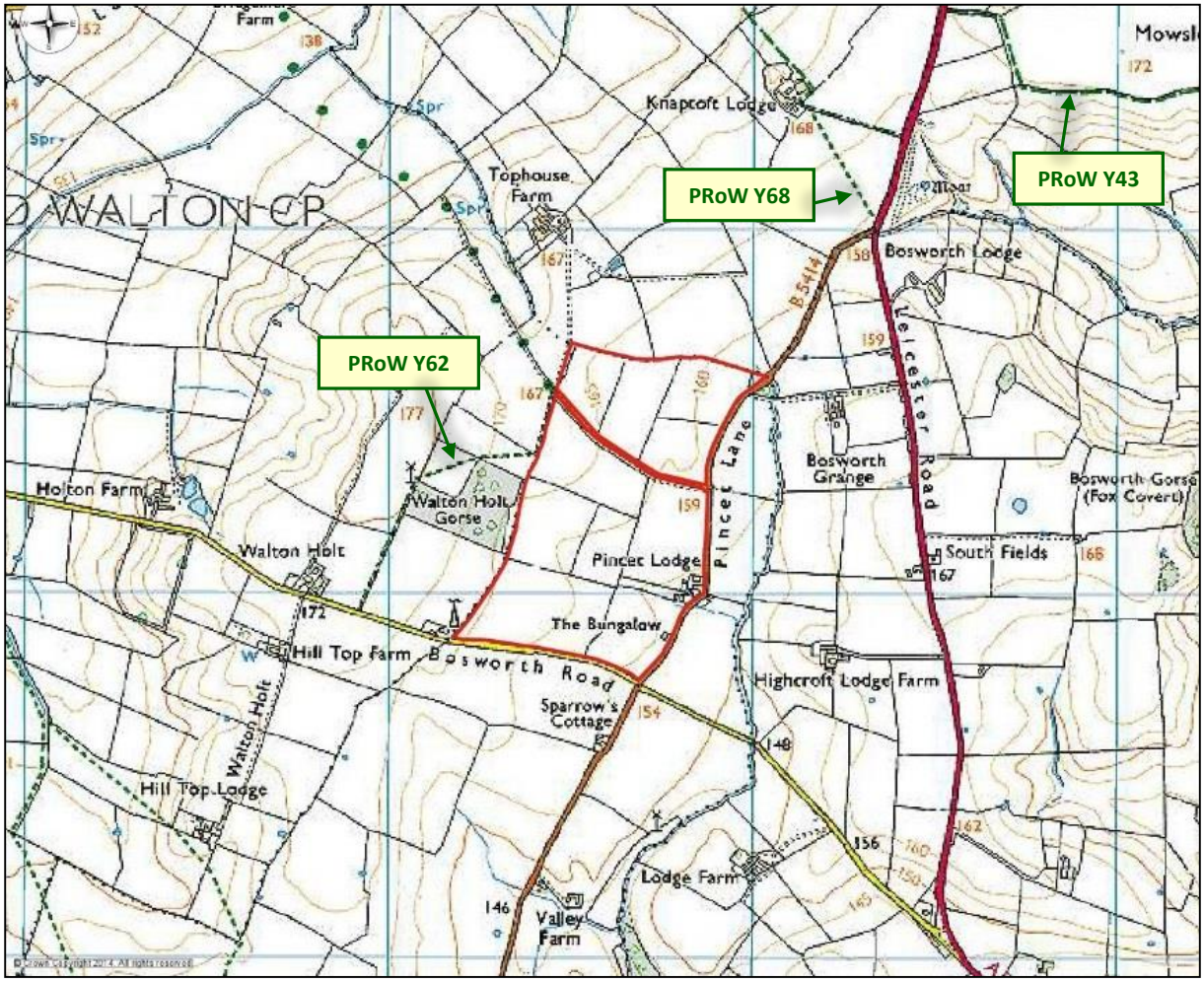


Diagram 2 Immediate Site Context (Bing Maps)

1.1.2 Crestwood have therefore undertaken an LVA of the Proposed Development which included the following key tasks:

- A desktop review of the landscape planning context for the Site and immediate area;
- A desktop study and web search of relevant background documents and maps, including reviews of aerial photographs, LPA publications and other landscape character assessments;
- Collated information about any relevant landscape designations, such as National Parks, and those parks and gardens listed on English Heritage's national register;
- A field assessment of local site circumstances including a photographic survey of viewpoints towards the Site, undertaken by a suitably qualified Landscape Consultant in August 2015; and
- An analysis of the likely visibility and visual effects arising from the Proposed Development.

1.2 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

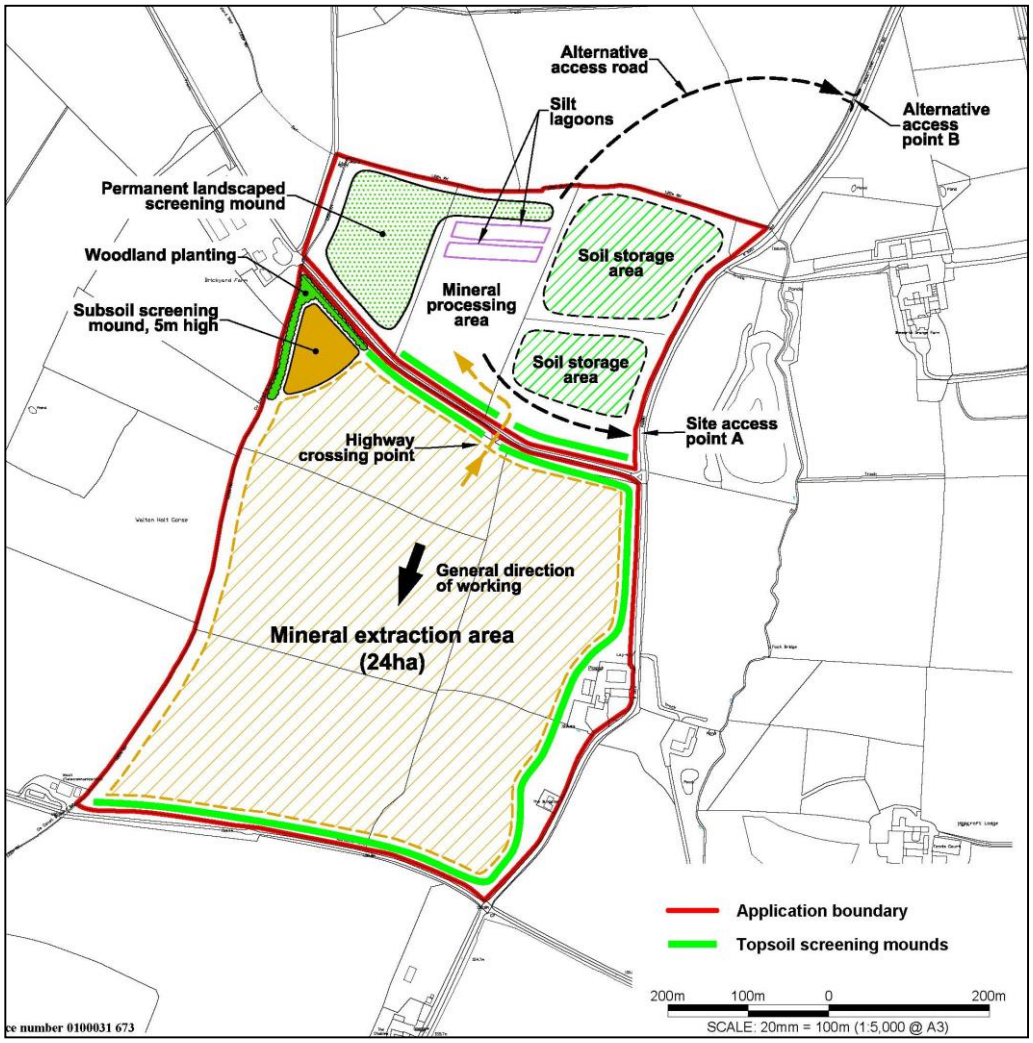
1.2.1 The Site is subdivided into two areas (referred to as 'the Northern Site Area' and 'the Southern Site Area' in this report) by an existing rural lane. The Proposed Development comprises:

- A 24ha Mineral extraction Area within the Southern Site Area;

- Construction of a mineral processing Area in the Northern Site Area (the plant will be a maximum of 5.5m high);
- Construction of two silt lagoons in the Northern Site Area;
- A permanent landscape screening mound in the Northern Site Area;
- Two soil storage areas within the Northern Site Area;
- A Site access point into the Northern Site Area, off Pincet Lane or an alternative access point further to the north off Pincet Lane;
- A highway crossing point between the two Site areas;
- Topsoil screening mounds adjacent to the southern, eastern and northern boundaries of the Southern Site Area and along part of the southern boundary of the Northern Site Area;
- Advance woodland planting in the northern corner of the Southern Site Area; and
- Retention and management of boundary vegetation.

1.2.2 The proposed layout (which has undergone a number of design iterations following receipt of input from the landscape and other environmental assessments undertaken) is shown indicatively in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3 The Proposed Development Layout



1.3 METHOD OF ASSESSMENT AND METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Landscape and visual assessment is comprised of a study of two separate but inter-linked components:

- **Landscape character** – which is the physical make-up and condition of the landscape itself. Landscape character arises from a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of physical and social elements, aesthetic factors and perceptual aspects; and
- **Visual amenity** – which is the way in which the Site is seen and appreciated; views to and from the Site, their direction, character and sensitivity to change.

1.3.2 This assessment is conducted with regard to the principles set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition ('GLVIA3'), (Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013) and has been carried out by a suitably qualified Landscape Architect (Katherine Webster MLPM, PGCert LA).

1.3.3 In this assessment, the initial study area extended to 4.5km in all directions from the edge of the Site, to help determine potential visibility and understand the wider sensitivity of the visual receptors. The extent of the initial study area was predicted, conservatively, to be the likely maximum distance where the Proposed Development could result in potentially significant landscape and visual effects, given the topography.

1.3.4 Fieldwork was undertaken in August 2015 to further understand the potential for significant landscape and visual effects and, following this, the Study area was subsequently reduced to 2km, as it was clear that effects would be more localised.

1.3.5 The combination of the fieldwork and desktop review established that the scale of the landscape and Proposed Development would limit likely significant adverse effects to within circa 330m of the Site. The Zone of Primary Visibility (ZPV) for the Proposed Development is illustrated in Diagram 4.

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Diagram 4 Approximate Zone of Primary Visibility

2 BASELINE SITUATION

2.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL POLICY

General

2.1.1 An appreciation of the 'weight' to be attributed to any visual and landscape effects arising from development starts with an understanding of the planning context within which any such development is to be tested for its acceptability.

2.1.2 Strictly, in legal terms, there is no automatic right to a view. However, the enjoyment of a view could be an important part of the residential amenity of location (e.g. a neighbouring property), and its loss might therefore have an adverse impact on the residential amenity of that property (i.e. an environmental effect on humans).

2.1.3 It should be recognised that the landscape is dynamic, as is made clear within GLVIA3 (Para 2.13): "*Landscape is not unchanging. Many different pressures have progressively altered familiar landscapes over time and will continue to do so in the future, creating new landscapes. Today many of these drivers of change arise from the requirements for development to meet the needs of a growing and changing population and economy*".

National Planning Policy

2.1.4 It is stated in paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012) that "at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking". The NPPF also recognises that "the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: …protecting and enhancing valued landscapes".

2.1.5 In Section 7 ("Requiring Good Design") of the NPPF, paragraph 61 states: "*Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment*."

Local Policy

2.1.6 The Site lies in the county of Leicestershire and Harborough District administrative boundaries. The proposed site allocation relates to the Leicestershire County Council Minerals and Waste Plan.

2.1.7 The current Development Plan, forming the context to the site allocation, comprises:

- Harborough District Local Plan, (2001);
- Harborough District Core Strategy (2011);
- Leicestershire Minerals Local Plan review (1995); and
- Leicestershire Minerals Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2009).

Harborough District Local Plan (2001)

2.1.8 The following landscape-related policies from the Harborough District Local Plan, (2001) apply:

DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE WILL BE STRICTLY CONTROLLED. THE DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE UNLESS:-

1. THE DEVELOPMENT IS LIKELY TO SUSTAIN OR IMPROVE THE RURAL ECONOMY AND CANNOT REASONABLY BE PROVIDED WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO AN EXISTING SETTLEMENT;

2. THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE;

3. THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE AMENITIES OF RESIDENTS IN THE AREA;

4. ANY NEW BUILDINGS ARE SITED IN A POSITION THAT MINIMISES THEIR IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE AND ON IMPORTANT VIEWS INTO AND OUT OF VILLAGES;

5. THE DESIGN, MATERIALS, MASSING AND BULK OF ANY BUILDINGS SHOULD COMBINE TO MINIMISE THE IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AND SHOULD MAINTAIN OR ENHANCE THE DISTINCTIVE LOCAL CHARACTER OF THE LANDSCAPE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT;

6. THE DEVELOPMENT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A LANDSCAPE SCHEME APPROPRIATE TO ITS SITING AND LOCATION;

7. THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT AREAS OF ECOLOGICAL OR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE ;

8. SATISFACTORY ACCESS CAN BE PROVIDED WITHOUT ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA;

9. THERE IS CAPACITY IN THE LOCAL ROAD NETWORK TO ACCOMMODATE THE TRAFFIC LIKELY TO BE GENERATED BY THE DEVELOPMENT;

10. ADEQUATE PROVISION IS MADE WITHIN THE SITE FOR PARKING AND SERVICING;

11. THE DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE COALESCENCE OF TWO CLOSE SETTLEMENTS OR DIMINISH THE OPEN CHARACTER OF THE LAND BETWEEN THEM.

POLICY EV/20

DETAILED PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY A LANDSCAPE SCHEME WHERE APPROPRIATE, RELATED TO THE SCALE, NATURE AND LOCATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT. THE SCHEME SHOULD INCLUDE PROPOSALS FOR:-

1. **THE RETENTION OF EXISTING LANDSCAPE FEATURES WHERE THIS IS DESIRABLE AND PRACTICABLE, SUBJECT TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL;**
2. **NEW PLANTING AND SURFACE TREATMENT;**
3. **THE PROTECTION OF THOSE LANDSCAPE FEATURES WHICH ARE TO BE RETAINED WITHIN AND ADJOINING THE SITE DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PERIOD;**
4. **MAINTENANCE OF THE EXISTING AND PROPOSED LANDSCAPE FEATURES.**

THE COUNCIL WILL REQUIRE A LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL AND THE DEFINITION OF LANDSCAPE PRINCIPLES AS PART OF AN OUTLINE APPLICATION WHERE THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT, BY ITS SCALE OR NATURE, WOULD HAVE A CONSIDERABLE IMPACT ON ITS SURROUNDINGS.

WHERE NECESSARY, CONDITIONS WILL BE ATTACHED TO PLANNING PERMISSIONS TO ENSURE THAT DETAILED LANDSCAPE SCHEMES, INCLUDING ALL PLANTING DETAILS AND THE MEANS OF PROTECTION OF EXISTING LANDSCAPE FEATURES DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PERIOD, ARE SUBMITTED AND APPROVED PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT.

Harborough District Core Strategy (2011)

2.1.9 The policies in the Harborough District Core Strategy 2006 -2028 relate to Settlement and Housing and therefore are not specifically relevant to the Proposed Development.

Leicestershire Minerals Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2009)

2.1.10 The following landscape-related policies from the Leicestershire Minerals Core Strategy and Development Control Policies, (2009) apply:

POLICY MCS11 The strategy for **environmental protection** is to protect and enhance the natural and built environment of Leicestershire by ensuring that

- there are no unacceptable adverse impacts from minerals development on:
  - (i) natural resources including water, air and soil;
  - (ii) the character and quality of the landscape;
  - (iii) biodiversity, including nationally and internationally important sites and the key habitats and species identified in relevant Biodiversity Action Plans;
  - (iv) sites of geological interest;
  - (v) historic and cultural features of acknowledged importance;
  - (vi) the distinctive character and setting of settlements within Leicestershire; and
  - (vii) residential amenity;
- the highest standards of operational practice for the management, working, restoration and aftercare of sites are adopted;
- development is designed to a high standard, incorporates sustainable construction principles and includes appropriate landscaping.

POLICY MCS17 The strategy for the **reclamation and future use of mineral sites** is to ensure that:

- land is reclaimed at the earliest opportunity and that high quality restoration and aftercare takes place to an appropriate after-use that enhances and complements the natural and historic environment and that is in keeping with the local area, including its landscape character and with due regard to the setting of historic assets, adding to local distinctiveness and biodiversity having regard to the County's Biodiversity Action Plan, Landscape and Woodland Strategy, and the National Forest Strategy;
- industry uses best practice at the time which seeks to minimise future public safety hazards and ground stability problems which can arise from the legacy of mineral workings.

The following after-uses will be sought in appropriate cases:

- (i) woodland planting, particularly in the National Forest;
- (ii) creation of new wildlife habitats;
- (iii) water-based recreational schemes;
- (iv) public access and improvements to the public rights of way network including links to surrounding green infrastructure.

Policy MDC2: Sustainable Design

Proposals for minerals development will be required to demonstrate that they have been designed to ensure impact on the environment is minimised by appropriate measures to:

(i) reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of pollution;

(ii) minimise levels of energy and water consumption;

(iii) minimise production of waste during construction and operation;

(iv) maximise the re-use or recycling of materials; and

(v) protect and enhance the character and quality of an area.

Policy MDC4: Sites of Regional and Local Importance

Planning permission will not be granted for minerals development which could have a significant adverse effect on the character, appearance, ecological, geological or amenity value of sites of regional and local importance, including:

(i) Local Wildlife Sites (LWS);

(ii) Local Nature Reserves;

(iii) priority habitats or species identified in relevant Biodiversity Action Plans;

(iv) land that is of regional or local importance as a wildlife corridor or for the conservation of biodiversity;

(v) special landscape areas and landscape features of importance;

(vi) Regionally Important Geological sites (RIGs);

(vii) protected woodland areas;

(viii) country parks, common land and village greens and other important areas of open space or green areas within built-up areas;

(ix) conservation areas and locally listed buildings (including their setting); and

(x) land or buildings in sport, recreational or tourism use;

unless it can be demonstrated that there is an overriding need for the development and any impacts can be mitigated or compensated for, such that there is a net gain or improvement to their condition.

Policy MDC5: Countryside

Planning permission will not be granted for minerals development that will adversely affect the general appearance and character of the landscape and the countryside, unless it can be demonstrated that there is an overriding need for the development.

Policy MDC6: Landscaping and Woodland

In granting planning permission for minerals development, landscaping and new woodland planting will be required, where appropriate.

Policy MDC12: Health and Amenity

Planning permission will not be granted for minerals development which is likely to generate unacceptable adverse effects from noise, dust, vibration, odour, emissions, illumination, visual intrusion or traffic to adjoining land uses and users and those in close proximity to the minerals development.

Policy MDC13: Cumulative Impact

Planning permission will not be granted for minerals development which would result in an unacceptable cumulative impact on the environment of an area or on the amenity of a local community, either in relation to the collective effect of different impacts of an individual proposal, or in relation to the effects of a number of minerals developments occurring either concurrently or successively.

Policy MDC15: Public Rights of Way

Planning permission will not be granted for minerals development that would adversely affect a public right of way, unless satisfactory proposals which are both convenient and safe are made for its diversion or the creation of an alternative route both during operations and following restoration of the site. The opportunity will be taken wherever possible to secure appropriate, improved access into the countryside.

2.2 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

2.2.1 No part of the Site lies within or near to a statutorily designated landscape (an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Park).

2.2.2 No part of the Site lies within or near to a non-statutorily, locally, designated landscape.

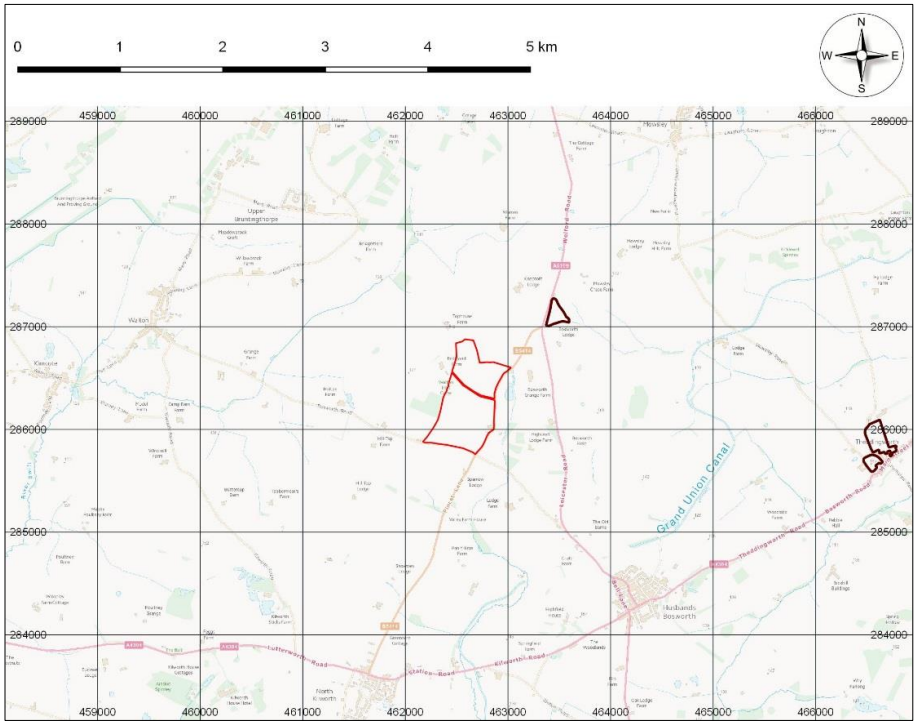
2.3 LISTED BUILDINGS, SCHEDULED MONUMENTS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

2.3.1 A formal assessment of the historical setting of these heritage features falls outside the scope of this report and the professional experience of the report author. Irrespective of this, to help ascertain whether there were potential interrelated landscape effects of the Proposed Development, potentially sensitive features were researched.

2.3.2 The Husbands Bosworth Conservation area is located c.1.8km to the Site, however does not lie within the Zone of Primary Visibility (ZPV).

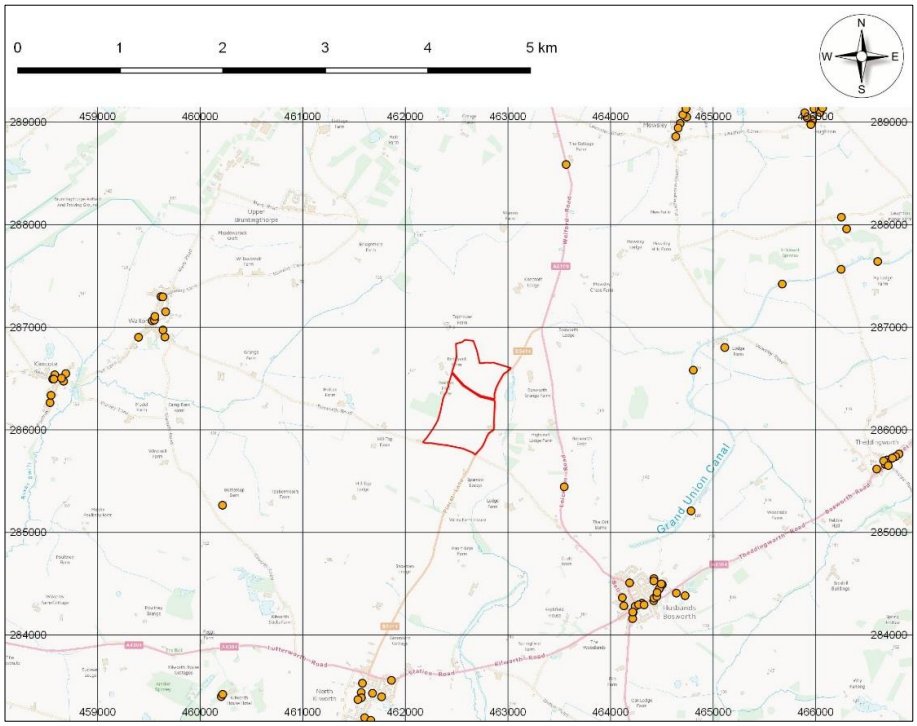
2.3.3 A small number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) lie within 2km of the Site (see Diagram 5), but do not lie within the ZPV.

Diagram 5 SAMs in the vicinity of the Site



2.3.4 One Listed Building, the 'Milepost c.500 yards off Kimcote Road' (Grade 2*) falls within the ZTV and is located c.885m southeast of the Site at its closest point. There are a limited number of Listed Buildings within 2km of the Site (see Diagram 6), the majority being clustered within the Husbands Bosworth Conservation Area c. c.1.8km southeast from the Site at its nearest point, which also lie within the ZTV. One listed building named 'the Grand Union Canal Bridge no. 48' (Grade 2*) is located c.1.780km east of the Site but does not lie within the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). There are no Listed Buildings within the ZPV.

Diagram 6 Listed Buildings in the vicinity of the Site



2.4 TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

2.4.1 There are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) relating to the Site (Harborough DC, n.d.).

2.5 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND OPEN ACCESS LAND

2.5.1 There are no public rights of way (PRoWs) or permissive access within the Site.

2.5.2 A small number of PRoWs lie near of the Site. PRoW (Definitive no. Y62) starts at Bosworth Road at c.255m southwest of the Site, and travels in a north easterly direction towards the Site where part of its route is adjacent the Site's western boundary. The PRoW ends at the northwestern corner of the Site (the Southern Site Area) at the junction with the minor lane that separates the two Site Areas. No other PRoWs lie within the ZPV other than local highways near the Site.

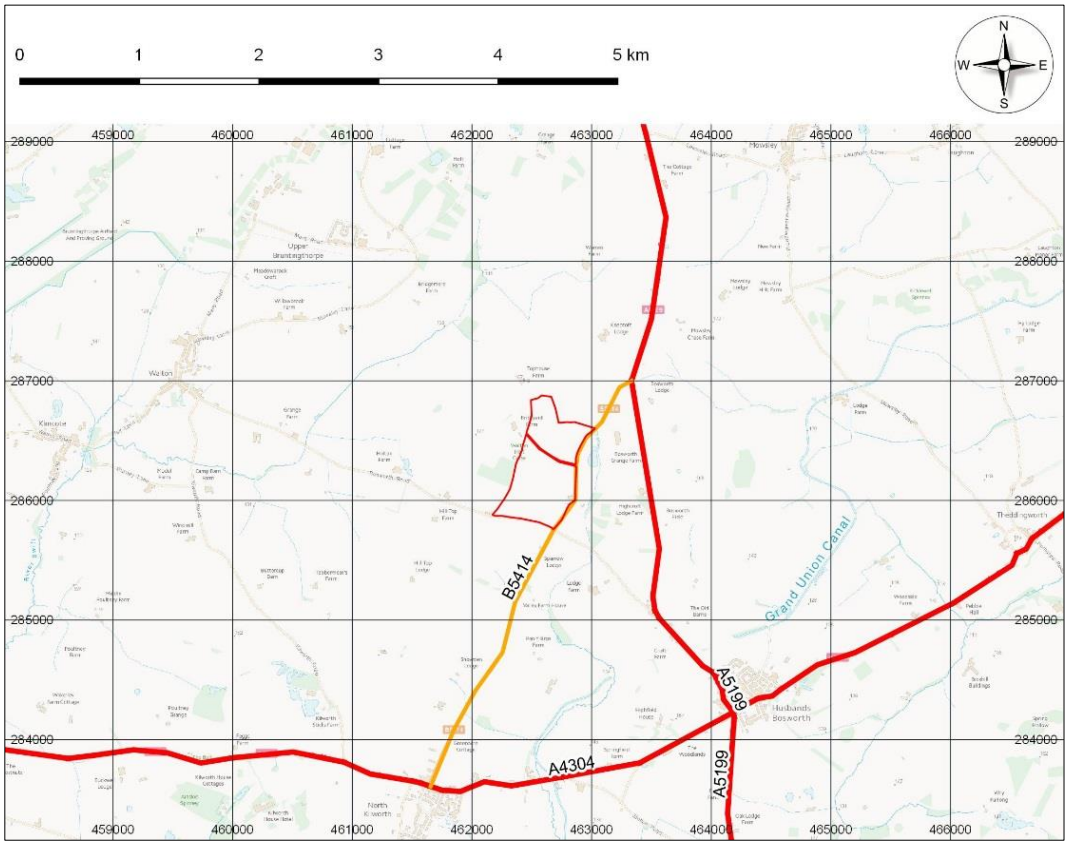
2.5.3 A PRoW (Definitive no. Y68) runs near the Site, but outwith the ZPV, c.500m to the northeast at its nearest point.

2.5.4 There is no Access Land, or Common Land within the ZPV.

2.5.5 Pincet Lane (B5414); runs past the Site (southwest to north) to the immediate east of the Site and a small number of A-class roads lie further afield (see Diagram 7).

2.5.6 Bosworth Road runs past the Site (southeast to northwest) to the immediate south of the Site. A small lane divides the Site into two sections (the Northern Site Area and Southern Site Area) as it travels from east to west and leads towards some dwellings and Farms, the closest to the Site being Brickyard Farm.

Diagram 7 Main roads in the vicinity of the Site



2.6 LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

2.6.1 The contours in the landscape at and around the Site are shown on Figure 1. The Site lies at c.155m AOD at it southeastern corner and gently rises to c.168m AOD at its northwestern corner. The Site gently rises from its eastern boundary which lies between c.155m AOD and 160m AOD towards its western boundary which lies at c.165m AOD. The land cover within the Site consists of arable farmland with mature hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees. A single storey dwelling named "The Bungalow" and an unoccupied dwelling and cluster of agricultural buildings named Pincet Lodge are located within the Site along its eastern boundary.

2.6.2 The Site's boundaries are a combination of hedgerows and trees, with gates access points into the Site. The eastern boundary consists of largely of a hedgerow, c.2m in height, although there are gaps present at specific points. Mature trees are located within the hedgerow at the southwestern corner of the Site. To the immediate west of the Site (located central along the Southern Site Area's western boundary) is a woodland named 'Walton Holt Gorse'. Mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees border the remaining western Site boundary.

2.6.3 The northern boundary of the Southern Site Area comprises mature hedgerows and mature trees (approximately 6-7m tall) which also border the small lane to the immediate northern boundary of the Southern Site Area. The southern boundary of the Northern Site Area is bordered by mature hedgerow with intermittent hedgerow trees. The northern boundary of the Northern Site Area is bordered by mature hedgerow and mature hedgerow trees. A small triangular shaped copse is located within the northeastern corner of the Northern Site Area.

2.6.4 The landform outside of the Site is gently undulating. Land to the west of the Site continues to slope to a high point of 177m AOD, c.415m from the Site at its closest point. Land to the north rises to a highpoint of 177m AOD c.1.855km northeast of the Site. To the northeast the land rises more steeply, either side of a stream corridor, and reaches a high point of 172m AOD at Mowsley Hills. Travelling east from the Site the topography continues to slope down towards a stream corridor and then gently rises again, reaching 168m AOD near Bosworth Gorse (Fox Covert). To the south of the Site land gently rises in a northwesterly direction. The high point of 165m AOD is located c.1.560km southwest of the Site at its closest point.

2.6.5 To the east of the Site land cover comprises a combination of arable and pastoral farmland bordered by hedgerows, some of which have mature hedgerow trees. Small mature woodland groups, woodland belts and establishing woodland plantations are located close to the nearby farms and dwellings, such as Bosworth Grange Farm and Highcroft Lodge, which screen and filter potential views from these properties.

2.6.6 To the immediate south are large arable fields bordered by of hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Occasional copses and small woodland groups are located within these arable fields. A farm and dwellings, labelled as 'The Stables', 'The Barn' and 'Sparrow Lodge' on maps, are located c.180m to the South of the Site.

2.6.7 Land use to the west is predominantly arable and pastoral farmland bordered by hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Nearby Farms and dwellings include Brickyard Farm, Walton Holt and Tophouse Farm.

2.6.8 The village of Husbands Bosworth is located c.1.8km southeast of the Site and the village of North Kilworth is located c.2.4km to the south of the Site.

2.7 LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENTS

2.7.1 The Site lies within the '94 Leicestershire Vales National Character Area' (NCA) (Natural England, 2014). The key characteristics for this character area are listed as:

- An open landscape of gentle clay ridges and valleys underlain by Mercia Mudstone and Lias groups bedrock but with an extensive cover of superficial deposits occasionally giving rise to moderately steep scarp slopes. There is an overall visual uniformity to the landscape and settlement pattern.
- Land use characterised by a mixture of pasture and arable agriculture that has developed on the neutral clay soils.
- Distinctive river valley of the Soar and Swift, with flat flood plains and gravel terraces together with tributaries including the Sence. Riverside meadows and waterside trees and shrubs are common, along with waterbodies resulting from gravel extraction.
- Woodland character derived largely from spinneys and copses on the ridges and the more undulating land and from waterside and hedgerow trees and hedgerows. The density, height and pattern of hedgerows varies throughout.
- Diverse levels of tranquillity associated with contrasts between busy urban areas and some deeply rural parts. Large settlements dominate the open character of the landscape. Leicester, Lutterworth, Hinckley and Market Harborough and related infrastructure, including major roads, are often visually dominant.
- Frequent small towns and large villages often characterised by red brick buildings and attractive stone buildings in older village centres and eastern towns and villages. Frequent, imposing spired churches are also characteristic, together with fine examples of individual historic buildings.
- Rich and varied historic landscape, with the nationally important Bosworth Battlefield near Sutton Cheney, prominent historic parklands and country houses, ridge-and-furrow earthworks and important medieval settlement remains, for example at Wistow Hall, Gumley, Knaptoft and Peatling Magna.

2.7.2 A District-wide Landscape Character Assessment has been undertaken (Harborough District Council, September 2007). The citation for this is included in Appendix CE3.

2.7.3 The Site lies within the Laughton Hills Landscape Character Area. The key characteristics are listed as:

- Distinct ridgeline of rolling hills with steep sides;
- Predominantly rural character with areas of woodland;
- Arable farming predominantly on the flatter areas to the south;
- Pasture on the hillier areas to the north; and
- Scattering of small attractive villages and hamlets;

2.7.4 The key issues are listed as:

- The distinctive ridgeline and steeply sloping sides of the ridge, which characterise the character area, contribute strongly to the area's low capacity to accommodate development. Even minimal development which is inappropriate or poorly sited may

impact adversely on landscape character;

- Woodland cover, which is another key feature of the landscape, may be vulnerable to loss through inappropriate development or poor management;
- The rural character of the landscape, both arable and pasture, would be threatened by development. Any development would need careful siting which is sympathetic to landscape setting and landform in particular; and
- In developing the tourism potential of Foxton Locks care will need to be taken to minimise the impact on the immediate landscape.

2.7.5 The assessment states that the Laughton Hills Landscape Character Area has a "*low capacity to accommodate development*".

3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 VISIBILITY OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1.1 A Zone or Primary Visibility (ZPV) for the Proposed Development, based on the findings in the field is illustrated in Figure 1, Appendix CE1, (reproduced in Diagram 4).

3.1.2 The illustrated ZPV demonstrates the restricted visibility of the main development through the combination of mature hedgerows, mature trees, woodland belts and copses, buildings and landform in the locality. It also demonstrates the few accessible viewpoints that the Proposed Development would be visible from; the ZPV not readily overlapping PRoWs or lengthy sections of road.

3.1.3 The ZPV largely follows close to the Site's southern, eastern and northern boundaries due to the existing mature hedgerows and mature trees that border the Site boundaries and Bosworth Road. The woodland named Walton Holt Gorse to the west severely limits views from west. The ZPV is elongated in a southeast orientation, reflecting the lower clipped hedge along on the far side of Pincet Lane (B5414) and gaps in the hedgerow that borders the Site's southeastern boundary and fewer mature trees.

3.1.4 Views from Pincet Lane (B5414); are largely restricted by the Site's eastern hedgerow boundary although intermittent gaps in the hedgerow near the junction with Bosworth Road allow oblique glimpses into the Site.

3.1.5 Views from The Bungalow within the Site (near the eastern boundary) would comprise views of the proposed soil screening bund and tree planting from the back windows of the dwelling. Views from Pincet Lodge (currently unoccupied) of the Proposed Development would comprise oblique views of the proposed bund and tree planting and potentially views of the mineral extraction area from upper storey windows, although this would likely become more filtered as the trees become increasingly established. Potential views from the newly built dwelling to the east are likely to be largely restricted by the intervening building of Pincet Lodge, however oblique partial views of the mineral extraction area may be possible from the second storey windows.

3.1.6 Views from the dwelling Bosworth Grange Farm are likely to be restricted to filtered oblique views of the mineral extraction area and landscape bund from second storey windows, due to intervening mature trees between the dwelling and the Site. Views from other dwellings to the east are likely to be screened by intervening vegetation and woodland. Views further east from the Site along the A5199 (Leicester Road) are screened by intervening vegetation that lies adjacent to the highway.

3.1.7 Visibility from the northeast is restricted by existing intervening woodland and establishing plantation woodland as demonstrated in Plate 1 which was taken from a bridleway Y43, c.1.2km northeast of the Site (see Diagram 1).

Plate 1 View from Bridleway Y43 towards the Site

3.1.8 Potential visibility of the Proposed Development from locations to the north are limited to a section of the PRoW Y68 (see Plate 2 and Diagram 1). Views of the Proposed Development are likely to be largely screened and filtered by intervening vegetation, although the upper levels of the processing plant may be visible above the existing vegetation.

Plate 2 View from PRoW Y68 towards the Site

3.1.9 Potential visibility of the Proposed Development from locations to the south is restricted to close range locations from field access points into the Site off Bosworth Road, due to the mature hedgerow boundary along the Site's southern boundary (to be retained). Oblique glimpsed views from Bosworth Road are anticipated to take in the proposed bund and planting with the mineral extraction area screened beyond. Views from private residences at 'The Stables' are likely to be heavily filtered and screened by existing intervening mature trees that border Bosworth Road and the proposed bund with planting.

3.1.10 Views from the west are very restricted by the existing boundary vegetation (to be retained) and the Walton Holt Gorse woodland adjacent the Site's eastern boundary. A potential oblique, glimpsed view of proposed mineral extraction area may be possible form a field access point from PRoW Y62.

Views from the dwelling Brickyard Farm are likely to be screened by existing hedgerow vegetation and proposed woodland planting and screening mound.

3.2 METHOD OF ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

3.2.1 The assessment of visual effects uses professional judgement to ascertain levels of importance of effect through levels of contribution of sensitivity of the viewer, magnitude of effects and nature of effect (i.e. whether it is positive, negative or neutral).

Table 1 Magnitude of Visual Effects Criteria

Magnitude	Visual Criteria
Very Large	Where the proposals become the only dominant feature in the view and to which all other elements become subordinate. Typically involves direct views at close range over a wide horizontal and vertical extent.
Large	Where the proposals would form a significant and immediately apparent element of the scene and would affect the overall impression of the view. Typically involves direct or oblique views at close range with notable changes over the horizontal and vertical extent.
Medium	Where proposals would form a visible and recognisable new development but where it is not intrusive within the overall view. Typically involves direct or oblique views at medium range with a moderate horizontal and/or vertical extent of the view affected.
Small	Where proposals constitute only a minor component of the wider view, which the casual observer could miss or where awareness does not affect the overall quality of the scene. Typically involves an oblique view at medium or long range or a direct view at long range with a small horizontal/vertical extent of the view affected.
Very Small	Where only a very small part of the development is discernible or that it is at such a distance that the effects are scarcely appreciated.

Table 2 Sensitivity of Viewer Criteria

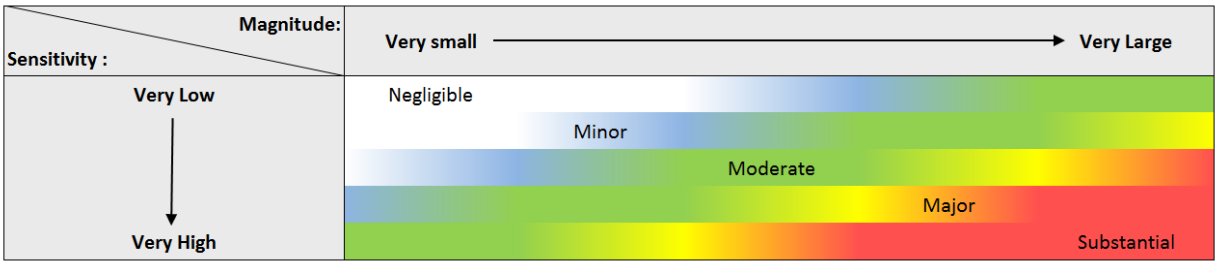
Visual Sensitivity	Visual Criteria
Very High	Nationally well recognised and advertised location for high visual amenity **value** Prominent location or vista with high visual amenity **value** that is recognised in published sources. Very high **susceptibility to change** as a very high level of attention focussed on the landscape and particular views.
High	Well-known area recognised regionally for high landscape **value**. Open areas of recognised public access where primary enjoyment is of the views of the landscape. High **susceptibility to change** as a high level of attention focused on the landscape and particular views.
Medium	Locations afford views of some **value**, but visual amenity not well recognised beyond locality. Moderate **susceptibility to change** as a moderate level of attention focussed on the landscape and particular views.
Low	Viewpoint context and location is of lesser **value** than similar views from nearby visual receptors that may be more accessible. Low **susceptibility to change** as low level of attention focussed on the landscape and particular views.
Very Low	Viewpoint context is such that views have a very low **value**. Expectations of visual amenity are very low.

	Activity at viewpoint is incidental to the view.

3.2.2 The derivation of levels of effect (indicating their importance) generally follows a pattern by which the relationship between sensitivity and magnitude contributes to the level of importance as shown in Diagram 8. This process is applied to a selection of representative viewpoints.

3.2.3 On balance, in overall planning terms, Important effects may not necessarily be considered unacceptable.

Diagram 8 Overall Level of Effect



3.3 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

3.3.1 A number of representative viewpoints have been selected to demonstrate the types of effects that are anticipated and that have been assessed as part of the Proposed Development. These are from the following locations and are assessed and illustrated on subsequent pages:

Photo 1 - From Pincet Lane (B5414), adjacent the Site's eastern boundary;

Photo 2 - From Pincet Lane (B5414), adjacent the Site's eastern boundary; near the two dwellings off Pincet Road (Pincet Lodge and the unnamed newly built dwelling);

Photo 3 - From Pincet Lane (B5414);

Photo 4 - From the unnamed lane between the two Site Areas;

Photo 5 - From the unnamed lane between the two Site Areas; and

Photo 6 - From Bosworth Road, adjacent the Site's southern boundary.

Photolocation 1

3.3.2 Photo 1 was taken from a gap in the roadside hedgerow and shows the view of the users of Pincet Lane (B5414) highway which has no pavement (Low sensitivity). It is also partially representative of views from the dwelling called 'The Bungalow' (High sensitivity) which is located c.85m from the viewpoint. Foreground views comprise relatively flat arable land (the Site) bounded by mature hedgerow and intermittent hedgerow trees and an isolated mature tree within the field. Middle ground views comprise arable fields and the woodland block named 'Walton Holt Gorse' which is visible in the middle ground (centre of the view) and restricts views beyond. A band of mature trees provide a backdrop (to the right of the view) and screen views beyond. The horizon to the left of the view is defined by a field hedgerow and is punctuated by intermittent mature hedgerow trees.

3.3.3 Changes in the view would be largely related to the bund with tree planting within the foreground which would restrict views beyond and screen the proposed mineral extraction area. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the proposals forms a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and

fleeting for road users but direct for receptors at the dwelling.

3.3.4 Without mitigation there would be potential for a Large magnitude of effect. The scope to mitigate is good such that infilling of gaps in the hedgerows and subsequent management, coupled with soil screening bunds and working towards the viewpoint (allowing inter-lying land to screen views beyond in to the working area) would limit effects to Moderate Importance.

Photolocation 2

3.3.5 Photo 2 was taken from a gated field access and shows the view of the users of Pincet Lane (B5414) highway which has no pavement (Low sensitivity). It is also partially representative of views from the dwelling Pincet Lodge located within the Site (currently unoccupied) and a newly built dwelling located c.65m east of the Site (Medium-High sensitivity). The existing view of the Site takes in an arable field enclosure with ruderal vegetated margins in the foreground (the Site). Middle ground views comprise very gently rising arable land which is bounded by mature hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees which filter views of the background beyond. Background views comprise mature trees. Partial views of gently rising arable land are available beyond the Site.

3.3.6 The change in view would be a bund with tree planting within the foreground which would restrict views beyond and screen the proposed mineral extraction area. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the Proposed Development would, without mitigation, potentially form a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and fleeting for road users but direct for receptors at the dwelling.

3.3.7 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is Low (road users) and the magnitude of effect would, without mitigation, be Large. Again, the scope to mitigate is good such that infilling of gaps in the hedgerows and subsequent management, coupled with soil screening bunds and working towards the viewpoint (allowing inter-lying land to screen views beyond in to the working area) would limit effects to Moderate Importance.

Photolocation 3

3.3.8 Photo 3 shows the view from the small lane that separates the Site into two Areas. Photo 3 was taken from a gated field access and shows the view of the users of the minor lane and also Pincet Lane (B5414) highway both of which have no pavement (Low sensitivity). The existing channelled view of the Site takes in an arable field enclosure bounded by a mature hedgerow (to the left of the view) and mature trees (to the right of the view) (the Site). Middle ground views comprise very gently rising arable land which is bounded by mature hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees which filter views of the background beyond. The dwelling and agricultural buildings at Pincet Lodge are visible in the middle ground (to the left of the view). Layers of mature trees form the background.

3.3.9 Due to the proposed soil screening bunds, the vast majority of the Proposed Mineral extraction area will be hidden from view. Changes in the view would be related to the bund with tree planting within the foreground which would restrict views beyond and screen the proposed mineral extraction area. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the proposals forms a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and fleeting for road users.

3.3.10 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is Low (road users) and the magnitude of effect would be Medium-Large. Overall, the visual effects would be considered to be of Moderate importance, with good scope to mitigate effects to a lower level of importance.

Photolocation 4

3.3.11 Photo 4 shows the view from the minor lane that separates the Site into two Areas. Photo 4 was taken from a field access point and shows the view of the users of the minor lane highway which has no pavement (Low sensitivity), looking southwards.

3.3.12 The existing view of the Northern Site Area takes in arable field enclosures bounded by mature hedgerows. A hedgerow with mature hedgerow trees subdivides the fields in the foreground (to the left of centre of the view). Middle ground views comprise largely flat rising arable land which is bounded by mature hedgerows and mature hedgerow. The dwelling and agricultural buildings at Bosworth Grange Farm are visible in the distance (to the right of the centre of the view) set in front of a backdrop of mature trees.

3.3.13 Changes in the view would comprise the proposed landscape screening mound with tree planting which would be situated in the field (to the left of the view), within the foreground and would restrict views beyond. The mineral processing plant is likely to be partially visible in the mid-ground and soil storage mounds would be also visible, restricting views of the background beyond. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the proposals forms a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and fleeting for road users and receptors accessing properties (Brickyard farm and Tophouse Farm) at the end of the lane.

3.3.14 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is Low (road users) and the magnitude of effect would be Large. Overall, the visual effects would be considered to be of Moderate importance, with good scope to mitigate effects to a lower level of importance through planting and screen mounds and minimising floor levels of processing plant and using appropriate colour schemes.

Photolocation 5

3.3.15 Photo 5 shows the view from the minor lane that separates the Site into two Areas. Photo 5 was taken from a field access point into the Southern Site Area and shows the view of the users of the small lane (highway) which has no pavement (Low sensitivity). Arable field enclosures bounded by a mature hedgerows dominate and foreground and middle ground views The dwelling and agricultural buildings at Pincet Lodge and the nearby newly built dwelling are visible in the background (to the left of the view) set in front of a backdrop of mature trees. Mature trees cover gently rising land in the distance beyond.

3.3.16 Changes in the view would comprise the proposed highway crossing point and the mineral extraction area. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the proposals forms a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and fleeting for road users and receptors accessing properties at the end of the lane.

3.3.17 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is Low (road users) and the magnitude of effect would be Large. Overall, the visual effects would be considered to be of Moderate importance, with good scope to mitigate effects to a lower level of importance through planting and screen mounds, although the entrance point will be clearly visible by users of the minor lane.

Photolocation 6

3.3.18 Photo 6 shows the view from the Bosworth Road, adjacent to the southern boundary of the Site. Photo 6 was taken from a field access point into the Southern Site Area and shows the view of the users of the highway which has no pavement (Low sensitivity). A largely flat arable field dominates the foreground and middle ground view. The woodland block named ‘Walton Holt Gorse’ is visible in the

middle ground (to the left of the view) and restricts views beyond. Partial, filtered views of the dwelling and agricultural buildings at Bosworth Grange Farm are visible in the background (to the right of the view) set in front of a backdrop of mature trees. A belt of mature trees forms the background and screens views beyond.

3.3.19 Due to the proposed soil screening bund, the vast majority of the Proposed Mineral extraction area will be hidden from view. Changes in the view would be related to the bund, with tree planting within the foreground further restricting views beyond and screening the proposed mineral extraction area. The viewpoint is close to the Site and the proposals forms a large component of the view. Views would be oblique and fleeting for road users.

3.3.20 The sensitivity of the visual receptor is Low (road users) and the magnitude of effect would be Medium-Large, decreasing over time. Overall, the visual effects would be considered to be of Moderate importance.

Photo 1:

Photo2:

Photo 3:

Photo 4:

Photo 5:

Photo 6:

3.4 METHOD OF ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

3.4.1 Landscape Sensitivity is determined by the combination of landscape susceptibility (i.e. the inherent ability of a defined landscape receptor (e.g. landscape characteristics) to accommodate the specific Proposed Development without undue negative consequences) and landscape value.

3.4.2 Landscape value is the desirability of landscape characteristics (including scenic beauty, tranquillity, wildness, cultural associations, conservation interests etc.) and the acceptability of their loss to different stakeholders (i.e. valued for different reasons by different people and on different scales, e.g. local, national).

3.4.3 The level of landscape sensitivity is derived generally following the pattern shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Landscape Sensitivity

Land. Value \ Land. Susceptibility	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Very Low	Very Low	Very Low	Low	Low or Medium	Medium
Low	Very Low	Low	Low or Medium	Medium	Medium or High
Medium	Low	Low or Medium	Medium	Medium or High	High
High	Low or Medium	Medium	Medium or High	High	Very High
Very High	Medium	Medium or High	High	Very High	Very High

3.4.4 The determination of magnitude of landscape effect is guided by Table 4.

Table 4 Magnitude of Landscape Effect

Magnitude of Landscape Effect	Landscape Criteria
Very Large	Typically, large scale changes and/or numerous changes to important landscape characteristics
Large	Typically, large scale changes to some landscape characteristics, or a high number of medium scale changes to the landscape characteristics
Medium	Typically, some medium scale changes to some landscape characteristics
Small	Typically, a low number of medium scale changes to landscape characteristics, or a number of small scale changes to landscape characteristics
Very Small	Typically, occasional, small scale changes to unimportant landscape characteristics

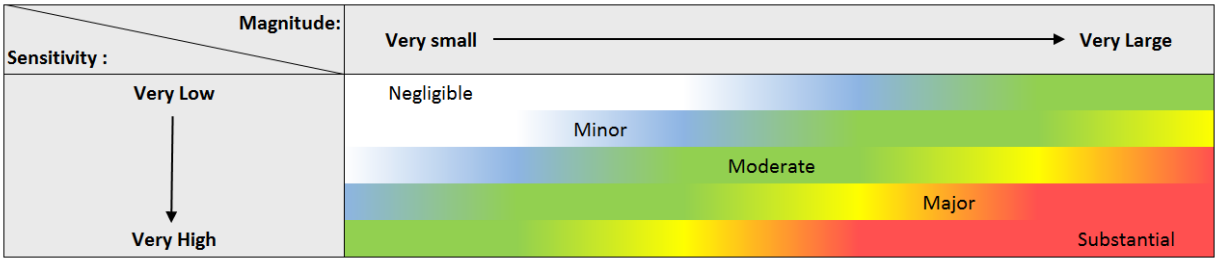
3.4.5 The effects on the landscape can apply at an individual level (e.g. to specific landscape elements or characteristics) and at the landscape character level. Both aspects are considered below.

3.4.6 Important changes to landscape character occur when the relative level of contribution of the existing key characteristics changes (either through reduction/increase or removal/addition) such that the landscape would be defined or classified differently at a given geographical scale.

3.4.7 For this Proposed Development and site, potential effects on landscape character would be limited to a maximum of c. 330m from the Site.

3.4.8 The derivation of levels of importance of effect generally follows a pattern by which the relationship between sensitivity and magnitude contributes to the level of effect as shown in Diagram 9. Major or Substantial levels of effect would be considered to be Important. On balance, in overall planning terms, Important effects may not necessarily be considered unacceptable.

Diagram 9 Overall Level of Effect



3.5 ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

Effects on Landscape Characteristics within the Site

3.5.1 The landscape elements present within the Site consist of a combination of arable farmland, mature hedgerows, mature hedgerow trees, scattered mature trees and a small copse which are representative of the **Laughton Hills** Landscape Character Area. The existing buildings comprise of two dwellings (The Bungalow and Pincet Lodge) and a cluster of agricultural buildings at Pincet Lodge. The Site's boundaries are a combination of mature hedgerows and trees, with some gated access points.

3.5.2 The more valued elements largely relate to the hedgerows and hedgerow trees within the Site and along the Site's boundaries. The landscape elements within the Site are considered to be of medium susceptibility. When considered alongside the medium landscape value of the Site, this results in an overall **medium sensitivity**. The remaining elements, i.e. arable crops are of low landscape value and would not be susceptible to change in their own right.

3.5.3 Boundary hedgerow and hedgerows are proposed to be retained however there will be loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees and arable crops within the Site which would be replaced by a mineral extraction area, mineral processing plant, silt lagoons. The magnitude of effect on the landscape characteristics of the Site is considered to be Large and negative (improving further as the landscaping establishes and matures; this will result in non-permanent effects of **Moderate - Major Importance**). This is normal for a mineral development, due to the temporary changes in land cover experienced, limited by the progressive, phased working and restoration of the Site.

3.5.4 The proposed landscaping and woodland planting in the northwestern area of the Site in addition to the landscape bunds around the southern, eastern and northern boundaries of the Southern Site Area and part of the Southern boundary of the Northern Site Area would have a small but positive effect on the landscape characteristics within the Site.

3.5.5 Upon restoration there is very good scope to provide landscape enhancement through inclusion of high quality and characteristic landscape elements including good semi-natural biodiversity and habitat improvements coupled with an agricultural management programme. This would potentially bring positive landscape effects of **Moderate Importance**.

Effects on Landscape Characteristics within the Locality

3.5.6 The landscape value of the locality is assessed as being **Medium**.

3.5.7 Overall the landscape sensitivity of the landscape characteristics of the locality to the Proposed Development is Medium given the rural character of the area and the **Laughton Hills** Landscape Character Area's "*low capacity to accommodate development*". The magnitude of effect on the landscape characteristics of the Locality is considered to be Small and negative (improving further as the landscaping and restoration establishes and matures; this will result in effects of **Minor Importance** overall).

3.5.8 The proposed landscaping and planting on the periphery of the Proposed Development periphery is proposed such that adverse effects apparent from the wider landscape will reduce over time as planting establishes, helping to integrate the built elements e.g. the mineral processing plant into the adjacent landscape context. The wider effects are extremely limited such that the temporary operational effects are very localised.

3.5.9 The magnitude of effect on the landscape characteristics of the Site is considered to be Small, but positive (improving further as the landscaping establishes and matures); this will result in landscape effects of **Minor Importance**. The restoration scheme will provide Long-term enhancements, again of **Minor Importance**.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The Site falls within an area characterised by **Laughton Hills** Landscape Character Area. The Site and locality are typical of the local landscape represented, being largely rural with both arable and pasture farmland, with areas woodland cover and mature hedgerows and scattered villages and hamlets.

4.1.2 The Site does not lie within a designated landscape area. The landscape value of the Site and locality is Medium due to its rural character, representativeness of the landscape character of the area and surrounding public right of way network.

4.1.3 The existing local scene is typical of the surrounding landscape and not considered to be particularly distinctive. The majority of views into the Site are screened by boundary hedgerows and mature trees or woodland. The prevalent landscape character at the Site is one of arable farmland.

4.1.4 The sensitivity of the landscape character to the Proposed Development is considered to be Medium. The visual and landscape effects are limited to a very localised area due to the context, existing screening and potential to enhance screening further.

4.1.5 Due to the loss of hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees within the Site the magnitude of effect on the landscape characteristics of the Site during the operational period is considered to be Large and negative (improving further as the landscaping establishes and matures; this will result in effects of **Moderate - Major Importance**). This is normal for a mineral development, due to the temporary changes in land cover experienced, limited by the progressive, phased working and restoration of the Site. The magnitude of effect on the landscape characteristics of the Locality is considered to be Small and negative (improving further as the landscaping establishes and matures); this will result in effects of **Minor Importance**). The restoration scheme has the potential to provide Long-term enhancements, again of **Minor Importance**.

4.1.6 The restricted visibility of the Site limits the potential for important effects on views, to Close-range locations. Views are likely to be oblique views of the proposed landscape bunding and planting and would be visible from Bosworth Road to the south, Pincet Lane to the east and the minor lane between the two Site areas. Overall, the visual effects from the roads would be considered to be, at most of Moderate importance, with good scope to provide further mitigation (e.g. through gapping-up hedgerows) to minimise adverse effects further.

4.1.7 Views from surrounding dwellings are from Close range to the east of the Site, namely The Bungalow, Pincet Lodge, the newly built dwelling off Pincet Lane and Bosworth Grange Farm. Views from these dwellings are likely to take in the peripheral bunding and planting from ground floor windows and potential filtered views from second storey windows. Views of Moderate Importance are anticipated from The Bungalow and Pincet Lodge.

4.1.8 There will be no Important adverse effects on visual amenity from the Proposed Development. There is the potential for glimpse, filtered views of the Proposed Development but visual effects on users of the PRoW Y86 to the north and Y62 to the west to the south and local footpaths in this area are considered to be negligible.

4.1.9 Overall, there are no overriding reasons, due to potential landscape or visual effects not to allocate this site for mineral development and there is potential for Long-term enhancement through targeted landscape and habitat improvements as part of the restoration scheme.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 It is recommended that development of this LVA is used to further inform the precise mitigation solutions, based on those outlined, to keep the potential for adverse landscape and visual effects to a minimum and to consult the local residents on preference for mitigation measures to be employed.

4.2.2 The LVA process can also be used to develop the most appropriate restoration scheme for the Site, to be employed in a progressive manner to minimise 'land-take' by the operations at any moment in time.

5 REFERENCES:

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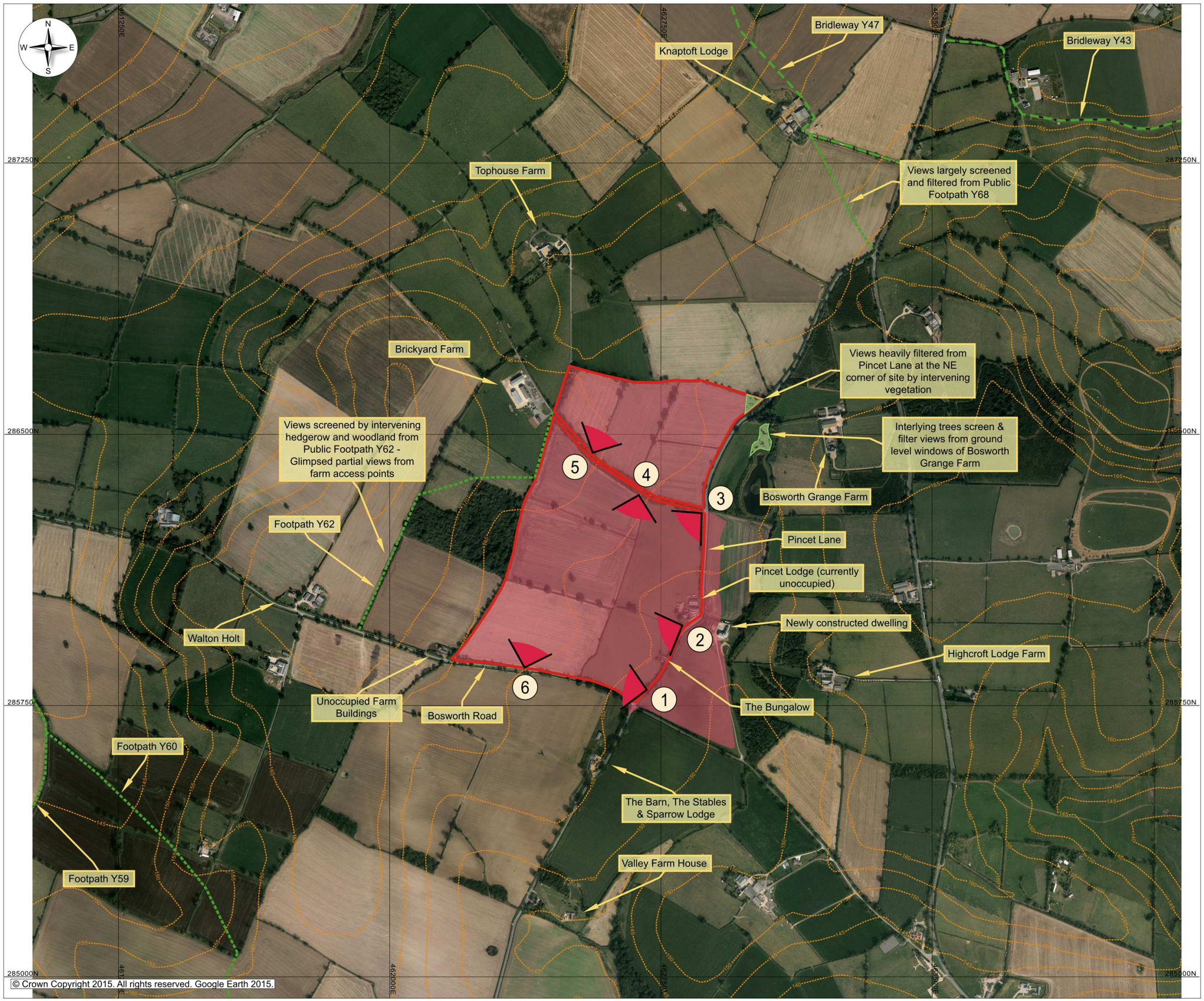
- Harborough District Council, September 2007. Landscape Character Assessment. In: s.l.:s.n.
- Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013. *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.* Third Addition ed. s.l.:Routledge.
- Natural England, 2014. National Character Area Profile. In: s.l.:s.n.

APPENDICES:

Appendix CE1	Figure 1
Appendix CE2	National Character Area Assessment Summary Extract
Appendix CE3	Local Landscape Character Assessment Extract

Appendix CE1:

Figure 1



Legend:

- Site Boundary
- Zone Of Primary Visibility (ZPV)
- Viewpoint + Direction Of View
- 1 Viewpoint Reference
- Public Footpaths
- Bridleway
- Highlighted Existing Mature Woodland Vegetation
- Existing Contours (MAOD)

0m 150m 375m

-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-
Final Revision:	Date:	Description:	By:	Chk:

Consultant:
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Client: MICK GEORGE

Site: **North Kilworth Mineral Allocation**

Drawing Title: **Visual & Landscape Reference Plan**

18 Aug 2015	Scale: 1:7,500	Paper Size: A3

Drawn By: JD	Checked By: KJ	Status: Final	Final Revision: -

CAD Ref: CE-NK-0945-DW02 - FINAL	Drawing No: Figure 1

Appendix CE2:

National Character Area Assessment Summary Extract

Summary

Leicestershire Vales National Character Area (NCA) shares many characteristics with the neighbouring Northamptonshire Vales NCA. The Leicestershire Vales extend between the town of Hinckley in the west to Leicester in the north-east and southwards towards Market Harborough and Lutterworth. This is a large, relatively open, uniform landscape composed of low-lying clay vales interrupted by a range of varied river valleys. Its sense of place comes less from its overall landform and more from its visually dominant settlements and views towards surrounding higher ground. The city of Leicester dominates the north-eastern corner of the NCA.

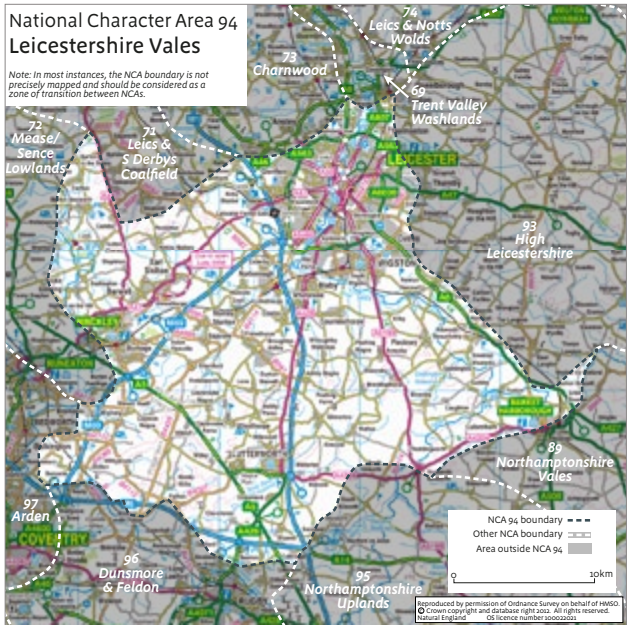
Other large- to medium-sized settlements include the towns of Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Hinckley, with many attractive small towns, villages and buildings and features of historic interest in between. The north of the area has a predominance of settlements and a general lack of tranquillity; this contrasts strongly with the distinctly more rural feel in the southern part of the area, where a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland is found.

Country houses, historic designed parkland, waterside trees and meadows are common throughout. The area is rich in historic character, with country houses, parkland and surviving examples of ridge and furrow. There are numerous features and sites of historic interest such as the site of the Battle of Bosworth, near the village of Sutton Cheney, which is of national significance. It attracts many thousands of visitors each year as the location where the Wars of the Roses concluded.

Major road networks that traverse the area include motorways, notably the M1 and the M69. Other main roads include the A6 and the A5, both of which have ancient origins.

Other than the historic environment, most of the ecosystem services within this NCA are locally beneficial, but its river valleys – especially the River Soar and its tributaries –provide regional benefits for water flow and water quality.

There are ongoing challenges in this area, principally development growth of the city of Leicester and many of the smaller towns which has an impact on the rural parts of this NCA. However, development also provides opportunities to raise design standards, strengthen sense of place and increase resilience of some habitats, by improving habitat connectivity and networks through associated green infrastructure provision.



Statements of Environmental Opportunity

SEO 1: Protect and appropriately manage the strong historic character and heritage and the geological assets within the rural and urban landscapes, maintaining the evidence of past land use and connections between agriculture, settlement pattern and topography, as well as the significant places and events that took place within the area, so that the area can be enjoyed by all. Ensure that development is fully integrated into and informed by the landscape.

SEO 2: Manage, conserve and enhance the woodlands, hedgerows, streams and rivers – particularly the rivers Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland – in both rural and urban areas, to enhance biodiversity and recreation opportunities; improve water quality, flow and availability; benefit soil quality; and limit soil erosion.

SEO 3: Increase, manage and enhance the recreational assets, principally the rights of way network, country parks such as Watermead and historic linear features such as the canals. Improve access to these assets and the open countryside from the city of Leicester and surrounding rural communities and provide green infrastructure to help improve people's health and wellbeing.

SEO 4: Create new habitats where opportunities exist, such as woodlands and wetlands at old gravel extraction sites, to extend, link or buffer areas of existing habitat to reduce the impacts of fragmentation. Manage existing grassland, woodlands, coverts and spinneys that contribute to sense of place, enhancing biodiversity resilience and habitat networks.

There are several large to medium sized settlements such as Lutterworth with many buildings and features of historic interest.

Description

Physical and functional links to other National Character Areas

Leicestershire Vales National Character Area (NCA) consists of low-lying clay vales and river valleys and shares many characteristics with Northamptonshire Vales NCA to the south-east. The town of Market Harborough nestles between the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire Vales NCAs and the A4303 runs along the border. To the north-east lies the higher ground of High Leicestershire NCA, and further north lie Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield NCA and Charnwood NCA, which rise quite steeply from the low-lying land north-west of Leicester. To the north-west of the NCA there is a more gradual transition to the flat, glacial till-dominated edge of the Mease/Sence Lowlands NCA, while to the south-west there is an equally gradual transition to Dunsmore and Feldon NCA and Arden NCA. The Northamptonshire Uplands and Northamptonshire Vales NCAs are to the south.

The area is split geologically into two areas, with the western half underlain by the Mercia Mudstone Group and the eastern half by the Lias Group. The latter continues into the neighbouring Northamptonshire Vales NCA.

The main rivers are the Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland. The River Swift runs out of the area in the south-west into the neighbouring Dunsmore and Feldon NCA. The Soar is fed by the Wreake in the north-west, and the River Sence flows into the area in the south-east. The slightly higher ground around Market Harborough separates the Soar and Welland catchments. Saddington Reservoir provides water for the Grand Union Canal, the 'Leicester Line' of which runs

The Grand Union Canal. The 'Leicester Line' runs north from Norton Junction to Leicester where it joins the River Soar to provide a link to the River Trent and to the Trent and Mersey Canal.

north from Norton Junction in the Northamptonshire Uplands NCA to Leicester, where it joins the River Soar to provide a link to the River Trent and to the Trent and Mersey Canal.

Expansive views into the area are afforded from the fringes of the elevated clay wolds, with the large settlements of Leicester, Hinckley and Market Harborough dominating the views.

The M1 cuts through the middle of the NCA, linking London with the North, and the M69 links the NCA with Dunsmore and Feldon, and Arden in Warwickshire. The A5, historically known as the Roman road of Watling Street, and the Fosse Way (the Bath to Lincoln road) are strategic routes through the area, linking London with Holyhead in Wales and linking Bath to Lincoln. Rail routes run north–south through Leicester, going south to Kettering, Bedford, Luton and London; and north to Derby, Nottingham, Sheffield and Leeds. Junctions north of Leicester station go east to Peterborough and Cambridge and west to Nuneaton and Birmingham.

The area also includes part of the 160-kilometre Leicestershire Round trail, which links several NCAs including Charnwood and High Leicestershire, and National Cycle Routes 6 (London to the Lake District) and 63 (Burton upon Trent to Wisbech in Cambridgeshire).

Improved management of the rivers Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland could enhance biodiversity and improve the water quality, flow and availability.

Key characteristics

- An open landscape of gentle clay ridges and valleys underlain by Mercia Mudstone and Lias groups bedrock but with an extensive cover of superficial deposits occasionally giving rise to moderately steep scarp slopes. There is an overall visual uniformity to the landscape and settlement pattern.

- Land use characterised by a mixture of pasture and arable agriculture that has developed on the neutral clay soils.

The NCA's woodland character is derived largely from spinneys and copses on the ridges and more undulating land and hedgerow trees and hedgerows.

- Distinctive river valley of the Soar and Swift, with flat flood plains and gravel terraces together with tributaries including the Sence. Riverside meadows and waterside trees and shrubs are common, along with waterbodies resulting from gravel extraction.

- Woodland character derived largely from spinneys and copses on the ridges and the more undulating land and from waterside and hedgerow trees and hedgerows. The density, height and pattern of hedgerows varies throughout.

- Diverse levels of tranquillity associated with contrasts between busy urban areas and some deeply rural parts. Large settlements dominate the open character of the landscape. Leicester, Lutterworth, Hinckley and Market Harborough and related infrastructure, including major roads, are often visually dominant.

- Frequent small towns and large villages often characterised by red brick buildings and attractive stone buildings in older village centres and eastern towns and villages. Frequent, imposing spired churches are also characteristic, together with fine examples of individual historic buildings.

- Rich and varied historic landscape, with the nationally important Bosworth Battlefield near Sutton Cheney, prominent historic parklands and country houses, ridge-and-furrow earthworks and important medieval settlement remains, for example at Wistow Hall, Gumley, Knaptoft and Peatling Magna.

Leicestershire Vales today

This is a large, relatively open and uniform landscape composed of low-lying clay vales interrupted by varied river valleys. Its sense of place comes less from its overall landform and more from its visually dominant settlements and views of the surrounding higher ground, particularly to the north of Leicester. The north-eastern corner of the area is dominated by the city of Leicester. Other large- to medium-sized settlements include Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Hinckley, with many attractive small towns and villages, and buildings and features of historic interest in between. In the north of the area there is a predominance of built settlements and a general associated lack of tranquillity. This contrasts strongly with a distinctly rural and tranquil feel tå the landscape in the south of the area, where a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland pervades. Country houses, historic designed parkland, waterside trees and meadows are common throughout.

The western part of this large and complex area is underlain by the Mercia Mudstone Group. To the east, the Lias Group mudstones crop out, with common interbedded limestones in the Blue Lias Formation forming a belt up to 5 km wide at the base. Between Market Harborough and Husbands Bosworth, ironstones of the Marlstone Rock Formation form pronounced topographic ridges, locally capped by the Whitby Mudstone Formation. The older, Ordovician age South Leicestershire Diorites form a line of hills from Enderby to Sapcote. These hard igneous rocks have been quarried for road and building stone. The whole area is covered by extensive glacial deposits, mainly of till but also with significant areas of sand and gravel and glaciolacustrine clays which begin to thin out to the south-east around Market Harborough.

Riverside meadows and waterside trees and shrubs are common along many of the rivers within the NCA.

The area is dominated by the river valleys of the Soar, Swift and Sence and their tributaries, with riverside meadows and waterside trees and shrubs common elements. The Soar Valley is dominated by urban development spreading and encroaching from Leicester. Tree cover is often low and localised, and fields are generally large to medium sized. In this open landscape, urban and suburban infrastructure and associated features such as pylons can be conspicuous. To the south of the valley, the hedgerow and woodland cover increases and the

urban influences diminish. A wide range of wildlife can be found in the flood plain wetlands, including otter and water vole and birds such as snipe, redshank and sand martin. Wetlands are also an important habitat for a wide range of invertebrate species; in particular, the Soar Valley contains known sites for a number of nationally rare beetles. Wetland habitat is associated with a few locally scarce plants; however, many watercourses are fringed by common, tall reed-like plants such as common club-rush, grey club-rush and reedmace. Many larger, open waterbodies can be found along the river valleys as a result of gravel extraction. These lakes and wetlands are important for wildfowl. Sites such as Watermead Country Park, on the northern side of Leicester, were initially farmland and then worked for gravel extraction before the disused gravel pits were restored and transformed into lakeside parks and wetlands.

Large woodlands are not a characteristic, but a wooded character derives from the many, usually small, woods, fox coverts and spinneys confined mainly to valley sides, on ridges and on more undulating land. Tree cover throughout the area has been substantially affected by Dutch elm disease and ash canker. Ash die-back has the potential to cause further change. A few larger wooded areas do exist, principally in parkland estates. Ancient woodland is scattered and fragmented but its distribution provides clues to the boundaries and margins of medieval and later open field townships. Mature trees, found across the area and often associated with ancient woodland, are an important habitat for many species. They provide roosting sites for seven species of bat , including Daubenton's, whiskered and Natterer's, as well as birds such as the stock dove, green woodpecker, redstart and barn owl. Mature trees are also particularly important for beetles and lichen species. The relatively low level of woodland in the area makes the remaining mature trees more prominent and influential in the landscape. Other important habitats include a number of small but mature broadleaved woodlands and spinneys, significant areas of grassland such as the neutral grassland in Goss Meadows and Kirby Frith Local Nature Reserves, and the grassland around Aylestone and Birstall. There are seven Local Nature Reserves in the city of Leicester, many linked by the rivers and the canal flowing through the centre of the urban area.

The landscape contains a considerable variation in field pattern, although the initial impression is of a landscape dominated by enclosure of former medieval open fields. This took the form of both regular geometric patterns – with straight hedgerows and roads among which sit planned farmsteads – and sizeable areas of less regular, non-Parliamentary enclosure dating from the 16th century, which often preserve the curved boundaries of medieval strip fields. There is considerable variety in the distribution, condition and density of hedgerows and hedgerow tree cover. Hedgerows tend to be low and closely trimmed, and hedgerow trees are often in poor condition. There are substantial waterside trees and meadows, but generally the flatter areas are given over to arable, where hedgerows can be particularly low, broken and intermittent. The most common hedgerow shrub is hawthorn, but older hedgerows contain a wide variety of species that are often characteristic of woodland, including field maple, dogwood and buckthorn. Characteristic hedgerow butterfly species include brimstone, purple and white-letter hairstreaks and holly blue. Ridge-and-furrow earthworks, significant in a national context, survive under pasture and, even more importantly, open field patterns survive at Gumley, Saddington and Mowsley (Laughton Hills).

This is an area of mixed farming where, on the slopes of the many minor valleys, on more undulating ground generally and close to settlements, pasture in small fields tends to predominate. Arable land is found on the broader, flat river terraces, and there has been a noticeable recent expansion of arable cultivation within this NCA. Seeds from arable weeds are an important food source for many

species of farmland bird such as grey partridge, corn bunting and skylark. Arable farming also supports butterflies such as the small skipper, gatekeeper and ringlet.

Timber frame was the most common form of building material for domestic and farm buildings before the 18th century, and survives encased in later stone and brick rebuilding. In the town centres – and to some extent in the frequent small towns and villages in the south-eastern part of the area – the older buildings and walls are constructed in an attractive range of local stones. Brick predominates and varies in colour from orange to deep red, with limestone and use of render adding variety, both in the older village cores and in the more regimented terraces of Leicester and Hinckley. The tradition of using brick as a building material in the area has resulted in many fine and prominent red brick buildings in the landscape. There are many large villages, but the frequent small ones show less 20th-century influence. This is particularly true in the south-east, where an older character of fine stone churches and mellow brick is present. As is the case in the neighbouring Northamptonshire Vales NCA, even when the landscape is not influenced by recent development, settlements are never very far apart and are prominent due to the imposing spired churches that punctuate the skyline. Lutterworth and Market Harborough have retained the character of older market towns and they are linked to the rural areas by a dense network of minor roads.

Seeds from arable weeds are an important food source for many species of farmland bird such as the corn bunting.

The area is rich in heritage assets, particularly late medieval buildings, such as Kirby Muxloe Castle, and groups of estate cottages, estate villages and planned farmsteads near the large country houses. There is a high survival of earlier timber-frame buildings in the west of the NCA, an area more notable for variety than uniformity, and also at Market Harborough. The NCA hosts the nationally important battlefield of Bosworth Field, where the last significant battle of the Wars of the Roses was fought in 1485.

In recent times there has been a relatively high rate of change from a more remote, rural character to an urban one. Pressure for development in the Leicestershire Vales is locally concentrated, such as the wind turbines around Lutterworth and at road junctions along the M69, around Hinckley and at Great Glen, as well as on the fringes of Leicester. Together with the presence and use of major transport routes, notably the M1 and M69 motorways and other major roads such as the A6 and A5, widespread development is challenging the rural and unspoilt character of much of the area and is further urbanising the road corridors.

The landscape through time

The geology of much of the western half of Leicestershire is dominated by the red mudstones of the Triassic-age Mercia Mudstone Group. These rocks were formed from wind-blown dust that settled into shallow saline lakes and mudflats within an extensive alluvial plain, with deposits up to 300 m thick. It was periodically inundated by flash floods that deposited thin beds of siltstone and sandstone. The Mercia Mudstone Group is quarried for brick making in Leicestershire. The older, Ordovician-age South Leicestershire Diorites form a line of low hills from Enderby to Sapcote; these hard, igneous rocks have been quarried for road and building stones. In the south-east of the area, between Leicester and Market Harborough, Triassic rocks are overlain by Jurassic-age limestones and clays. Deposits of glacial till (clay) are widespread throughout the NCA, covering much of the bedrock, along with areas of glacial sand and gravel which have been worked for aggregate.

The river valleys were a focus of settlement from at least Neolithic times and had become extensively settled by the Bronze Age. The gravel terraces of the Soar were thick with bronze-age occupation and ritual sites, and the valleys have been settled ever since. The surrounding land, however, was less densely occupied in prehistory, particularly in Leicestershire west of the Soar.

By the Iron Age, much of the better land had been cleared and there was major settlement in the valleys. Dense occupation of the Soar Valley continued into Roman times, with a major Roman centre established at Leicester (Ratae) on the site of an earlier iron-age ramparted settlement. The Roman roads of the Fosse Way (linking the early 'outpost' garrisons at Exeter and Lincoln and forming an early frontier in Roman-occupied Britain), Gartree Road and Watling Street form features that are still prominent in the landscape. Romano-British settlement was dense, with villas and hamlets associated with centres such as Leicester.

Anglo-Saxons took over a landscape that was substantially cleared of woodland, except furthest from the river valleys. The '–tons' and '–hams' still dominate the place names, and a number of parish boundaries originate from 'Saxon' estate boundaries. Away from the river valleys, settlement was less dense. A scattering of Scandinavian settlements became established in the 9th century, particularly in the thick boulder clay of Leicestershire, west of the Soar. Leicester developed in this period as a significant Viking settlement. Important towns such as Market Harborough and Lutterworth also owe their origin to the pre-conquest period. As the population expanded and the land was re-organised, frequent nucleated villages developed, surrounded by open fields. Significant areas of ridge and furrow remain from these open fields.

On 22nd August 1485, the Battle of Bosworth was fought in the Leicestershire Vales. This was the last significant battle in the Wars of the Roses, the civil war between the Houses of Lancaster and York that raged across England in the latter half of the 15th century. The battle was won by the Lancastrians and their leader Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, by his victory became the first English monarch of the Tudor dynasty. His opponent, Richard III, the last king of the House of York, was killed in the battle. Richard's grave was found during an archaeological investigation in 2012 in a Leicester City Council car park, the former site of Grey Friars church.

From the 15th century onwards there was piecemeal enclosure, but much of the landscape remained unenclosed until much later. The landscape contains a considerable variety of field systems, largely, but not exclusively, related to the process of regular enclosure undertaken in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

There are many surviving ridge-and-furrow earthworks under pasture and, even more importantly, nationally significant open field patterns survive in the townships of Gumley, Saddington and Mowsley (Laughton Hills). With the exception of the parts of forests that extend into the area from neighbouring higher ground and seasonal wetlands, the medieval open field system was extensive across this area. Significant enclosure had certainly taken place before 1750, but many open fields remained and the dominant settlement type continued to be the linear village, with farms concentrated within it. Extensive enclosure, some achieved by private agreement but much formalised through Parliamentary acts, took place in the late 18th and 19th centuries. As it had in the 15th and 16th centuries, enclosure usually meant the conversion of ploughland to pasture. Fossilised cultivation strips, preserved from the last episode of ploughing, were once widespread across the pastoral landscapes of this area. Modern arable practice has dramatically altered this picture, and now most of the remaining areas of ridge and furrow are highly fragmented and vulnerable. Sizeable ridge-and-furrow earthworks occur in some parishes and are key historic features.

Agricultural production developed in relation to the expanding markets of the nearby industrial towns and was heavily biased towards livestock for meat and dairy. Wealthier farms were newly created among the surveyed fields and lanes, many with combination barns serving cattle courts. The poorer inheritors of the enclosed landscape clustered in the old village farmsteads, which gradually declined. As a result, the area contains a much-modified, but still highly significant, survival of 18th-century and earlier farm buildings within the villages, most of which are threshing barns.

Landscaped parks surrounding grand houses were developed between the 17th and 19th centuries when many of the area's fine manor houses, such as

Pressure for further growth continues and the impact of modern development is a major factor in the area, where 'out of town' retail and industrial parks are a common and widely visible feature.

Bosworth Hall, were constructed and villages were rebuilt, occasionally in local stone. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the rapid growth of Leicester as a red brick-dominated residential and manufacturing centre in which the textiles and footwear industries played a major part. These industries transformed settlements in the eastern part of the area, spurred by the development of the Leicester Arm of the Grand Union Canal and the Ashby Canal and later the railways. Visible reminders of the canal system can be found at Foxton Locks, which is the largest flight of staircase locks on the English canal system. Alongside the locks is the Foxton Inclined Plane, built in 1900 as a solution to operational restrictions imposed by the lock flight. It remained in full-time operation for only ten years and was dismantled in 1928.

The Leicestershire Vales settlement pattern formed in medieval times and remains evident where separate villages can be seen clustered around tall church spires.

Gravel extraction has also left marks on the landscape, although many sites – such as Watermead Country Park – have now been transformed into wetlands, providing recreational and biodiversity benefits.

Leicester continued to expand through the 20th century, absorbing many of the surrounding villages. Pressure for further growth continues and the impact of modern development is clearly evident along the main transport routes and periphery of major settlements, where 'out of town' retail and industrial parks are a common and widely visible feature. Transport infrastructure developments – the M1 widening, the A14/M1/M6 junction, the M1/M69 junction and the park and ride at junction 21 of the M1 – are having a visual impact which is further urbanising the M1 corridor. More recently a Sustainable Urban Extension has been agreed at Lubbesthorpe, near junction 21 of the M1. This will provide a mixed-use development for up to 4,250 dwellings and related land uses, including schools, open space and 21 ha of employment development.

Ecosystem services

The Leicestershire Vales NCA provides a wide range of benefits to society. Each is derived from the attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) within the area. These benefits are known collectively as 'ecosystem services'. The predominant services are summarised below. Further information on ecosystem services provided in the Leicestershire Vales NCA is contained in the 'Analysis' section of this document.

Provisioning services (food, fibre and water supply)

- **Water availability:** There are four main rivers in the NCA: the Soar, the Sence, the Swift and the Welland; and two canal systems: the Grand Union Canal and the Ashby Canal. Saddington Reservoir, a nationally designated Site of Special Scientific Interest, was built to supply water to the Grand Union Canal and is also located within the NCA. The River Soar rises to the east of Hinckley in the west of the NCA and flows north through Leicester. There are a number of tributaries that join the Soar, including the River Sence. There are few water resource pressures within the Soar catchment, partly because most of the public water supply is imported from neighbouring catchments and partly due to the decline of the textile trade in Leicester.

Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation)

- **Regulating water quality:** Good quality water is available in the River Sence, which currently has a good surface water chemical status. The River Soar is poor quality, while the Grand Union Canal and the River Sence have moderate ecological potential. Thee groundwater chemical status in most of the NCA is good.

This is an area of mixed farming where pasture in small fields tends to predominate close to settlements.

- **Regulating water flow:** Much of the NCA is located within the River Trent catchment, while an area in the east of the NCA (around Market Harborough) is within the River Welland catchment and in the south around Lutterworth, the River Swift is part of the Severn catchment The woodland resource in the area helps to slow down the flow of water, and new areas of wetlands created by old gravel extraction sites help to balance water flows.

Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

- **Sense of place/inspiration:** The area retains a quintessential East Midlands landscape of mixed farming. Areas of pasture, arable and ridge and furrow provide a strong sense of a medieval landscape. Other notable features that enhance a sense of place are the field patterns, country houses, canals and rivers. There are many villages and small towns, often attractive and with historic, vibrant centres featuring many notable older buildings. The city and county town of Leicester lies within the area and exerts a considerable influence over the surrounding landscape, being the focus of the transport networks, infrastructure, industry and development.

- **Sense of history:** A sense of history is evident in the bronze-age origin and continuity of settlement along the main valleys and a network of Roman roads that still influence the character of the area, not least the Fosse Way and Watling Street, the latter following the route of the modern-day A5. The settlement pattern formed in medieval times remains evident, with separate villages clustered around tall church spires. A long history of agricultural land use is evidenced by remaining examples of ridge and furrow overlaid by later phases of enclosure. The many historic country houses in the area, most of which are still surrounded by parkland, are visible reminders of a prosperous past, as is the canal system – especially the Foxton Locks and the Foxton Inclined Plane. The Battle of Bosworth was the last significant battle of the Wars of the Roses and the battlefield is a nationally significant historic site.

The narrow River Soar where flooding is associated with a lack of capacity in the river channel. It is anticipated that flood risk is likely to increase in the future in this NCA, with further urban growth.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity

SEO 1: Protect and appropriately manage the strong historic character and heritage and the geological assets within the rural and urban landscapes, maintaining the evidence of past land use and connections between agriculture, settlement pattern and topography, as well as the significant places and events that took place within the area, so that the area can be enjoyed by all. Ensure that development is fully integrated into and informed by the landscape.

For example by:

- Conserving and maintaining evidence of ridge-and-furrow cultivation and important medieval settlement remains, for example at Wistow Hall, Gumley, Knaptoft and Peatling Magna, by working with farmers to avoid damaging cultivation and land management practices.
- Conserving remaining areas of historic designed parkland, typically on the edge of the area and next to the more wooded landscapes, for example around Wistow, Misterton and Cotesbach, by working with landowners to protect important features such as veteran trees and by planting replacement trees of appropriate species in keeping with historic landscape character.
- Maintaining remaining areas where Tudor and Parliamentary enclosure survives, in particular in the east where there is less 20th-century influence and where hedgerows are currently low but well maintained.
- Encouraging the use of traditional 'Midlands-style' hedgelaying to manage hedgerows, improving their structure and biodiversity value and strengthening landscape character.
- Maintaining and conserving the nationally important Bosworth Battlefield site by enhancing interpretation and minimising any potential damage caused by inappropriate land management and public access.
- Protecting, conserving and enhancing the fabric and understanding of the historic transport networks through the area, notably the Roman roads, the canal, and associated canal architecture and engineering features such as Foxton Locks and Foxton Inclined Plane.
- Using the understanding and knowledge of the distribution and location of settlements across the area to encourage and enable better-informed and complementary designs for development and urban expansion.
- Encouraging the use of locally sourced building materials in the repair and conservation of notable and historic buildings and in new developments within villages and smaller towns.
- Ensuring that green infrastructure is incorporated into new and existing development, providing accessible greenspace, protecting valuable heritage assets and increasing biodiversity in urban areas.
- Managing and interpreting the area's geology and geological sites.

SEO 2: Manage, conserve and enhance the woodlands, hedgerows, streams and rivers – particularly the rivers Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland – in both rural and urban areas, to enhance biodiversity and recreation opportunities; improve water quality, flow and availability; benefit soil quality; and limit soil erosion.

For example by:

- Conserving wet valley woods of alder and willow in the principal valleys of the rivers Soar, Sence, Swift and Welland by maintaining a diverse shrub layer, to provide good wildlife habitat and landscape interest
- Conserving and maintaining water quality by working with farmers and other landowners to reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture and other land uses through best practice land management, such as the use of buffer strip management.
- Seeking to introduce sustainable urban drainage systems in new and existing developments and next to the major roads throughout the area, to help regulate water flows (reducing the risk of flooding in urban areas) and to trap pollutants (preventing them from reaching main rivers and streams).
- Maintaining watercourse corridors as a strategic resource for tourism and recreation, for example by extending informal, small-scale public access where appropriate.
- Maintaining sustainable levels of recreational use of watercourses and waterbodies such as the Grand Union Canal and restored gravel extraction sites, to ensure benefits for water quality, biodiversity and recreation.
- Maintaining and reinstating the traditional practice of pollarding riparian trees (mainly willows).
- Maintaining the linear habitats, particularly the watercourses, which provide movement corridors for declining species such as water vole and also for otter.
- Conserving lowland meadows and pasture within the flood plains, recognising their increasing importance in the management of floodwater, by maintaining traditional management.
- Removing barriers to fish migration and creating formal fish refuge areas where appropriate.
- Encouraging best farming practices to improve soil structure and minimise soil erosion, thus improving water quality.

An opportunity for the area is to maintain and reinstate the traditional practice of pollarding riparian trees (mainly willows).

SEO 3: Increase, manage and enhance the recreational assets, principally the rights of way network, country parks such as Watermead and historic linear features such as the canals. Improve access to these assets and the open countryside from the city of Leicester and surrounding rural communities and provide green infrastructure to help improve people's health and wellbeing.

For example by:

- Identifying new opportunities for providing recreational assets such as gravel workings and new woodlands. Offer visitors and local communities opportunities to learn more about these assets and get involved through for example, volunteering, while enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits afforded by contact with the natural environment.
- Creating access to high-quality urban greenspace, linking with climate change adaptation, around the larger settlements on the edge of the National Character Area (NCA), in particular to the south of Leicester and the sub-regional centres of Hinckley and Market Harborough, and other locations that are under pressure for development.
- Creating natural links to the wider countryside to encourage the spread of species and thus enhance adaptation to climate change, in particular in the transportation and water corridors and alongside public rights of way such as the National Cycle Routes 6 and 63 and other local circular routes.
- Creating extensive new planting on the edges of residential and other development to mitigate visual impact, including realising the potential for growing energy crops, while avoiding sensitive sites.
- Enabling and encouraging fishing opportunities by improving recreational facilities in places such as Watermead.

The historical linear features such as the canals could be enhanced to help improve the health and wellbeing of local communities.

SEO 4: Create new habitats where opportunities exist, such as woodlands and wetlands at old gravel extraction sites, to extend, link or buffer areas of existing habitat to reduce the impacts of fragmentation. Manage existing grassland, woodlands, coverts and spinneys that contribute to sense of place, enhancing biodiversity resilience and habitat networks.

For example by:

- Extending links and creating new wildlife corridors with a varied structure and range of habitats, to minimise effects of climate change.
- Creating new and conserving existing notable habitats, in particular lowland wood pasture and parkland, wet woodland and grazing marsh.
- Working with landowners and managers to maintain and enhance existing woods, coverts and spinneys and to plant new woods where appropriate.
- Enhancing and expanding the network of semi-natural habitats that aid the movement of predatory species and bring benefits for pest regulation within food crops, as well as pollination and biodiversity.
- Managing unimproved species-rich grasslands and retaining ridge-and-furrow earthworks for their many functions, including their educational value.
- Encouraging the use, if feasible and appropriate, of Leicestershire sheep as a conservation grazing animal that is well-suited to lowland grazing, encouraging associated local branding and marketing of meat and wool and preserving the genetic diversity of this rare breed.
- Enhancing existing woodlands by removing and controlling invasive sycamore and rhododendron.
- Promoting the management and high-quality restoration of quarry wetlands and the creation of new wetland habitats. Improve interpretation and understanding of the local geological resource.

Supporting document 2: Landscape change

Recent changes and trends

Trees and woodlands

- Dutch elm disease affected large parts of the area during the second half of the 20th century, resulting in the loss of hedgerow trees. Woodland cover is generally sparse, except for intermittent small woodlands and small valley-side woods, spinneys and copses on the ridges and more undulating land.

- Agricultural activities on land adjacent to woods in some areas have caused impoverishment of woodland flora, through eutrophication and spray drift, particularly on smaller sites. Conversion of pasture to arable land with close ploughing has also sometimes resulted in tree root damage.

- Habitat fragmentation is evident across the area. There is a lack of younger generations of trees producing an uneven age structure, leading to breaks in continuity of deadwood habitat and loss of specialised, dependent species.

- Mature trees have also been affected by urban development and agricultural practices, removal of trees for safety reasons or perceptions of tidiness and lack of management, for example pollarding, and unsympathetic lopping and topping.

Boundary features

- There is variety in the distribution and extent of hedgerow and tree cover and density of hedgerows. On some valley flood plains, such as that of the Welland, there are substantial waterside trees and meadows, but elsewhere flatter areas are generally used as arable farmland with low, intermittent and often 'gappy' hedgerows.

- Traditional 'Midlands' style hedgelaying is still practised in places.

Agriculture

- There is a continuing trend to increase the area of arable cropping and for other changes in land use (farm reservoirs, equestrian facilities and associated infrastructure including fencing, training circles and stables) to replace traditional pasture.

Settlement and development

- There has been a relatively high rate of change from a rural character to urban character within this predominantly rural area. About 11 per cent of the area lies within green belt. Development is locally concentrated, such as around Lutterworth/Magna Park, at junctions along the M69, around the edges of the area in particular Market Harborough, Hinckley and Earl Shilton, as well as on the fringes of the city of Leicester, such as Oadby and Wigston. These changes in settlement pattern and commercial and retail developments, coupled with the intrusive nature of the major transport routes, namely the M1, M69, A5 and A6 passing through the NCA, have served to weaken the character of the area.

- High-density residential development at the edges of villages and towns has often been intrusive and there has often been a lack of screening vegetation to help assimilate new development. Such development may also be out of keeping with local character in its layout, design and materials.

Semi-natural habitat

- There is a lack of semi-natural habitat, which currently covers approximately 1 per cent of the NCA.

- With an increase in the area of arable cropping there have been impacts on pasture, woodlands and hedgerows.

Historic features

- Changes in land use threaten to diminish still further the area's important legacy of ridge-and-furrow earthworks under pasture, a particular feature in the Laughton Hills.

- In 1918 about 3 per cent of the area was historic parkland. By 1995 it is estimated that 60 per cent had been lost. About a fifth of the remaining parkland is covered by a Historic Parkland Grant.

Coast and rivers

- There are a number of changes that have affected the NCA's rivers including; infilling, siltation as a result of agricultural cultivation, various engineering schemes, road building and other developments which increase run-off and alter the catchment characteristics, and recreational pressures.

- The Grand Union and Ashby Canals have been subject to eutrophication from fertiliser run-off from surrounding land and increased recreational use, including boating and fishing, with associated dredging and management.

Minerals

- Several gravel extraction sites sit within this area such as at Ashby Parva, Lutterworth, Cadeby, Shawell, Huncote and Husbands Bosworth (on the southern border of this NCA).

- Croft Quarry is also found within this area, one of Leicestershire's four main hard rock extraction sites.

- Some old worked-out minerals sites have been transformed into local nature reserves providing benefits for wildlife and people, such as Watermead Country Park to the north of Leicester.

Drivers of change

Climate change

- The Leicestershire Vales is un-wooded in character so what tree and woodland cover there is makes an important contribution to the landscape. Climate impacts may make subtle and varied changes to this component of the landscape character but locally impacts may be more significant. It is likely that individual trees, groups of trees and hedgerows may be more at risk of loss and damage, notably due to pests and disease, wind-blow and fire.

- Climate change may bring increased risk of soil erosion and unstable ground (landslides) as a result of long periods of drought followed by intense rain. It may lead to increased risk of flooding and potentially alter the courses of rivers and streams.

- Increased summer temperatures may see an increase in incidents of algal bloom on some of the larger waterbodies such as the Saddington Reservoir.

- As air temperatures rises, so do water temperatures particularly in shallow stretches of rivers and the surface waters of lakes, reducing levels of

dissolved oxygen. The rivers, streams and reservoirs may become unsuitable for certain species.

- When stream flows peak earlier in the spring, owing to warmer temperatures, low stream flows begin earlier in the summer and last longer into the autumn. These changes stress aquatic plants and animals that have adapted to specific flow conditions.

Other key drivers

- There has already been a significant increase in arable farming in this NCA and with increased pressure for food production as a result of a national drive for greater self-sufficiency this trend is likely to continue resulting in continued pressure to convert grassland to arable use.

- Lowland meadows and pasture within the flood plain will play an increasing role in retaining and storing floodwater and this traditional type of management would further assist in flood risk regulation.

- Modern development and infrastructure pressure arising from the need to accommodate the expansion of Leicester, Hinckley and Market Harborough is likely to be experienced.

- The city of Leicester is identified as a principal urban area, with Hinckley and Market Harborough as sub-regional centres with the capacity for appropriate sustainable new growth and regeneration. Leicester and Hinckley are described as 'Growth Points' for receiving new development. Consequently the area is highly likely to come under considerable pressure for extensive new residential and other development.

- Recent wind turbine developments around Lutterworth.

- Continuing pressure for gravel extraction along the river valleys.

Appendix CE3:

Local Landscape Character Assessment Extract

Laughton Hills Landscape Character Area

Key Characteristics

- Distinct ridgeline of rolling hills with steep sides
- Predominantly rural character with areas of woodland
- Arable farming predominantly on the flatter areas to the south
- Pasture on the hillier areas to the north
- Scattering of small attractive villages and hamlets

General Description

The Laughton Hills character area consists mainly of high hills predominantly used for grazing, which flatten out to arable areas towards the south. Medium sized fields are divided by mature declining hedgerows with boundary trees throughout the area. In places some ridge and furrow fields are still apparent. Wooded areas are more common and larger towards the north of the character area. Views are open but limited in extent across the area due to the rolling topography. There are several well established villages that have grown significantly in recent times, such as Husbands Bosworth.

Topography

The topography of Laughton Hills follows a distinctive ridge line that adjoins and overlooks the Upper Welland Valley and the Grand Union Canal from the north and west. The area generally becomes lower and flatter towards the south. The ridge line along the Welland Valley border incorporating the Upper Avon Valley south of Laughton reaches above 160m AOD and areas further south around Swinford at 110m AOD. The River Avon forms the southern boundary of the character area.

Geology

The main geology grouping of the Laughton Hills is predominantly Lower Lias, Jurassic with some Middle Lias, Jurassic and Upper Lias, Jurassic.

Vegetation

The main wooded areas feature in the north of the character area in particular Gumley Wood beside Gumley and patches along the Laughton Hills' ridge line adjacent to the Grand Union Canal. The woodlands predominantly consist of ash and oak species with ornamental trees such as horse chestnut evident in the village centres. The Rookery (18.4ha) beside Swinford represents the most significant woodland area towards the south with other prominent woodland areas also around North Kilworth. The hedgerows of the Laughton Hills are mature and well established, yet appear in decline due to a lack of ongoing management. Occasional hedgerow trees and dispersed spinneys and copses enclose medium sized fields.

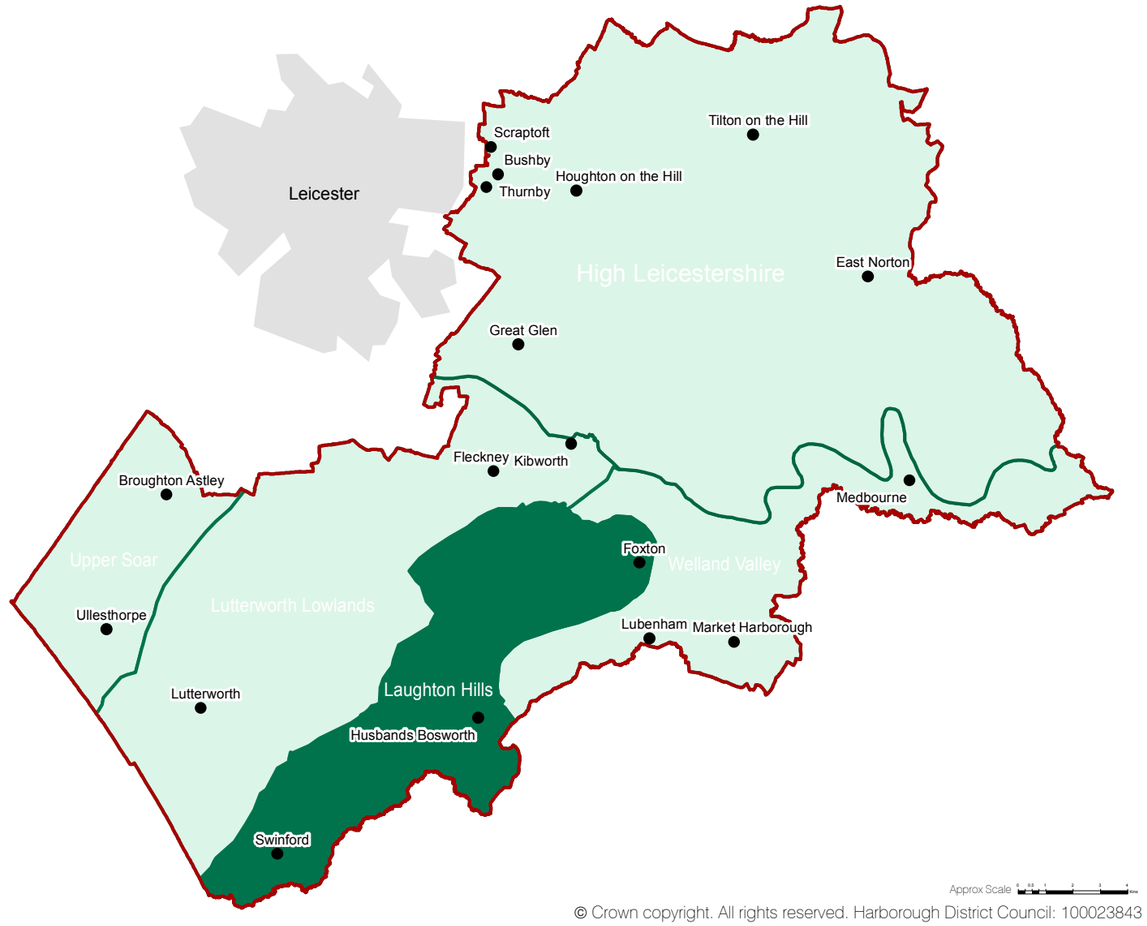
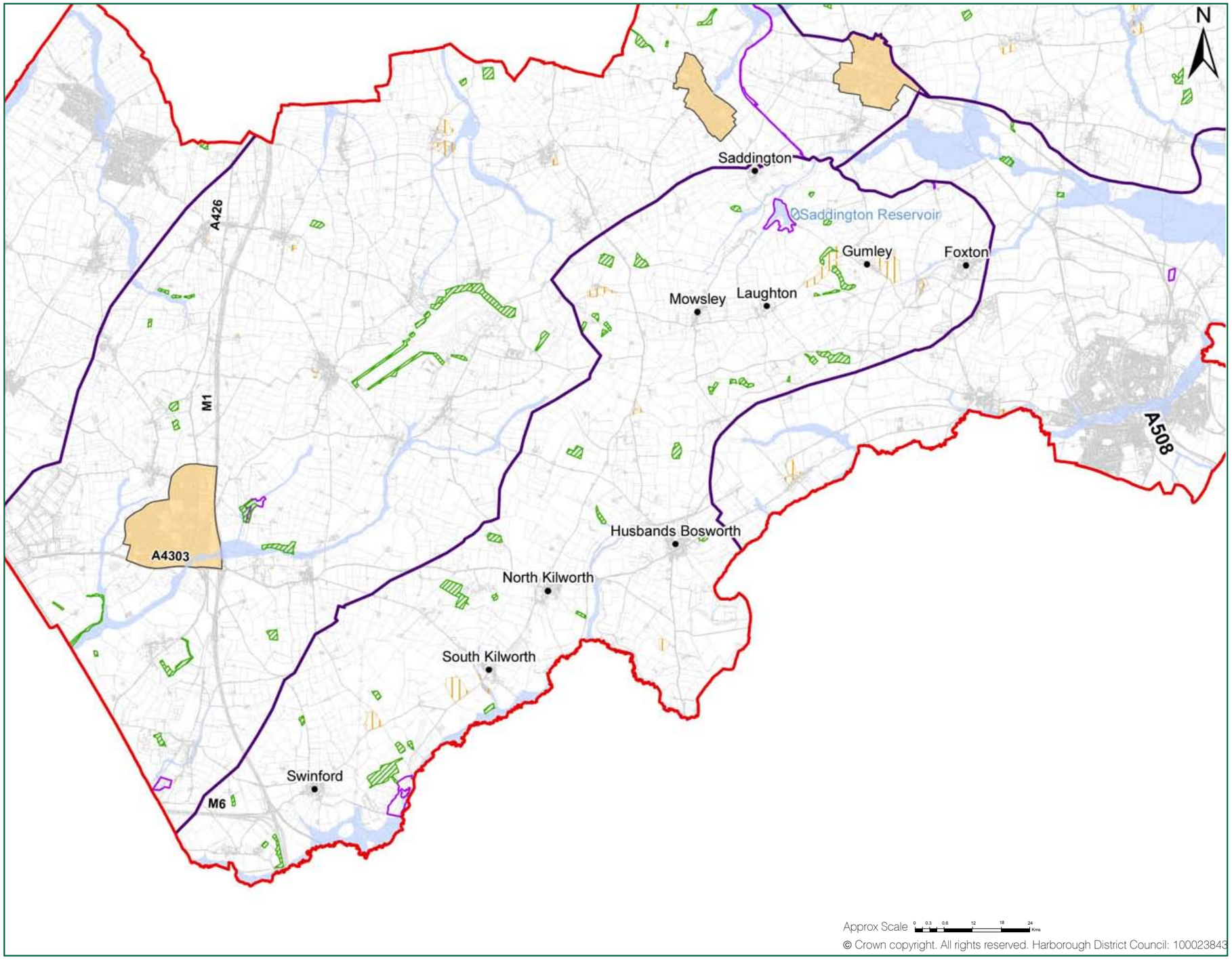


Figure 1.6: - Laughton Hills- Landscape Character Plan



Legend

- Harborough District Boundary
- Settlements
- Character Area Boundary
- Woodland
- SSSI
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Flood Zone
- Focus Areas
- Local Nature Reserve
- Green Wedge
- Reservoir

Ecology

The mature hedgerows and woodland areas in this area are likely to be of at least local ecological value due to the species they can support, including ground flora and bird species.

Saddington Reservoir SSSI supports a diverse range of undisturbed wetland communities and is notable for its beetle interest. Stanford Park SSSI in the south of the Laughton Hills area is an area of old parkland which supports the richest assemblage of lichens in Leicestershire.

Protected/ notable species that may be found in Laughton Hills include birds, badgers, bats, reptiles and amphibians.

Land Use

The Laughton Hills are a rural area used predominantly for pasture in medium sized fields. The Foxton Locks and Grand Union Canal provide for recreational activities such as walking and cycling. There are no large developments throughout the character area with the villages of Husbands Bosworth and Foxton acting as the most significant settlements.

Urban Influence/ Settlement Pattern

The character area contains several villages that have retained their traditional high church towers/ steeples which are a prominent feature of the area. However some villages have suffered from recent residential developments out of keeping with their traditional character.

The main roads that run through the area are the A4304 east to west connecting Market Harborough to Lutterworth, the M1 and M6, and the A5199 running north to south connecting to Leicester. Both these roads meet in Husbands Bosworth making the settlement a relatively busy interchange. Some of the roads to the north have steep inclines particularly those crossing the Laughton Hills ridgeline.

In the far south west corner beside Swinford lies the M1, M6 and the A14 which significantly intrudes, both visually and physically, upon the local area, but does not impact on the wider extents of the Laughton Hills.

Heritage

There are no towns within the Laughton Hills character area. The area is agricultural in use and although there is evidence of the land being settled in the prehistoric period, as indicated by a Scheduled settlement near Swinford, it is the Medieval land use and settlement which has provided the pattern of current small villages. There are a number of small settlements surrounded by agricultural land, often with ridge and furrow earthworks visible indicating the longstanding arable use of the landscape. There are also a few deserted medieval settlements scattered throughout the character area.

The Grand Union Canal runs through this character area and was constructed in the early 1800s to transport heavy goods including coal to Kettering and further south. Associated with the canal is the area of Foxton Locks, which allowed canal boats to travel up a 75ft hill using a series of locks. To allow the faster movement of canal boats an Inclined Plane to the east of Foxton Locks, was designed which acted as a pioneering boat lift, and which is now Scheduled.
Stanford Hall is a Registered Park and Garden located in the south west of the character area and is a large country house on the site of a former manor house. Nearby is a deserted medieval settlement of Stormsworth and this reinforces the pattern seen in High Leicestershire of parkland estates, which were likely to have been the former manorial estate with associated villages and surrounding farmland.

Capacity: Low to Medium

The Laughton Hills are a rural area with little existing development. In general the character area has low capacity to accept further development. Along the route of the A4034 and away from the visible plateaus of the north there would be some scope for carefully considered residential development that fits within the existing infrastructure of the villages and the topography of the surrounding landscape.

Where unsympathetic developments have previously occurred at the edge of settlements, sites have the capacity to accommodate further development, which is more in keeping with the scale and form of the traditional settlement pattern and envelope. Many of the villages have some capacity for small scale development internally as infill but care must be taken to not impact further on the surrounding countryside. Some of the villages along the A4034 such as Husbands Bosworth have the residential capacity in landscape terms to accommodate further development.

South Kilworth Village

Foxton Church

Typical hedgerow boundary of the Laughton Hills

Key Issues

- The distinctive ridgeline and steeply sloping sides of the ridge, which characterise the character area, contribute strongly to the area's low capacity to accommodate development. Even minimal development which is inappropriate or poorly sited may impact adversely on landscape character.
- Woodland cover, which is another key feature of the landscape, may be vulnerable to loss through inappropriate development or poor management.
- The rural character of the landscape, both arable and pasture, would be threatened by development. Any development would need careful siting which is sympathetic to landscape setting and landform in particular.
- In developing the tourism potential of Foxton Locks care will need to be taken to minimise the impact on the immediate landscape.