Date: April 2008

Land at Durrants Lane, Berkhamsted

Landscape Assessment

Prepared by CSa Environmental Planning

On behalf of Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd Hertfordshire County Council Egerton Rothesay School



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Report No:- CSA/1074/002

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 CSa Environmental Planning has been commissioned by Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd, Hertfordshire County Council and Egerton Rothesay School ('The Consortium') to prepare a landscape assessment of land at Durrants Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts. The site, which is jointly controlled by the consortium, is excluded from the Green Belt and allocated for a replacement school site, housing and open space in the adopted Local Plan.
- 1.2 This assessment describes the landscape character and quality of the site and discusses the potential landscape impacts of development.
- 1.3 The site, which extends to approximately 14.2 hectares, is bounded to the west by Durrants Lane, to the south by Shootersway and to the north and east by existing development. It is divided into several distinct parcels and ownerships, with the centre of the site comprising the buildings and grounds of Egerton Rothesay School, the southern part two arable fields, and the remainder of the site woodland.
- 1.4 The site lies within the settlement boundary of Berkhamsted; land to the west and south falls within the Green Belt. The adopted Local Plan allocates the northern and southwestern parts of the site as 'Open Land', the central portion as Housing (H37) and the eastern field as the site for the replacement school (refer to Local Plan extract at Appendix C).
- 1.5 CSa has also undertaken an ecological assessment of the site, the findings of which are presented in a separate report (CSA/1074/001).

Methodology

- 1.6 This assessment is based on site visits made by a qualified and experienced Landscape Architect in April 2008.
- 1.7 Photographs contained within this document were taken using a digital camera with a lens focal length approximating to 50mm, to give a similar depth of vision to the human eye. In some instances images have been combined to create a panorama.

2.0 SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

Site Context

- 2.1 The site lies on the western fringe of the Shootershill area of Berkhamsted. The location and context of the site is illustrated on the Site Location Plan (CSA/1074/101) in Appendix A and on the Aerial Photograph (CSA/1074/102) at Appendix B.
- 2.2 The site is roughly triangular in shape, with the apex of the triangle lying to the north on Durrants Lane and the base running along Shootersway. To the east, the site borders the residential areas served off Marlin Close, Coppins Close, Chalet Close and Tresco Road. To the south the boundary follows Shootersway and to the west Durrants Lane.
- 2.3 Neighbouring development comprises detached and semi-detached dwellings of mixed age and character, arranged in an informal, medium density suburban layout. The density of development is higher to the north although no development exceeds 2½ storeys in height.
- 2.4 To the south, beyond Shootersway, lies open farmland with some sporadic dwellings. This land slopes down towards the A41 trunk road, which runs parallel to Shootersway. To the west, beyond Durrants Lane, is farmland which is interspersed with several large dwellings, set in private grounds.
- 2.5 In terms of the general topography of the area, the central and southern portion of the site occupy a broad plateau of land, at approximately 170m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The northern portion of the site slopes steeply towards the River Bulbourne and the Grand Union Canal which flows through the centre of Berkhamsted. To the south, beyond Shootersway, the land gently falls to a second, smaller valley which runs parallel to the River Bulbourne.

National Landscape Character

- 2.6 The Character of England: Landscape, Wildlife and Natural Features:1999' (a national assessment of landscape character by the Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency) and English Nature) identifies the site as lying within the Chilterns Character Area (110). This character area extends from the River Thames in Oxfordshire, across Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, and into Bedfordshire and includes the major settlements of Reading, High Wycombe, Hemel Hempstead and Luton.
- 2.7 The Character Map describes how the underlying chalk gives rise to a hill and plateau landscape with a prominent escarpment along the north-west edge and an extensive dip slope, with numerous valleys running perpendicular to the escarpment.
- 2.8 The chalk valleys are described as quite intimate whereas the plateaux are more open. Fields tend to be small in scale, bound by a dense network of hedgerows, particularly on steep ground. Hedgerow trees and small woodlands are commonplace. A particular feature of the area is beech woodland which is described as the most widespread in the country.
- 2.9 In 1998 Hertfordshire County Council undertook a county-wide landscape assessment, to accompany the Structure Plan. That assessment ascribes similar qualities to the area as those found in the Character Map of England.

Local Landscape Character

- 2.10 Dacorum Borough Council has produced Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): 'Landscape Character Assessment for Dacorum' which assesses and evaluates the varying character of the landscape throughout the borough.
- 2.11 In that document the site is shown as falling within the 'Ashlyns and Wiggington Plateau' character area which lies to the southwest of Berkhamsted, between Wiggington and Ashlyns (See Appendix F).

- 2.12 The character of the area is described as a gently undulating plateau on the Chilterns dip slope which contains open farmland and mixed woodland, with the predominant land-use being farming, primarily pasture. Overall, the landscape character of the area is regarded as robust with a strong sense of continuity.
- 2.13 The pattern of settlement in the area is said to be sporadic and often associated with the large historic parklands and estates that are spread throughout the area. The northern boundary of the character area, in which the site lies, is described as being part of the suburban fringe of Berkhamsted.
- 2.14 In evaluating the landscape of the area, the SPG considers the site to be of 'moderate' landscape condition and having a 'moderate' strength of character, resulting in an overall objective of 'improvement and conservation'.
- 2.15 The landscape regions identified by HCC and the landscape character areas identified in the SPG are referred to in Policy 98 of the Local Plan. This policy requires development to pay particular regard to the landscape qualities identified for the Regions and Character Areas and in particular the need for proposals to 'protect and enhance the visual quality of the landscape by retaining, reinstating or managing desirable elements'.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.16 The site itself is not covered by any statutory or non statutory designations for landscape character or quality, nor does it directly adjoin any such areas (see Local Plan Proposals Map at Appendix C). The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies approximately ½km to the west of the site (see Appendix C).

Tree Preservation Orders

2.17 Although there are a number of significant trees and areas of woodland on the site, particularly to the periphery and in Cox Dell and The Plantation, none of these are covered by Tree Preservation Orders. This was confirmed by the Local Authority's landscape/tree officer in April 2008 (Ref: 29101).

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 The site extends to approximately 14.2 hectares and for the purpose of this assessment has been divided into 5 distinct parcels: these are illustrated on the site plan at Appendix E.
- 3.2 The southern boundary of the site, with Shootersway, is marked by an established hedgerow, of variable quality, which is interspersed with large specimen trees, up to 20 metres high (Photograph 4). At the western end of this boundary the hedgerow becomes more open, allowing glimpsed views into the site (Photograph 5), whereas to the east it is denser and backed by a narrow band of broadleaf woodland.
- 3.3 To the west, the arable field (Parcel E) is bounded by an agriculturally managed hedgerow (Photograph 7); this changes to an ornamental hedgerow along the frontage of the school site (Photograph 17) before finally becoming a woodland edge (Parcel C).
- 3.4 To the north, the site narrows and the land slopes steeply. This area is known as Cox Dell and comprises mainly ageing, mixed species broad-leaved trees with two large clearings (Photograph 9), one of which contains a small pond. To the very north, the site becomes increasing steep as it opens out into a small rough grassland area which is flanked by dense scrub vegetation and tall evergreen trees (Photograph 2). Tree and scrub cover occurs along the northeastern boundary which abuts the rear gardens of the houses on Tresco Road and Marlin Close (Photograph 2). The remainder of the eastern boundary of the playing fields (Parcel A) and the arable field to the south (Parcel F) is a mix of fences and garden walls with sporadic tree cover (Photograph 3).
- 3.5 The centre of the site, Parcel D, is occupied by the Egerton Rothesay School (Photograph 12) with the school playing fields to the north (Parcel B) and east (Parcel A). The main school building is 2 storey and there are several smaller

- ancillary buildings. A hard games court lies to the southeast of the school and a car park to the west (Photograph 1).
- 3.6 The playing fields that lie to the east of the school (Parcel A) gently slope downwards to the south. The field is divided into two roughly equal halves by a mixed band of evergreen and broad-leaved trees (Photograph 3).
- 3.7 The two arable fields to the south (E & F) are divided by a belt of beech woodland, known as The Plantation, which has an understorey of rhododendron. The woodland is a valuable local landscape feature and characteristic of the Chilterns landscape (Photographs 4, 5, 6, 7 & 14). More recent planting, including conifers and some maturing coppice, forms the southern section of this woodland belt (Photograph 6). Both fields are relatively flat, gently sloping to the south with Parcel E sloping more abruptly at its southern end (Photograph 7).

Boundary Conditions

3.8 As noted above, the boundaries of the site are clearly defined and for the most part well vegetated. A civil/parish boundary divides the site in half, running along the western edge of Parcels A and F and then following the line of the eastern site boundary which borders the properties on Tresco Road.

Public Rights of Way

3.9 There are no public footpaths within or adjoining the site. A public footpath runs westwards from Durrants Lane to Woodcock Hill.

Access

3.10 The main access to the site is via the school entrance on Durrants Lane (Photograph 17). The farmland to the south is accessed off Shootersway, in the southwest corner of Parcel E.

- 3.11 A gated, pedestrian access leads from Tresco Road (Photograph 18) to the school playing fields in the eastern part of the site.
- 3.12 The woodland area to the north, Cox Dell, can be accessed at the northern most point where the site meets Durrants Lane, by means of an informal footpath.

Topography

- 3.13 The topography of the wider area has been described in the preceding sections. There are however some variations in the topography of the site and adjoining area that have an effect on its setting and visibility.
- 3.14 The break of slope on Durrants Lane, by Cox Dell, results in the body of the site being screened from view as one approaches from the north (Photograph 10). Similarly, the land to the south of the site, beyond Shootersway, falls away sharply, resulting in views from this direction being limited to the vegetation on the southern site boundary (Photograph 8). There is also a break in slope along the northern boundary of the two arable fields with the land to the south sloping gently downwards towards Shootersway and that to the north falling slightly more steeply to the Grand Union Canal. The result of this is that the existing school buildings are partly screened by this localised ridgeline (Photograph 7).

Visibility

- 3.15 The heavily vegetated nature of the site boundaries, the extent of built development to the east of the site and topography of the local area is such that views of the site are limited and for the most part confined to fragmented, near distance views. In broad terms, key views of the site can be considered as follows.
- 3.16 From the **northwest** there are some views of the site from Durrants Lane although due to the topography and dense woodland cover, these are limited to the area of Cox Dell (Parcel C) in the very north. From further north there

are long-distant elevated views from the adjacent valley side of the Bulbourne. However, such views are not considered significant given the distance involved and the fact that there is intervening development and vegetation.

- 3.17 From the south, there are glimpsed views into the site from Shootersway with the exception of the southeastern most section where a dense and wide field margin of mainly conifers prevents views. At the western most end of Shootersway the field boundary becomes more open allowing views of the arable field and glimpsed views of the school (Photograph 7).
- 3.18 From the west, views into the site are determined by the nature and extent of boundary vegetation. Along the southern most section of the Durrants Lane boundary the hedge is relatively open with some sporadic tree cover, (Photograph 5) allowing intermittent views into the site. However, from this direction the Plantation separating Parcels E and F prevents views of the easternmost field and housing beyond. From further north, the high ornamental hedge along the frontage of the school (Photograph 17) limits views into the site to the school entrance.
- 3.19 From the east, there are few direct views into the site from the public realm on account of the density of neighbouring development. There are however views from a number of properties, notably from the upper floor windows of the dwellings on Coppins Close and Chalet Close. From the footpath to the west of Durrants Lane the extent of intervening vegetation is such that views are confined to glimpses of the southern most field.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 As noted earlier, the site lies within the settlement boundary and is allocated for the following uses:
 - Approximately 100 dwellings (Policy H37)
 - A replacement school with playing fields (Policy C1)
 - New leisure space (Policy L1)
- 4.2 Policy H37 allocates 4.4 ha of the total site area for approximately 100 dwellings. Vehicular access is to be taken from Durrants Lane. Existing trees are to be retained and supplemented with new planting to reinforce the Green Belt boundary. Housing is to be mixed, two storey and incorporate affordable housing (approximately 40%). Release of the site is conditional on the school and playing fields (Policy C1/L1) being relocated to adjoining parts of the site. The policy also notes the presence of Grim's Ditch, a pre-historic monument, and requires the archaeological impacts to be assessed.
- 4.3 Policies C1/L1 allocate approximately 8.3 ha for the development for a new school with dual use of the playing fields, in addition to informal leisure space. Vehicular access is to be taken from Shootersway. The allocation calls for the new school buildings to be sited adjacent to Coppins Close and to have regard to the amenity of the adjoining properties. A minimum of 3.9 ha of new leisure space is required for pitches and informal open space. Again, existing trees are to be retained and supplemented with new planting.
- 4.4 The woodland on the northern part of the site (Parcel C) and the southeast parcel (Parcel E) is designated as 'Open Land' under Policies 9 and 16 of the Local Plan. Policy 9 requires 'Open Land' to remain generally open, with only education, leisure and nature conservation being acceptable. Policy 116 strengthens the position of Policy 9 with regard to potential development on 'Open Land' stating that 'the location, scale and use of the development must be well related to the character of existing development, its use and its open land setting'.

- 4.5 The central parcel part of the site is also identified as an Area of Special Restraint under Policy 117. This policy effectively safeguards allocated sites from temporary development that could prejudice its future use.
- 4.6 Policies 99 and 100 are concerned with the protection of trees, hedgerows and woodland and require new development to give a high priority to retention and protection of existing features. Policy 101 encourages the 'appropriate management of trees.... and woodland'.
- 4.7 Policy 118 seeks the protection, preservation and appropriate excavation of surviving archaeological remains. The Local Plan proposals map shows that part of the site (Parcels A & D) lie within an area of archaeological significance, Area 22 'Grim's Ditch, Berkhamsted' and as such impacts on archaeology require to be considered.
- Dacorum Borough Council has produced SPG on 'Environmental Guideline': these effectively complement Polices 99 to 101. Section 3 of the SPG seeks the retention of 'natural boundaries' and 'scattered trees' and requires landscape to be integral parts of layouts, especially for residential developments. Section 4 refers to the retention of natural features, especially where they can be blended into the development. It states that 'the layout of the built elements of a scheme should avoid disruption of any wildlife linkages or corridors to adjoining sites, and planting should create continuity of species'. In respect of new playing fields, the SPG seeks to maximise the opportunities for nature conservation through utilising spare land, not used for formal pitches, to create more informal landscapes thus creating a variety of habitats.
- 4.9 Whilst the site is not in the Green Belt, Paragraph 3.15 of PPG 2, requires proposals outside of the Green Belt not to 'injure' or be 'visually detrimental' to the Green Belt by reason of their siting, materials or design.

5.0 SUITABILITY OF THE SITE TO ACCOMMODATE DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 It is understood that the Consortium's aspirations for the site differs from the allocation in the Local Plan in that it seeks to develop Parcels A and F for housing and potentially Parcel B. This section therefore considers, in landscape terms, whether the proposed strategy would give rise to any significant landscape effects, over and above those of the allocated scheme.
- 5.2 In the following section, an assessment of the proposed strategy is made against a series of landscape criterion.

Landscape Quality

- 5.3 The site in its present form is pleasant but relatively undistinguished with some higher quality landscape features, particularly the beech plantation, Cox Dell and the vegetation along the Shootersway frontage. It does not carry any statutory or non statutory designation for landscape character or quality nor does it directly adjoin any designated area.
- 5.4 In land use terms, the proposed strategy is not significantly different to the allocation, in that it envisages Parcels F and A being developed, albeit the school would give rise to a different form of development to residential development. In terms of the effects on the wider character of the area, and subject to the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features, the Consortium's proposals would not give rise to any materially greater effect than the allocated scheme.

Impact on landscape features

5.5 There are a significant number of mature trees, hedgerows and woodlands on the site at present which substantially screen the site from view. Whilst the existing trees are not covered by TPOs, the allocating policy does require their retention, as do various policies in the Local Plan and Environmental SPG. Subject to sensitive detailed design there is therefore no reason why

the proposed scheme should give rise to any greater effects than the allocated scheme, other than, potentially, the site access onto Shootersway; this will need to be designed in such a way as to minimise vegetation loss.

5.6 Policy 101 of the Local Plan identifies the benefits, for biodiversity, of managing woodlands, hedgerows and other landscape assets. Provision of a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan for the retained areas of woodland would achieve the benefits sought by the policy.

Public rights of way

5.7 There are no public rights of way within or adjoining the site that would be affected by development. There would be some indirect visual effects on users of the footpath to the west of Durrants Lane but these would be insignificant given the extent of existing vegetation and the fact that views would be directed towards the proposed area of open space.

Visibility

5.8 As noted in the previous section, there are currently views of the site but these are not widespread. Whilst there would inevitably be some views of development on the site, these could, to a large extent, be mitigated by strengthening the existing boundary vegetation, particularly along Shootersway.

Relationship to the existing urban area

5.9 The site is well related to the existing urban area of Berkhamsted, with the eastern boundary contiguous with the rear garden boundaries of neighbouring development.

Compliance with Local Plan Policy

5.10 It is evident from this initial assessment that there is no landscape reason why the site should not be developed in the manner proposed by the Consortium. Furthermore it is considered that the following benefits would arise from the Consortiums proposals.

- The Local Plan allows for residential development in Parcel A; the amended scheme retains this element without change.
- Residential development on Parcels A and D would require the
 existing school to be demolished and relocated to Parcel F. The
 amended proposals allow for the retention and redevelopment of the
 existing school buildings minimising the impact on school itself. The
 playing fields on Parcel E could be provided in advance of the release
 of Parcel A, thus allowing continuity of use for the school.
- The relationship between Parcels D and E is better than between Parcels E and F due mainly to the severance caused by The Plantation.
- 5.11 The amended proposals provide the option for Parcel B to be developed for residential use. Given the configuration of this site it could lend itself to a higher density flatted development.

Proposed access to the site

5.12 The amended proposals would require a new access from Shootersway. However, the allocated scheme would require a similar access for the new school; again, subject to matters of detailed design, there should be no material difference between the two schemes.

Impact on the Green Beit

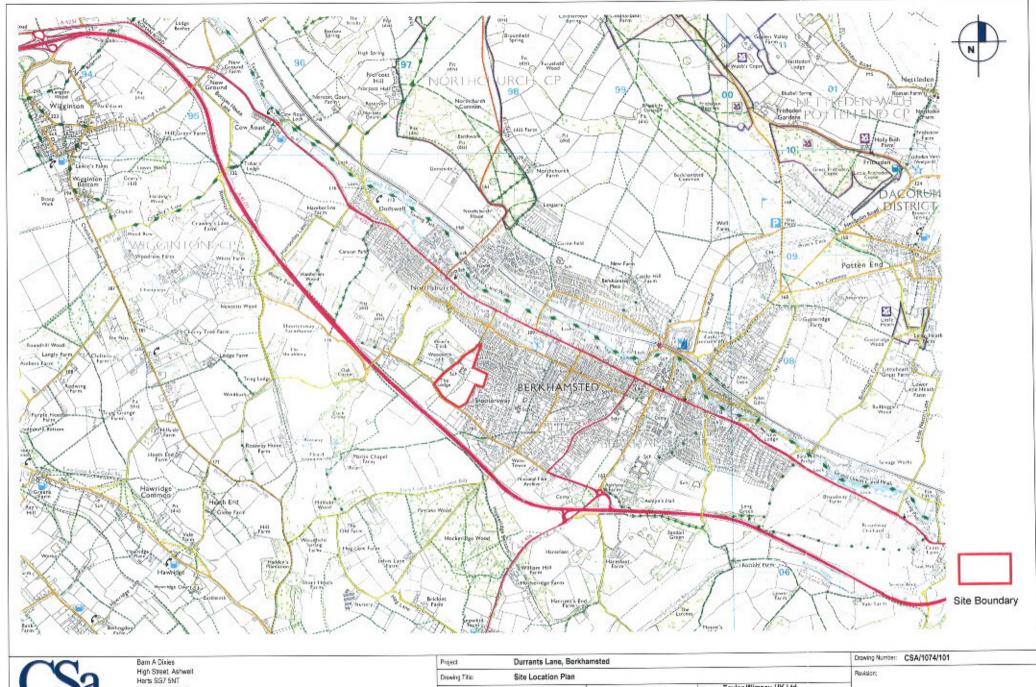
5.13 The site lies outside of, but adjacent to, the Green Belt. Given the scale of development proposed and the heavily vegetated and defined nature of the site boundaries it is unlikely that there would be any adverse effects on the visual amenity of the adjoining Green Belt.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The site is not covered by any statutory or non statutory designations for landscape character or quality; it is pleasant but generally undistinguished.
- 6.2 There are a number of landscape features within the site that contribute to the charcter of the wider area, notably The Plantation and Cox Dell. In addition, the boundaries of the site are well established, comprising mixed species hedgerows and mature trees. Whilst none of these trees are protected by TPOs they can be successfully retained and enhanced.
- 6.3 Whilst there are some views of the site from the surrounding area these are not widespread and for the most part screened by boundary vegetation. There is no reason therefore why a well considered scheme should result in any unacceptable visual impact to either the adjoining Green Belt or neighbouring area.
- 6.4 The scheme proposed by the Consortium differs from the Local Plan altocation, both in terms of the quantum and disposition of development. However, in landscape terms it is unlikely that the proposed scheme would give rise to any materially greater impact.

APPENDIX A

Site Location Plan



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APPENDIX B

Aerial Photograph & Photograph Location Plan



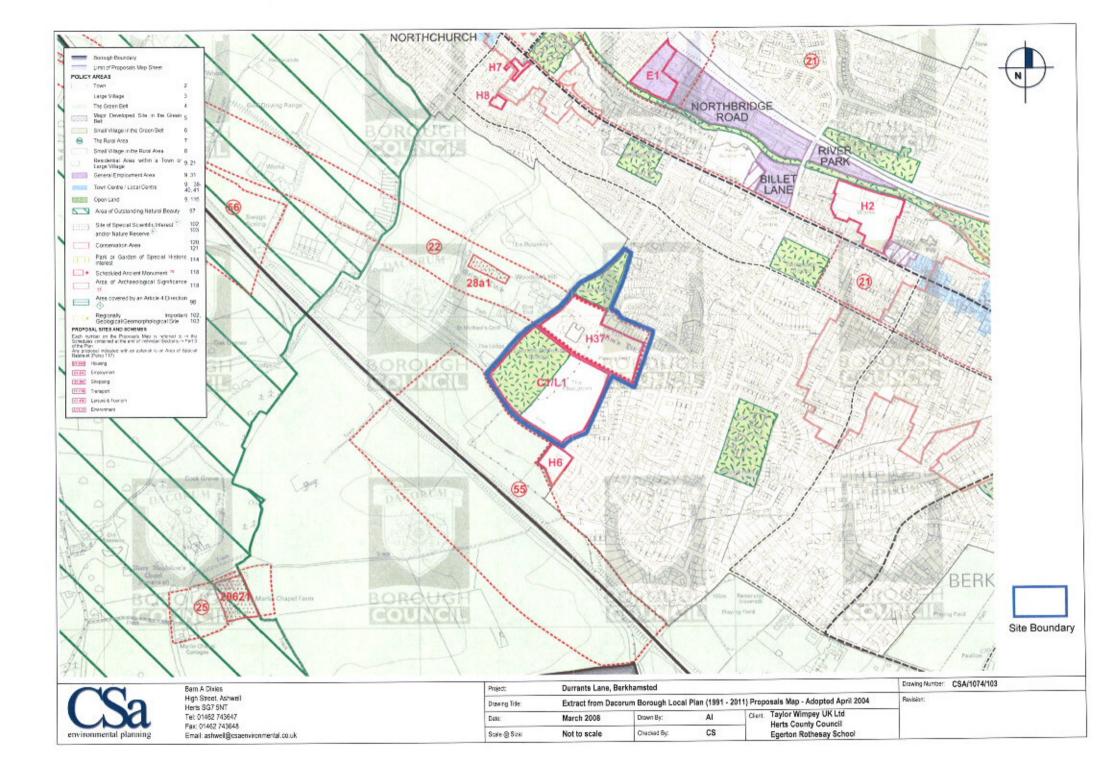


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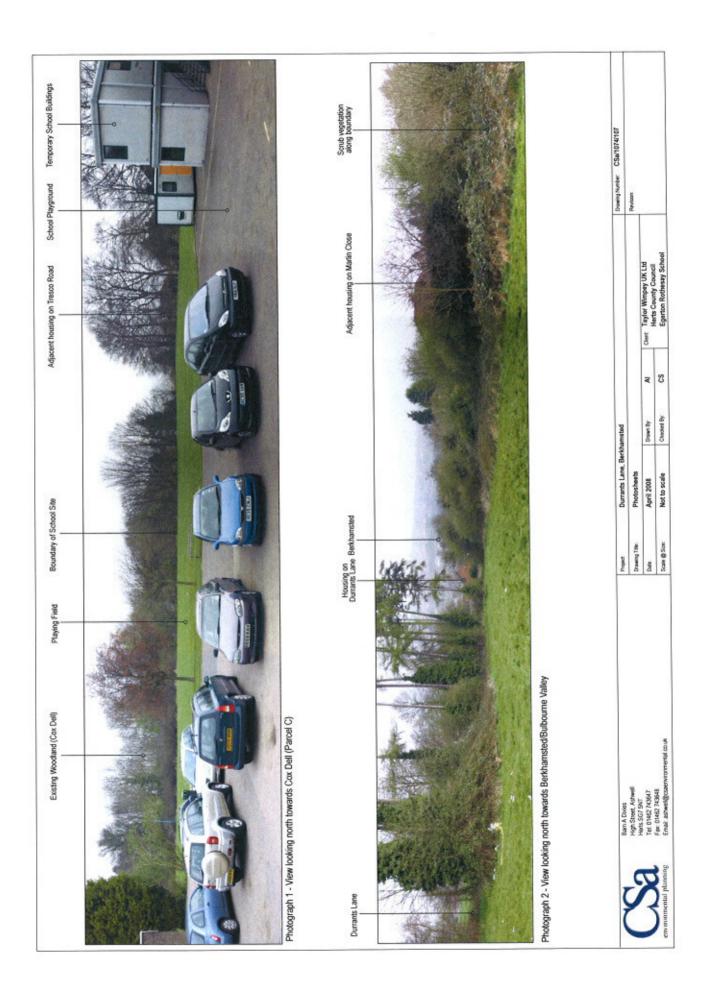
APPENDIX C

Local Plan Proposals Map

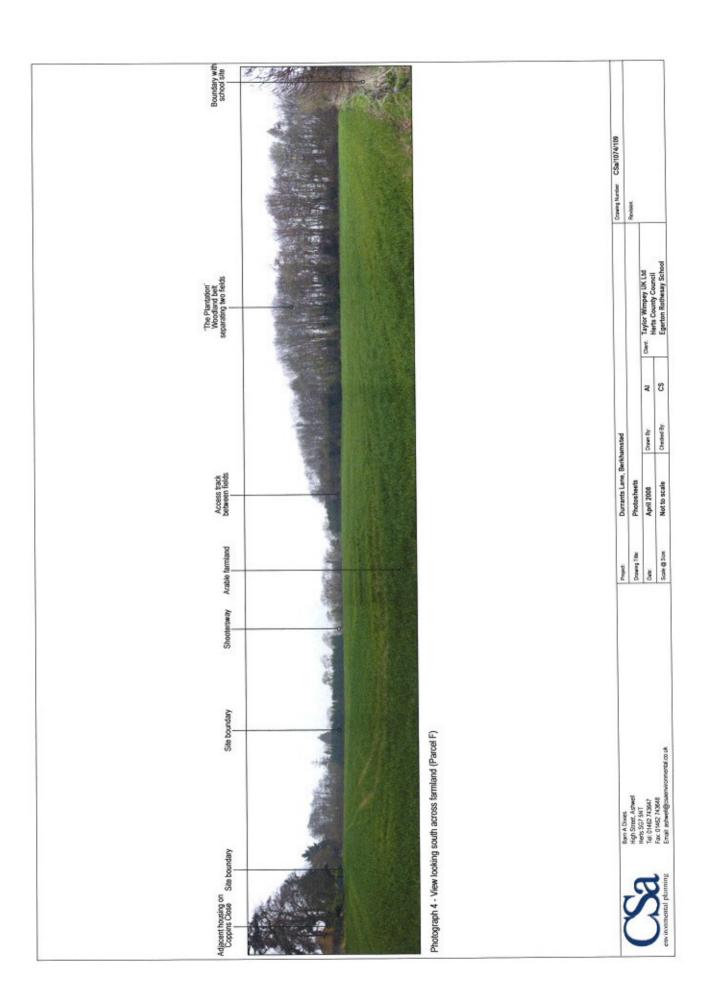


APPENDIX D

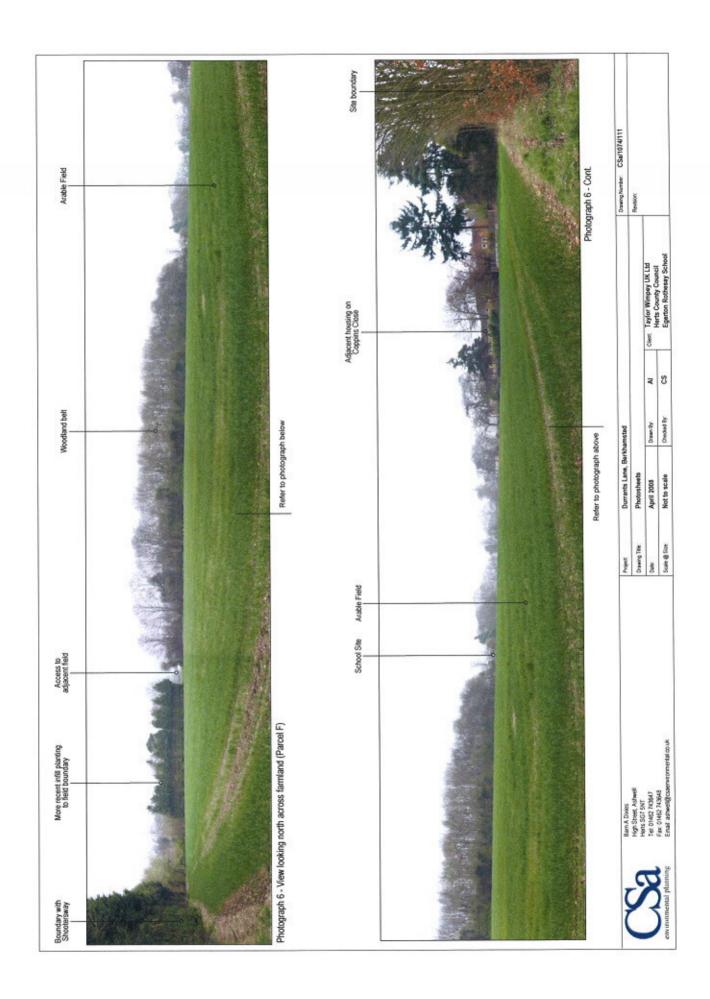
Site Photographs

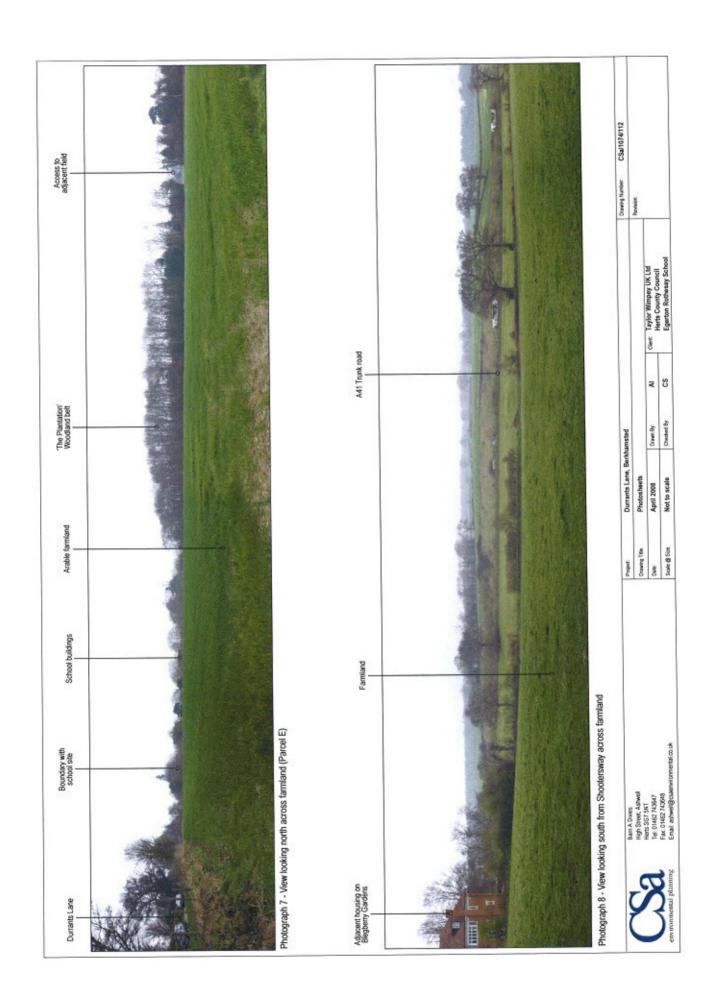


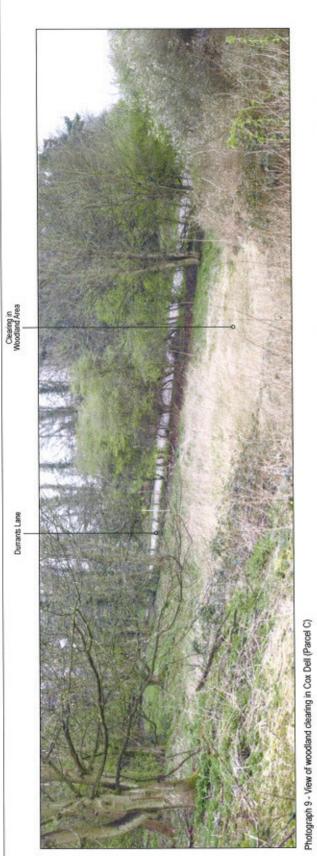














Photograph10 - View looking south along Durrants Lane

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Photograph11 - View of adjacent farmland to the west



Photograph12 - Representative photo showing existing school buildings

Photograph13 - View looking west across playing fields towards school buildings



Photograph15 - View looking west along Shootersway



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Photograph17 - View looking north along Durrants Lane adjacent to school site



Photograph18 - View south along pedestrian footpath accessing playing fields (Parcel A)



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APPENDIX E

Existing Site Plan



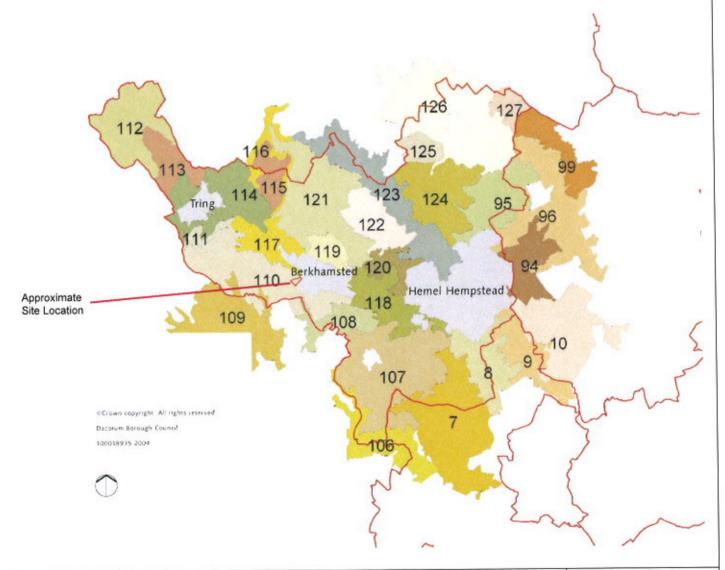
APPENDIX F

Local Landscape Character Assessment Plan

Map Showing Landscape Character Areas

Aldbury Scarp Slopes

7	Sarratt Plateau	117	Upper Bulbourne Valley
8	Upper Gade Valley	118	Lower Bulbourne Valley
9	Bedmond Plateau	119	Berkhamsted Castle & Valleys
10	St Stephen's Plateau	120	Little Heath Uplands
94	Buncefield Plateau	121	Ashridge
95	Revel End Plateau	122	Nettleden Ridges & Valleys
96	Upper Ver Valley	123	High Gade Valley
99	Rothamsted Plateau & Kinbourne Green	124	Gaddesden Row
106	Middle Chess Valley	125	Beechwood Estate
107	Bovingdon & Chipperfield Plateau	126	Markyate Ridges & Valleys
108	Bourne Gutter & Hockeridge Bottom	127	Pepsal End Slopes
109	Bellingdon & Hawridge Ridges & Valleys		
110	Ashlyns & Wiggington Plateau		
111	Tring Scarp Slopes		
112	Boarscroft Vale		
113	Tring Reservoirs		
114	Tring Gap Foothills		
115	Aldbury Coombe		





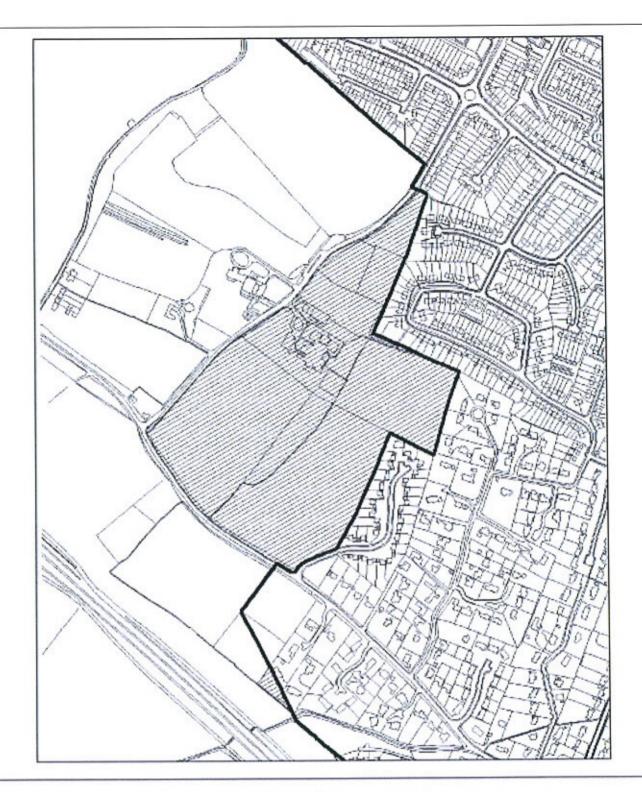
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APPENDIX G

Land excluded from Green Belt



Map NO.2 Egerton-Rothesay School, Durrants Lane and Blegberry, Shootersway

1995 Adopted Plan Green Belt Boundary

Change to 1995 Adopted Plan Green Belt Boundary

Scale 1:5,000

A North



Land excluded from the Green Belt

Note: the Proposals Map shows the current Green Belt boundary



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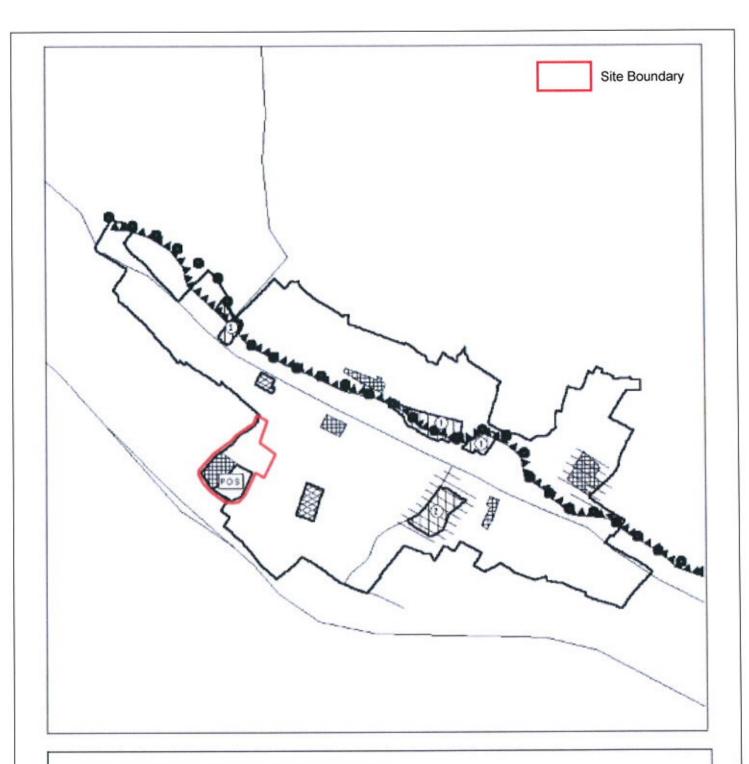
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APPENDIX H

Open Land Strategy



BERKHAMSTED OPEN LAND STRATEGY

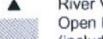
Diagrammatic for illustrative purposes only



Edge of Countryside Route Corridor



River Valley



Open Ridge or Valley Side (including Prominent Slopes)



Open Land (designated under Policies 9 and 116 in the Plan)



POS

Open Land and Neighbourhood Open Space or Area with Special Character

- Adjoining Grand Union Canal
- 2. Kings Road
- Northchurch

Open Land and Open Land Site meeting a leisure Space Deficiency

Lelsure Space Proposal in the Plan



Bam A, Dixies

High Street, Ashwell
Herts SG7 5NT
Tel: 01462 743647
Fax: 01462 743648
Email:ashwell@csaenvironmental.

- 1	Drawing
- 5	Date:
ntal.co.uk	Scale (6

Drawing Title:	Berkhampsted Open Land Strategy Taken from Decorum Borough Adopted Local Plan (1991)		
Date:	April 2008	Drawn By:	Al
Scale @ Size:	Not to scale	Checked By:	CS

Durrants Lane, Berkhamsted

opted April 2004
Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd
Herts County Council
Egerton Rothesay School

Drawing Number:

CSA/1074/106

APPENDIX I

Indicative Site Proposals Plan



EXISTING



Trees to be retained

Woodland to be retained

Existing school buildings

Barn A, Dixies High Street, Ashwell Tel: 01462 743647 Fax: 01462 743648

INDICATIVE PROPOSALS



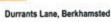
Housing site



Housing site or school site



Playing field/ Leisure site



Proposed Land Uses

Checked: GC

Drawing Number: CSA/1074/117 Revision: •

Principal points of access

April 2008

Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd Herts Country Council Egerton Rothesay School

environmental planning

Email:ashwell@csaenvironmental.co.uk Scale @ Size: