

Thriplow & Heathfield

Site selection: Landscape and visual sensitivity

for Thriplow Parish Neighbourhood Plan

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Introduction

1. Chartered Landscape Architect Lucy Batchelor-Wylam was appointed in 2019 to assist Thriplow with landscape consultancy to support the making of their parish Neighbourhood Plan. The author is a suitably qualified professional having undertaken a number of character assessments and parish level sensitivity studies for Neighbourhood Plans in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk in recent years, and worked jointly on a district level character assessment and fringe sensitivity assessment for Ipswich and surrounding villages, in association with Alison Farmer Associates.
2. Landscape consultancy is provided to help the parish underpin their Neighbourhood Plan and site allocation process with a sound and robust evidence base. Landscape character assessment and landscape sensitivity assessment have been undertaken, in line with national guidance, to support this process.
3. The aim of this assessment is to assist the parish group with site selection. The Sites put forward for consideration are the result of a Call for Sites in early summer 2020. Of the sites put forward 5 met the initial sifting criteria and were put forward for assessment. Their locations are mapped in figure 1.
4. The aim of this report is to assess in turn each of the five sites against a set of landscape and visual sensitivity criteria. Other factors will also influence final site selection including highways/access issues, flood risk, infrastructure capacity, ecological impact etc. and these are dealt with elsewhere. Site selection will be undertaken by the Neighbourhood Plan group once in receipt of all pieces of evidence.

What is landscape sensitivity?

5. Landscape sensitivity assessment is covered by National Guidance published in 2019 by Natural England ¹.
6. The guidance includes the following definition:

“Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure

of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change arising from development types or land management practices, without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value.”

7. The premise is that residential development should be more readily acceptable in the least sensitive areas, and where appropriate forms of mitigation would be possible. Development is least acceptable in areas of higher sensitivity and/or conditions are such that the landscape would not be sensitive to mitigation measures.

Objectives

8. The purpose of this report is to allow due weight to be given to landscape and visual constraints and opportunities relating to each site in order that housing delivery is enabled in appropriate locations that do not harm the distinctive and special characteristics of the village or its valued views.
9. There are three overall objectives:
 - a) provide the Neighbourhood Plan group the means of making sound decisions in relation to site selection
 - b) help make transparent to residents and land owners why such decisions were taken;
 - c) explore landscape protection, mitigation and enhancement opportunities relating to each site.

Policy background

10. The NPPF supports the inclusion and consideration of landscape and the built environment in planning decisions. Paragraph 120 requires sufficient provision for conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure.
11. Paragraph 170 states that:

“Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes,

¹ An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment. Christine Tudor. Natural England 2019

sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;...”

Green Belt

12. The parish is enclosed by the Cambridge Green belt policy designation. Para 133 of the NPPF states *‘The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence’.*
 13. This means that land within the Green Belt area could not ordinarily be considered for residential allocation under the Neighbourhood Plan, NP policies have to accord with the district or National policies that sit ‘above’ it. The exception to this would be if the tests that are set out in paragraph 145 of the NPPF were met. For example, these can include limited village infilling and limited affordable residential development for local community needs, in certain circumstances.
 14. The Sites generally comprise ‘White’ land (outside settlement boundary but excluded from the Greenbelt designation. One Site is within the Greenbelt and is included to allow a full understanding of sensitivity and value issues across the village fringes, and allow the assessment to be relevant should future exception sites come forward.
 15. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan policy NH/8 ‘Mitigating the impact of development in and adjoining the green belt’ is relevant - development on the edges of the settlement which are surrounded by Green Belt must include careful landscaping and design measures of a high quality.
- ## Method and Approach
16. This sensitivity assessment considers 5 sites as mapped on Figure 1. The approach to their assessment aims to be transparent, robust and defensible. It is consistent with good practice guidance on landscape character assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment, namely:
 - An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment. Christine Tudor. Natural England (2019).
 - Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition, Spon.
 17. Sources of information included:
 - Ordnance Survey base maps;
 - Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991)
 - Thriplow and Heathfield Parish character study
 - Biodiversity designations (local and national);
 - Historic England designations;
 - Relevant Local Authority data for Conservation Areas;
 - Aerial photography (Google Earth).
 18. Landscape and visual factors are considered separately and tabulated for each Site. The factor criteria are defined in Table 1 and Table 2. They set out example circumstances indicating conditions of higher and lesser sensitivity. They are set out under five headings:
 - Physical and natural factors
 - Cultural and historic factors
 - Visual sensitivity - views
 - Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge
 - Perceptual aspects
 19. Each table then culminates with a judgement of overall sensitivity - either LOW , MODERATE or HIGH. This final judgement is a balance of the separate factor judgements and employs professional

judgement. Whilst it provides an overall comparative measure of sensitivity in both landscape and visual terms, more useful is the detail in the supporting text that pick out the sensitivities for each area.

20. Conditions indicating high site sensitivity could be, for example, where the following scenarios apply:
- the site has highly valued features, and/or valued features that are highly susceptible to development;
 - Where aspects of national value are present eg listed heritage features;
 - Where impacts might result to natural or topographic features that contribute notably to local character and sense of place;
 - Where Site is very visually prominent;
 - Where adjacent settlement has stark edges and assimilation of a new development would be hard;
 - Where scenic views, that are key to the experience of a settlement or where they are related to amenity and recreation, are vulnerable.
21. Conversely, examples of conditions indicating a Site with lower sensitivity could be;
- the site has few or no valued features, and/or valued features that are less susceptible to development;
 - lower value through a lack of any designations for landscape, ecology or heritage;
 - a lack of value associated with recreation or visual amenity,
 - the Site does not play a role in any key views of the village, or where it is well contained and where development could be assimilated without wider impact;
 - where the Site is visually well contained;
 - where development would fit well with the historic pattern of settlement development or where it might offer the opportunity for the enhancement or reinforcement of character.
22. Each Site assessment includes a brief consideration of mitigation. Mitigation is important as it must be recognised that regardless of the policies which might discourage development in areas of high sensitivity, applications may still come forward. Provision of mitigation guidance provides a basis for the determining authorities and the parish group to negotiate better design outcomes.

Figure 1: Site locations and context

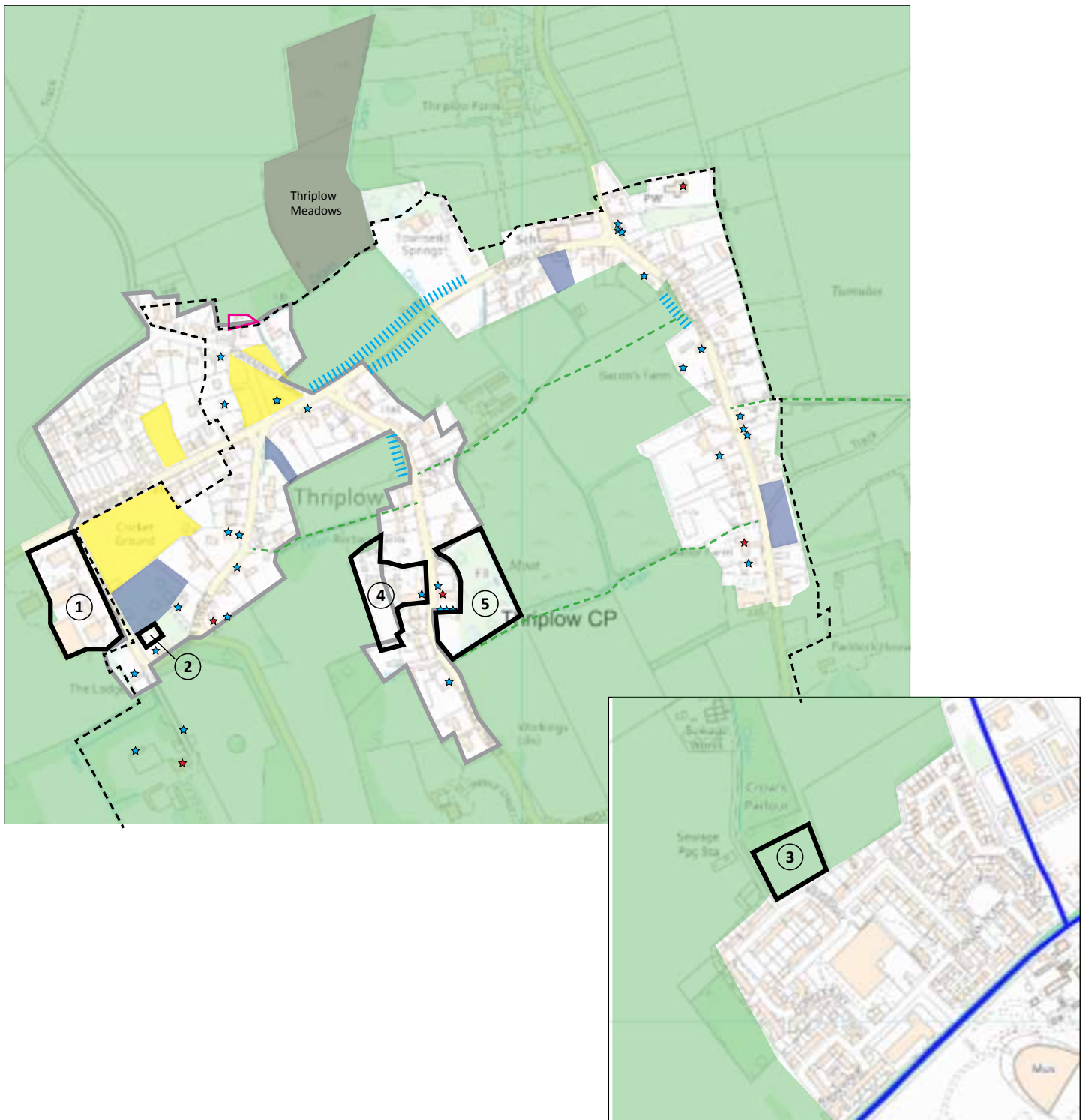
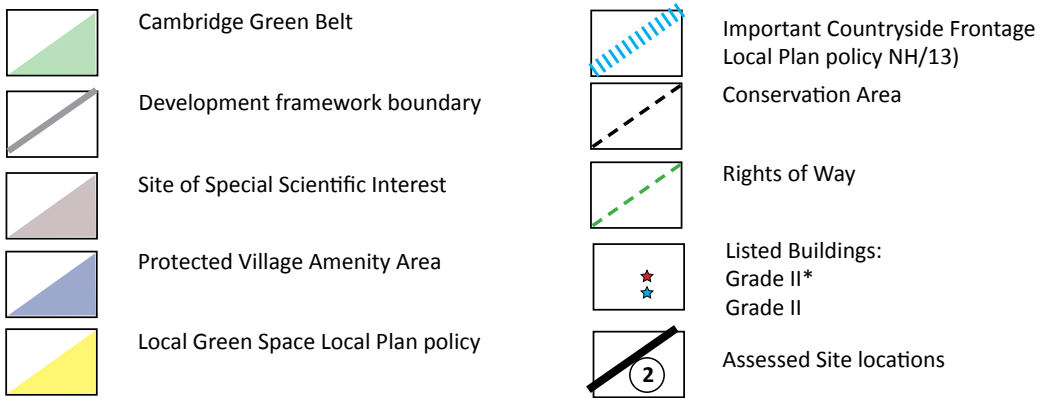


Table 1: LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY FACTORS

	PHYSICAL AND NATURAL SENSITIVITY FACTORS
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site located where topography and landform play key role in defining character and sense of place. Loss of visible landform would harm character. Sites on strong landform features such as slopes, scarps and valleys are likely to be more sensitive. • Wealth of natural features such as woodland edges, native hedges, ponds or watercourses etc. and they are in good condition and provide important habitat. • The Site makes a strong contribution to local landscape character – e.g. it has distinctive landform, an intact, natural landscape with hedgerows, trees and other features of interest.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography and landform play some role in defining character. • Some natural features. Condition of natural features hedges sometimes poor. Some habitat value. • The Site has some limited characteristics that contribute to local landscape character but is undistinctive. It may be a typical example of a locally commonplace character.
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topography and landform play little role in defining character. Sites on simple, flat land likely to be less sensitive. Not vulnerable to the loss of visible landform. • Natural features generally absent, very fragmented and/or in poor condition. • Landscape context is degraded and makes no contribution to local landscape character or even detracts.

	CULTURAL AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE VALUE
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site associated with a landscape with regionally-rare character/ valuable landscape with designations • Site has strong, intrinsic historic character, or associations that are not diminished by modern human influence. • Small scale, fine grain; historic field patterns are strongly in evidence; intact network of hedges; regular hedgerow trees. • Strong indication of 'time-depth' in the landscape - i.e. enduring features or arrangements that contribute strongly to historic character.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site associated with a landscape with common but locally-valuable landscape character. No designations for value. • Landscape context with some historic character or visible historic elements • Medium scale field sizes, evidence of partial boundary loss. • Some indication of 'time-depth' seen in arrangement of features which give a degree of historic character
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site associated with a rural area with very common or easily replicated landscape character with no designations for value. • Landscape context has lost all historic character or visible historic elements • Simple, large scale open; little evidence of historic field pattern; boundary straightening and field amalgamation. • Very little indication of time-depth - modern elements dominate

Table 2: VISUAL SENSITIVITY FACTORS

	VISUAL SENSITIVITY FACTORS - VIEWS
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site offers views, or falls within public views towards, designated landscapes or features of national importance e.g. Grade I or II* Listed Buildings, especially where potentially contribute to the significance of an asset / feature • Views associated with Site are of notable scenic beauty • Views experienced by large numbers of people, or by multiple residential properties, or is the subject of visitor interest. • Visually prominent in wider landscape; forming part of view from many points in the parish. • Direct views from multiple footpaths or open spaces, or at close range and where would dominate the view.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site offers views, or falls within public views towards Grade II Listed Buildings and potentially contribute to the significance of an asset / feature • Views associated with Site have some scenic beauty but have some detracting elements • Some views into Site available where conditions allow. • Moderately visible in views from principal points or routes in the parish. • Views from a few points on footpaths and/or at longer range
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No aspects of value see in views on or around the Site. • Views associated with Site could not be thought of as 'scenic'- strong detracting elements • Conditions combine to make views of land generally difficult to experience - landscape is enclosed or well screened from public or private view. • Site not seen from principal points or routes in the parish. • No views from public footpaths

	RELATIONSHIP TO SETTLEMENT / SETTLEMENT FORM AND EDGE
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Site is part of a landscape which provides a prominent and distinctive setting or backdrop to settlement • The Site plays an important role in the perception gaps between distinct settlements or clusters. • Site part of porous edge to settlement, breaks in settlement allow interface with countryside; buffered by historic landscape pattern; native vegetation softens edges.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Site makes a limited positive contribution to the setting of the settlement. • The Site partly contributes to a gap between settlements or clusters • Site is partially integrated within settlement edge but could create some limited sense of separation.
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The landscape plays no role as setting or backdrop to the settlement • The landscape is contiguous with existing settlement to the extent that if developed, it would not be perceived as an extension of the settlement into the countryside • Site occupies poorly integrated or abrupt interface between edge of settlement and countryside; boundary vegetation absent or sparse, aspects of modern development already present and enhancement opportunities are obvious.

	PERCEPTUAL ASPECTS
HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively remote and tranquil, little human activity seen or heard • Complex and varied texture, high degree of naturalness with few features of human scale.
MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate tranquillity; some human activity seen and/or heard • Moderately varied texture, reasonably good degree of naturalness; some features of human scale.
LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An area with a disturbed landscape, strongly influenced by development/activity/ intrusion. • Very uniform and simple without texture where natural features have been lost and features of human scale dominate.

Site Assessment Results Tables

SITE 1

SITE LOCATION: The Grainstore Site, 1-3 Lodge Road

SITE AREA: 1.28ha

FACTOR and SENSITIVITY VALUE	EVALUATION & JUSTIFICATION
Physical and natural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	<p>This brownfield Site itself has few natural features and consists of agricultural scale buildings and hardstandings. Its roadside boundaries are vegetated and the trees have value in helping assimilate the bulky buildings within the skyline. Flat, open countryside to the west. A continuous hedge with trees lines Fowlmere Rd and trees have been planted in the verge along Lodge Lane. Good scope to retain all trees. There is a pond and copse just beyond the southern boundary which contain the Site to the south.</p> <p>The Site is flat and makes no notable contribution to character in terms of topography.</p>
Historic and cultural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	<p>There are no heritage features on the site, but its east boundary adjoins the Conservation Area and views in to the Site are possible from it.</p> <p>There are also a number of Listed Buildings within 250m although none with direct views onto the Site. Confers understanding of the historic agricultural role of the village.</p>
Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge LOW / MED / HIGH	<p>Site sits prominently along the west side of the village forming a strong edge. The buildings provide containment to the village after the openness of the cricket pitch. It provides a strong contrast in terms of scale of its built form compared to the residential land close by. Development here would not constitute an incursion into the countryside and could represent an enhancement opportunity.</p>
Visual sensitivity factors - Views LOW / MED / HIGH	<p>Built form is visually prominent in views from the east and west. It contains and blocks views outward from the village, from points within the Conservation Area. It has a strong backdrop function to views over the cricket pitch. Current positive or scenic value is low however, although some visual interest from the colourful agricultural structures on site. Opportunity to allow some longer views through to the west in future site design.</p>
Perceptual aspects LOW / MED / HIGH	<p>Site alongside main road so subject to regular road noise. Sense of activity on the farmyard as well as from garage operations in one of the buildings.</p>
OVERALL SENSITIVITY RESULT and justification:	<p>LOW / MODERATE / HIGH</p> <p>Although sensitive in visual terms, this brownfield Site is much less sensitive in landscape terms and has good scope for development.</p> <p>Something of the agricultural language of the Site's forms and structures could be carried through to any future design proposal. Retain all trees and hedges to help assimilate development and provide maturity. Enclose with a strong boundary along the west side to reinforce the village edge.</p>

SITE 2

SITE LOCATION: 34 Lower Street

SITE AREA: 0.045 hectares

FACTOR and SENSITIVITY VALUE	EVALUATION & JUSTIFICATION
Physical and natural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	A small site to the north of an existing historic dwelling. It features an old concrete garage building. It is partly enclosed by skyline trees along the north boundary and scattered garden scale trees along its other boundaries. The area is flat and makes no notable contribution to character in terms of topography, but contributes to tree cover and the wooded and enclosed feel noted in the parish character assessment.
Historic and cultural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Reads as rear curtilage and provides setting to grade II listed cottage at 30, Lower Street. A further listed cottage across the road 'The Lodge'. These cottages read as a related pair which form a subservient part of the estate landscape relating to Thriplow Bury. They share features such as gothic lattice windows. Site also inside Conservation Area.
Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge LOW / MED / HIGH	Separated somewhat from village. Part of western village edge where patterns remain historic in form and unaltered by modern development.
Visual sensitivity factors - Views LOW / MED / HIGH	Filtered views into the Site are possible from lane immediately adjacent to Site but views from the wider landscape or village are not possible. The Site is well contained and does not play a role in key views around the village.
Perceptual aspects LOW / MED / HIGH	Sense of a quiet, wooded corner of the village. Greater tranquillity compared to other parts of the village experiencing higher traffic flow. But vulnerability to a single plot is low in terms of likely effects on tranquillity.
OVERALL SENSITIVITY RESULT and justification:	LOW / MODERATE / HIGH In landscape terms the sensitivity of this Site lies in its contribution to the lightly settled, historic, quiet, wooded, character of Lower Lane. It has low visual sensitivity and developing a single house here would have localised impact only. The location is highly sensitivity in terms of heritage. Any design would need to be highly sympathetic to satisfy the Heritage Officer that little impact to the cottages (and their interrelationship) adjacent would result, or the wider Conservation Area. Some degree of mitigation is conceivable through assimilation within vegetative boundaries.

SITE 3

SITE LOCATION: West of Recreation ground, Heathfield

SITE AREA: 0.57 hectares

FACTOR and SENSITIVITY VALUE	EVALUATION & JUSTIFICATION
Physical and natural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Greenfield land - small fenced meadow adjoining Kingsway. Bordered by grown out gappy hedge/trees along east, west and south boundaries; block of wet woodland provides containment to the north. Adjoins recreation ground to the east but no views in owing to thick boundary hedge. Site flat - no particular contribution to character in terms of topography. It is natural character makes it inherently valuable, given the lack of green space in the urban area to the south. Biodiversity value and opportunity.
Historic and cultural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Site is in the Green belt. No historic assets in the vicinity. This area has been developed in recent decades on farmland, no traces of any historic settlement are present. Bridleway/footpath wraps around two sides of the site offering important amenity to Heathfield residents - access to countryside and footpath to Thriplow.
Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge LOW / MED / HIGH	Site projects north just outside the existing straight, modern settlement edge but is contained by vegetation - strong edge provided by woodland block to the north. Development on the Site would not be perceived as a break into countryside.
Visual sensitivity factors - Views LOW / MED / HIGH	Only a glimpse into the Site is possible from Kingsway and the well used right of way offering views across the site. It contributes positively to visual amenity for local residents. Views from wider landscape or housing area are not possible - impacts of any change would be very localised.
Perceptual aspects LOW / MED / HIGH	Site is in a relatively quiet corner of Heathfield, but tranquillity is low in the area owing to the very busy road network a short distance away.
OVERALL SENSITIVITY RESULT and justification:	LOW / MODERATE / HIGH Landscape and visual sensitivity values are moderate. Its importance locally is notable for the amenity it provides Heathfield residents. Building on the Site would erode the character of the landscape in this corner of Heathfield and would cause localised loss of habitat and local visual amenity in an area where environmental quality is already very limited. Site could be focus for rural exception/community use.

SITE 4

SITE LOCATION: Rectory Farm and to the rear of 14 -18 Middle Street

SITE AREA and CAPACITY: 0.8 hectares

FACTOR and SENSITIVITY VALUE	EVALUATION & JUSTIFICATION
Physical and natural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	This mainly brownfield site comprises a walled farmyard which forms part of the streetscape along Middle Street, and adjacent greenfield land to the west. Some large pine trees on Site frontage and other large trees within the site. Pond to rear of Farmyard. Open land to the west separates Middle Street from Lower St. Flat land - little sensitivity in terms of topography.
Historic and cultural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Site is the Conservation Area. Green Belt lies adjacent to the west. Tithe barn is grade II listed and thought to have been built in the C14, and altered in the late C19 or early C20. Farmsteads play a role in the streetscene in amongst newer housing - bringing a tangible sense of history about the village's past life and economy. Opposite the Site lies The Manor - a Grade ii* property with a further three grade II listed structures in its curtilage.
Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge LOW / MED / HIGH	Settlement pattern along Middle Street is currently linear arrangement which includes old farms and large historic houses. The houses, their grounds, enclosures and some large trees form the most distinctive aspects of the streetscene. Development of Site could contrast with the linear 'one plot deep' prevailing pattern. However, it does fit well into the existing village edge - it will not read as a new incursion into open land - development here would feel contiguous with the settlement along Middle Street, if contained within a strong vegetative boundary.
Visual sensitivity factors - Views LOW / MED / HIGH	Localised impacts only. Views to rear/side of Site are possible only at close range from footpath to northwest, as well as direct views in from Middle Street. Views from footpath are rural in character if not especially scenic - landscape in mixed condition from small holding/ancillary farm activities and structures. No views from the wider landscape or village experienced.
Perceptual aspects LOW / MED / HIGH	Stronger historic feel to village here than in much of the village. Road brings a degree of noise and movement.
OVERALL SENSITIVITY RESULT and justification:	LOW / MODERATE / HIGH Factors balance out to Moderate sensitivity. Higher sensitivity aspects are the features of heritage value and their collective contribution to character. Any conversion and development adjacent needs to be highly sympathetic. Retail all significant trees and integrate into layout to retain mature, rural feel. Instate strong planted boundary to provide screening and containment along the west side.

SITE 5

SITE LOCATION: The Manor, Middle Street

SITE AREA: 0.6ha

FACTOR and SENSITIVITY VALUE	EVALUATION & JUSTIFICATION
Physical and natural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Land is undeveloped curtilage south and east of The Manor. Appears to be managed grassland well vegetated with a number of mature trees of native and ornamental appearance, some conifers, giving a garden feel. A pond in the south links into an enclosing ditch system that is noted on OS plans as a historic moat.
Historic and cultural landscape factors LOW / MED / HIGH	Site is the Conservation Area. Green Belt lies adjacent to the east. Manor is Grade II*, its garden wall is Grade II listed and so are three garden urns to the south of the house. Land forms part of the wider setting to these assets. Site reads as part of setting to the Manor and contributes to its significance. Mature garden trees provide backdrop. All feels enclosed by long, decorative, roadside brick wall.
Relationship to settlement / settlement form and edge LOW / MED / HIGH	Site is not well integrated with village edge and existing dwellings - the Manor sits alone as the southern-most property east of Middle Street. The Site contributes to the separation through undeveloped land between Middle St and Church Street, and between footpaths 234/2 and 234/3.
Visual sensitivity factors - Views LOW / MED / HIGH	Views into the Site are generally hard to achieve given the continuous vegetated boundaries. They help provided a wooded feel to the rear of Middle Street in views from the footpaths.
Perceptual aspects LOW / MED / HIGH	Perceptions about this Site are related to its function as curtilage to a historic house of high status. Its ornamental trees and moats convey its historic relationship with the Manor and related lack of intrusion from modern elements.
OVERALL SENSITIVITY RESULT and justification:	LOW / MODERATE / HIGH This site is highly sensitive to development because of its role as setting to The Manor and other listed assets, historic landscape features. Mitigation measures are unlikely to be able to overcome these significant factors.