

New Settlement Proposals: Landscape and visual impact.

This paper looks at the significance and the effects of change resulting from the development of a new settlement on the landscape and on public views and visual amenity.

This report is not based on any site specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), or part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), undertaken by UDC.

Establishing the baseline landscape and visual conditions, when reviewed against the development description, form the basis for identifying and describing the landscape and visual effects of any particular proposal. The Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates (September 2006) has been used to inform this report. This 2006 study was jointly commissioned by UDC, Braintree DC, Brentwood DC, Malden DC, and Chelmsford BC. The approach and methodology used for the 2006 study was based on the guidance and best practice as set out in *Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland* (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage 2002). The current *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (2013) does not depart from the previous guidance to an extent that the Blandford study is unsound. It is recognized that the 2006 study was a relatively broad brush analysis undertaken at 1:25,000 scale and consequently the degree of sensitivity is not absolute. Furthermore, the Blandford study is not based on any specific site development proposal.

Geological information contained in this report has been sourced from the British Geological Survey.

The six sites assessed are:

Takeley – Priors Green
Little Dunmow – Chelmer Mead
Elsenham
West of Braintree
Great Chesterford
Easton Park

Ben Smeeden
Landscape Officer
UDC

Date: 27/04/2017
(Revised 05/05/2017)

Great Chesterford

Land south-east of A11 and north-east of the B184.

Site area 466Ha (Developable 22Ha).

Total number of housing units proposed 5,000.

The site is not within an Area of Outstanding Natural beauty or National Park, or a locally designated Special landscape Area, Regional or Country Park. The site is outside the Metropolitan Green Belt. There are no trees or woodlands on the site which are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order, and there are no hedges subject to a Hedgerows Retention Notice.

There is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Historic England list entry no.1017453 – Romano-Celtic temple) located 400m south of Dell's Farm on the southern part of the site.

The site area lies within the Cam River Valley, as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (A1 Cam River Valley):

Key Characteristics for this area include:

- Rolling, open landscape of chalky boulder clay with wide view from higher ground
- Large-scale downland reflecting late enclosure, with rectilinear field pattern.
- Low hedges and few trees mainly in small copses.
- Dispersed settlements on valley sides connected by busy B roads.

Visual Characteristics include:

- Attractive panoramic views from the eastern slopes to western valley sides framed by distant blocks of trees.
- Views of towns and villages from higher ground.
- Valley sides descend quite steeply from rolling arable field to the river and its tributaries and dramatic views are possible from the ridges.

Sensitivities to Change include:

- Sensitive key characteristics within the character area include the patchwork pattern of pasture and plantation planting
- The open skyline of the valley slopes is visually sensitive, with new development potentially being highly visible. Intimate views from lower slopes to the wooded river valley floor and views to the valley sides are also sensitive. Overall this character area has relatively high sensitivity to change.

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of the site in relation to the proposed development has been undertaken by the site proposer Bidwells (Urban Design Studio). Their overall conclusions are that the level of landscape sensitivity is 'Medium' and the Landscape Value is also assessed to be 'Medium'. Varying levels of visual sensitivity were identified; ranging from 'Low' to 'High'. Their conclusion is that the site does have capacity to accommodate development with comparatively limited adverse effects on neighbouring settlements. With development opportunities largely focus to the northern parts of the site. With extensive new planting would notably enhance the existing agricultural landscape compared to the existing. The appraisal identified a number of areas where proposed buildings are sited on 'outward facing slopes', or ridge lines and consequently these would be prominent on the skyline, particularly when viewed from the surrounding lowlands. The appraisal findings are that mitigation measures, including extensive new planting, would improve the prominence of the development and its assimilation with the landscape. In final conclusion, with the implementation of recommended mitigation measure it is considered that the scheme, despite its size, could be accommodated with the landscape.

Landscape consultants Hankinson Duckett Associates (HDA) were commissioned by The Chesterford Neighbourhood Steering Group to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment to inform the current preparation of The Chesterford Neighbourhood Plan (LCA dated Feb. 2017). HDA identified three character areas covering the proposal site: 1. Chesterford Ridge; 2. Chalk Upper Slopes; 3. Chalk Lower Slopes. The HDA study addresses the Landscape Capacity of these character areas. The landscape capacity is the extent to which the landscape can accommodate change without significant effects on the landscape. The methodology used by HDA for the analysis of landscape capacity is based on the criteria set out in Topic Paper 6 of the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance. HDA's capacity summary rates the character area 'Chesterford Ridge' sensitivity as being 'Major' with a capacity of 'Negligible/Low'; The 'Chalk Upper Slopes' sensitivity as 'Substantial' and a capacity of 'Low'; the 'Chalk Lower Slopes' sensitivity as 'Substantial' and a capacity of 'Low'.

The site lies within a broad rolling landscape comprising of large open fields with farmsteads and isolated residential properties. Across the site there is a change of some 50m in ground elevation. The geology is Lowestoft Formation, and Newpit Chalk Formation, with chalky boulder clay overlying.

The landscape is dominated by the large regular rectilinear open fields of the Cambridgeshire and Midland type. This pre-enclosure pattern of open field system of agriculture dates back to at least Saxon times (*Great Chesterford in 1801 as revealed in the Inclosure Awards – Ken Kilford. Chesterford & District Local History Society*).

Overall the character of the site is considered to have a high sensitivity to change. The nature and scale of the proposed development would have a significant impact on the character of the site and the surrounding landscape. This predominantly rolling landscape with its historic field pattern is considered to be of significant visual quality. The open skyline and the views across the Chelmer valley are particularly sensitive to change.

The Urban Design Studio's LVA identifies that "a number of areas where proposed buildings are sited on 'outward facing slopes', or ridge lines and consequently these would be prominent on the skyline, particularly when viewed from the surrounding lowlands". This would be particularly harmful to the existing character and visual quality of the broader landscape. With the proposed "development opportunities largely focus to the northern parts of the site"; the development would be predominantly on the highland areas of the site and would be a departure from major settlement patterns which have developed in the District.

The mitigation measures proposed in the Urban Design Studio's LVA include extensive new planting which is suggested "would notably enhance the existing agricultural landscape compared to the existing". Whilst it is accepted that extensive screen planting belts, and blocks of new planting would to some extent reduce the visual impact of the proposed development, such planting would in itself have a significant and detrimental affect the historic pattern and character of the existing landscape.

I am of the view that this site cannot accommodate the development shown in the illustrative masterplan submitted in the North Uttlesford Garden Village Prospectus of Delivery document, as presented to Members of the District Council on 27th March 2017, without causing significant and unacceptable harm to the important visual qualities of the site and the wider landscape.

I consider that the development of a garden village may be achievable on parts of the proposal site without unacceptable harm, but only if the development is exceptionally well designed so as to create an innovative model village of the very highest quality which is sensitive to the wider landscape. This has not in my view been satisfactorily demonstrated by the current submission by Bidwells. It would be necessary to formulate a readily decipherable layout, articulated by open spaces and green streets, and a well-defined village centre. The development on the western slopes of the site would need to be avoided in the greater part, or significantly restricted, in order to reduce the potential visual impact of the development on the wider landscape. This would potentially necessitate a reduction in the number of dwelling units that can be satisfactorily accommodated on the site. The height of buildings would need to be restricted with maximum building heights fixed across the sites as appropriate. This would need to be determined by a detailed visual impact analysis to establish potential intervisibility.

Excellence in design would need to be achieved, as opposed to just about satisfactory, in order to offset the potential detrimental impact of the development on the site and surrounds and to create a cohesive garden village of quality. The design of the layout and the buildings would need to be exceptional, and sensitive to the site and the surrounding landscape. A locally distinctive palette of materials to provide coherence, identity, and architectural richness would need to be employed. Structural landscaping should predominantly include the use of native species, reflecting the mixtures and patterns found in the surrounding landscape.

Innovative design and, as appropriate, departure from standard design solutions (e.g. highway standards, and external lighting) would need to be developed to ensure that the development stands above that of a generic housing estate.

Little Dunmow – Chelmer Mead

Land north-west and east of Little Dunmow and north of Flich Green.

Site area 100.26Ha (Area suitable for development 66.4Ha)

Total number of housing units proposed 3,000.

7.8Ha Business Park

2.2Ha Primary school

5Ha Neighbourhood Centre

31.9Ha Public open space.

The site is not within an Area of Outstanding Natural beauty or National Park, or a locally designated Special landscape Area, Regional or Country Park. The site is outside the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The greater part of the site lies within the Upper Chelmer River Valley as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (A6):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Narrow valley, with a restricted valley floor.
- Small meandering river channel on the left side of the valley close to the rising ground of the valley side.
- Dense riverside trees. Arable valley sides with fairly open character.
- Mostly tranquil away from Great Dunmow, Chelmsford.

Visual Characteristics include:

- The church tower at great Easton, (St. John and St. Giles), Little Easton (St. Mary the Virgin), Little Dunmow (St. Mary the Virgin), and Barnston (St. Andrew), and the spire of the church in Thaxted form landmarks within views into and across the valley slopes.
- Generally open views from the valley sides into the gently meandering valley floodplain, which are framed in places by small patches of woodland.
- Enclosed and framed views along the valley corridor.

Sensitivities to change identified within this character area include:

The skyline of the valley slopes is visually sensitive with open and framed cross-valley views and long views along the river corridor potentially affected by new tall or non-screened new development, Views to the valley sides from adjacent Landscape character Areas are also sensitive. Historic integrity is strong with a largely surviving pattern of medieval dispersed settlements, isolated farms, moated sites and small hamlets strung out along linear greens, small historic parklands and a number of churches and local vernacular buildings with timber-frames, bright colour-washed walls and thatched roofs. Overall this character area has relatively high sensitivity to change.

The most northern part of the site, for the most part that north of the A120, falls within the Rayne Farmland Plateau (B13) as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (B13):

Key characteristics for this character area include:

- Irregular field pattern of mainly medium to large arable fields, marked by sinuous fragmented hedgerows and ditches.
- Many small woods and copses provide structure and edges in the landscape.
- Scattered settlement pattern, with a few hamlets.
- A concentration of small farmsteads, some with moats.
- A comprehensive network of rural lanes and Public Rights of Way.

Sensitivities to change identified within this character area include:

The skyline of the valley slopes is also sensitive to new development, which may be visible in views across and along the valleys. There is a sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern. Overall this character area has moderate to high sensitivity to change.

The site extends across a predominately agricultural landscape with, for the most part, a medieval field pattern, although there has been some later field enlargement. Most of the field boundaries are defined by hedge and ditch. From the north of the site there is a relatively gentle change in ground elevation of some 20m running down towards the Chelmer River to the south.

The north of the site is bounded by the line of the Roman road (B1256), with the northern part of the site is dissected by the east-west line of the new A120, which runs in cut through the site. The southern edge of the site is bounded, for the most part, by the new residential estate of Flich Green, and a Travellers' park. The disused east-west running Braintree to Bishop Stortford railway line, Flich Way Country Park, dissects the southern part of the site. The western and eastern boundaries of the site are for the most part bounded by field boundaries. Little Dunmow village sits in a pocket towards the middle of the site.

The site proposer has not submitted an LVA in relation to the proposed development, however, they commissioned The Landscape Partnership Ltd (TLP) who carried out an LVA in respect of a previous development proposal for up to 750 dwellings, retail centre, offices, and primary school, on some 55ha of the current proposal site (Ref: UTT/14/2756/OP). It is acknowledged that this LVA does not specifically related to the current proposal, but it does address the potential effects of significant development on the landscape character of the surrounding landscape.

The TLP appraisal questions the drawing of the boundary between the Fenland plateau and the Chelmer Valley character areas as defined in the Blandford assessment. TLP's contention is that Little Dunmow village should be considered to be on the Farmland Plateau, and not within the Chelmer Valley character area. Including the village within the Farmland Plateau designation would alter the sensitivity to change rating from 'relatively high' to 'moderate to high'. Having looked at the site and the land contours I am confident with the Blandford delineation between the two character areas.

The relatively large gently sloping arable fields in the northern parts of the proposal site are open to views from the B1256 and Station Road, in particular from the elevated sections of this road at the bridge crossing over the A120. Whilst the provision of belts of screen planting and strengthening of retained hedgerows would to some degree mitigate the visual impact of development in these areas, development would remain prominent.

To the south of Little Dunmow village the arable fields and pasture land, together with the Flitch Way linear park, and the narrow lane of Brook Street, give rise to intimate visual qualities. The broad buffer zone of planting along the northern edge of the Flitch Green development maintains the separation between that development and the rural character of the site to the south Little Dunmow village. The proposed development would result in the coalescence of Little Dunmow village and the Flitch Green estate.

Little Dunmow is a small village with an historic core defined by the designated conservation area and a number of listed buildings. The character of the conservation area and the settling of the listed buildings are defined and significantly enhanced by the open countryside which surrounds the settlement. The loss of the countryside setting by the proposed development would disconnect the village from its historic agricultural landscape setting significantly degrading this heritage asset.

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that this site cannot accommodate the proposed development without causing significant and unacceptable harm to the important visual qualities of the site, the wider landscape, and the setting of little Dunmow village.

Easton Park

Easton Park Estate

Site area 697ha (developable 473ha)

Total number of housing units proposed 9,550-10,000

1 Secondary school and 4 Primary schools

4 Mixed Use Centres

The site area lies within the Broxted Farmland Plateau, as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (B10 Broxted Farmland Plateau):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Gentle undulating farmland on glacial till plateau, dissected by River Roding.
- Large open landscape with tree cover appearing as blocks on the horizon or as scattered trees along field boundaries, with intermittent hedgerows.
- Higher ground where plateau broadens and flattens is expansive and full of big sky views.
- Dispensed settlements and few villages of any size.
- Some sunken lanes.
- Moats, halls and historic farmsteads scattered over the area.

Visual characteristics include:

- Churches set on hills can be seen in long views.
- Telecommunications masts occasionally seen.
- Stansted Airport and tower visible in long views from many locations within the character area.
- From several locations in the north and east of the character area, panoramic views across the Chelmer Valley slopes and views to great Dunmow.
- Commercial premises growing around airport.

The sensitivities to change identified within this character area include:

The open nature of the skyline of higher areas of the plateau is visually sensitive, with new development potentially visible within expansive views across the plateau. Overall, this character area has moderate to high sensitivity to change.

The greater part of the proposal site lies across the former parkland associated with an Elizabethan house which was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1847, subsequently part rebuilt in the Gothic Revival style, but destroyed by fire in 1918. Only the west wing, Easton Lodge, was rebuilt and remains. Associated with Easton Lodge are the Stable yard Cottages, Warwick House, and the Tower House, which are Grade II listed buildings. The gardens of Easton Lodge lie prominently to south-east, north, and north-west of the Lodge. The Harold Peto designed garden features are mainly in the area north of the house and include a

formal lawn, twin pergolas, a sunken Italianate garden, and a Japanese Garden, all of which survive in part, and are listed Grade II in the Historic England Historic Parks and Gardens Register (Entry No. 1001484). Easton Lodge, its gardens, and the grouping of associated buildings, would form a pocket within the proposed development. The separation of this group of buildings and the historic gardens from the former parkland would have limited impact in terms of their historic setting.

During the Second World War the parkland was requisitioned by the War Office and cleared of trees to make way for an airfield (The two concrete runways have been subsequently broken up and removed for much the greater part. The existing concrete drive leading to Easton Lodge was laid down during the war on the line of a 19th Century drive). The wiping away of the historic parkland trees and the rides they formed has denuded this landscape of much visual interest and its relevance in relation to the historic setting of Easton Lodge and associated buildings.

For the greater part the proposal site is relatively flat and open arable land. The maximum land fall across the whole of the site is some 30m, with gentle slopes in the north to the Chelmer valley, and to west the Roding River valley.

The large blocks of native species woodland within the proposal site, including Canfield Spring, Broxted Common Wood, Middlefield Wood, Philipland Wood, and High Wood immediately to the south of the site, define the landscape and frame long distance views.

In the southern part of the proposal site there is an active gravel and sand working.

An intervisibility desk top study has been carried out by the site proposer. It is evident that parts of the proposed development would be visible in views taken from outside the site, and that there is likelihood that the development would be visible in some distant views. A detailed assessment of the visual impact on the broader landscape has not been undertaken.

In conclusion, the former parkland is not considered to be of significant landscape value. Whilst much of the proposal site is on the elevated plateau land, the substantial blocks of existing woodland on and adjacent to the site would provide a level of visual containment of the proposed development. The provision of additional woodland and tree belts would provide further mitigation of the potential visual impact of the development. The likely overall effect of the proposed development on the surrounding landscape is considered moderate.

West of Braintree

Site area 795ha (Developable area 245ha)

Total number of housing units proposed up to 4,500

Employment land proposed circa 40,000 - 45,000m² (All in Braintree District)

1no. Secondary and 5no. Primary Schools

2no. District centers.

The site and surrounds consist, in the main, of a gently rolling landscape rising from the south and east from the Pods Brook valley to a broad domed plateau. The land levels across the whole site rise some 20m. Within those parts of the proposal site within the Uttlesford administrative district the levels rise some 10m. For the greater part the site is arable farmland, with field hedges and blocks of woodland. The Andrewsfield Aerodrome lies over the highest ground in the north-west part of the site.

The geology is London Clay Formation, with clay, silt and sand, with chalky clay Lowestoft Formation superficial deposits.

The parts of the site within Uttlesford District lie within the Felsted Farmland Plateau, as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (B16 Felsted Farmland Plateau):

Key Characteristics for this area include:

- Gently undulating farmland.
- Network of narrow, winding roads.
- Many small woods and copes provide structure and edges in the landscape.
- The farmland is predominantly arable with field boundaries delineated by fragmented hedgerows.

Visual Characteristics include:

- The views are open panoramic across the farmland. The variation in the nature of the view is dictated by the trees.

Sensitivities to Change include:

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include many small woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees (which are sensitive to changes in land management). The comprehensive network of quite rural lanes and byways, which cross the landscape are sensitive to potential increased traffic flow, associated with new development. In association with this, the overall sense of tranquillity within the area is sensitive to change. Overall, this character area has low-moderate sensitivity to change.

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of the site in relation to the proposed development has been carried out by Capita and Property Infrastructure on

behalf of the proposer Andrewsfield New Settlement Consortium (ANSC). Their overall conclusions are that the proposed development would “alter the landscape character of the site and its immediate surroundings - due to the conversion of arable and pastoral fields residential and recreational use...”; and “The geographic extent from which the development would be apparent would be limited however, due to the rolling landform and extensive woodland and hedgerow coverage both within the site and in the surrounding area, which visually screen the majority of longer distance views; the only exception being the cross valley views from the east.” The proposed mitigation measures include:

- Retain and protect existing woodland (and Ancient Woodland) coverage;
- Maintain and enhance the existing hedgerow vegetation within the site through additional planting in ‘happy’ sections and improve landscape management;
- Resurface and connect up existing public rights of way within the site and surrounding area for recreational use.
- Retain and connect isolated sections of woodland (particularly at the periphery of the site) to provide visual screening from key routes and encourage biodiversity;
- Minimise alteration to landform and protect and enhance existing watercourses, promoting them for recreational use;
- Protect the character of historic lanes (notably Shalford road and Pods Lane) and roads within Great Paling Conservation Area;
- Allow for ‘buffer’ zones around existing listed buildings to minimise impact on their landscape setting;
- Incorporate screen planting to the south of Saling Grove in order to mitigate views towards development; and
- Maintain cross valley views from the east, but screening development blocks where practical.”

Landscape consultants The Landscape Partnership Ltd. have been commissioned by The Stebbing Neighbourhood Steering Group and have carried out a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal to inform the current preparation of The Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan (TLP study dated March 2017). The TLP study examines Landscape Capacity and identifies the extent to which the landscape can accommodate change and the degree to which this is likely to impact on the landscape.

TLP’s study describes six distinct parcels of land in Uttlesford District which fall in whole, or part, within the proposal site (Land parcels Nos. 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, and 25). The Landscape Capacity for four of these areas is described in their study as being Medium – Low (Parcels Nos. 19, 20, 22, and 24), and two as being Low (Nos. 23 and 25). The two areas with Low Landscape Capacity are in the vicinity of the linear settlement of Stebbing Green in the south west part of the proposal site.

In consideration of the proposed development my comments are restricted to those areas of the site which lie within the administrative district of Uttlesford.

The aerodrome occupies a significant part of the site within Uttlesford. Within the boundaries of the aerodrome there are no historic landscape features which are of significance. There are, however, arable fields adjacent to Stebbing Green which are considered to be of pre-18th century, or possibly of much earlier origin. The setting of the small linear settlement of Stebbing Green, with its Listed dwellings, is particularly sensitive to the visual impact of new development and it is considered important that this settlement's character and identity is protected by the provision of a generous buffer zone incorporating the immediately adjacent fields. Overall, whilst the proposed development would undoubtedly result in a significant change to the visual character of the site and the immediate surrounds, it is considered that the site within Uttlesford has a low to moderate sensitivity and has capacity for change.

Elsenham

Land north east of Elsenham

Site area 300ha

Total number of housing units proposed 3,000-4,000

1 Secondary School and 2 Primary Schools

Up to 21ha employment land.

The main part of the proposal site lies to the north east of Elsenham village, east of the Cambridge - Liverpool Street railway line, and extending eastward up to Mill Road, Henham. The northern most extent of the site lies to the west of the railway line and is bounded in the west by the M11. The southern most part the site extends to the Henham Road. The site covers an area of gently undulating landscape formed by the river valley systems of tributaries of the Stort River to the south and the Cam River to the north. Across the whole of the site the fall in ground levels is of some 44m.

The site's underlying geology is London Clay Formation with clay silt and sand and Lowestoft Formation superficial deposits on the higher land; on the lower levels Kesgrave Catchment Subgroup superficial deposits of sand and gravel; and clay, silt and gravel superficial deposits in the valley bottom.

The greater part of the site lies within the Broxton Farmland Plateau as defined in the Blandford Landscape Character Assessment (B10 Broxton Farmland Plateau); the northern part of the site west of the railway line lies within the Debden Farmland Plateau (B7 Debden Farmland Plateau); the remainder of the site lies within the Stort Valley (A3 Stort Valley).

The Broxton Farmland Plateau as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (B10):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Gently undulating farmland on glacial till plateau, dissected by River Roding.
- Large open landscape with tree cover appearing as blocks on the horizon or as scattered trees along field boundaries, with intermittent hedgerows.
- Higher ground where plateau broadens and flattens is expansive and full of big sky views.
- Dispersed settlements and few villages of any size.
- Some sunken lanes.
- Moats, halls and historic farmsteads scattered over the area.

Visual Characteristics include:

- Churches set on hills are visible in long views.
- Telecommunications masts occasionally visible.

- Stansted airport and tower visible in long views from many locations within the character area.
- Commercial premises growing around airport.

Sensitivities to change identified within this character area include:

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include blocks of mixed deciduous woodland (visible on the horizon) and scattered trees within field boundaries (which are sensitive to change in land management). The open nature of the skyline of higher areas of plateau is visually sensitive, with new development potentially visible within expansive views across the plateau. Sunken, often tree-lined lanes are also sensitive to new development, or increases in traffic flow associated with such development. There is a sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern and several visible moats and halls (the pattern of which is sensitive to change or new development). Overall, this character area has moderate to high sensitivity to change.

The Debden Farmland Plateau as described by Blandford (B7):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Dense woodland patches or copses, many of them ancient, provide structure in the landscape.
- Gently rolling plateau incised by River Cam in the south, Debden Water west of Debden, and a small section of the River Pant in the northwest corner near Bears Hall.
- Tall trees or overgrown hedgerows line some roads or lanes; broken hedgerows evident or absence of hedgerows due to agricultural intensification.
- Expansive views on open roads at higher elevations.
- Settlement visible in most directions.
- Rich cultural heritage with many vernacular buildings.

Sensitivities to change identified in this area include:

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within the character area include dense woodland patches and copses, which provide structure within the landscape and are sensitive to changes in land management. The open nature of the skyline of areas of the plateau (where panoramic views, often towards settlements can be gained) is visually sensitive to development, which may interrupt such views. There is also a sense of historic integrity, resulting from dispersed historic settlement pattern (with isolated farms, moated sites and small hamlets strung out along linear greens), which is sensitive to potential large scale development. Overall, this character area has relatively high sensitivity to change.

The Stort Valley as described by Blandford (A3):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Gently sloping, sometimes steep river valley slopes dominated by arable farmland.
- Small to medium scale field pattern defined by hedgerows, tree belts, woodland blocks in places.
- Location of River Stort well delineated by riverbank trees.
- Continuous views down the valley from higher ground, and at some bridges.

Sensitivities to change identified in this area include:

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include hedgerows, the belts, woodland blocks and copses that frame several views across and out of the area. Potential new development, which may result in the loss of these features, would change the visual character and nature of views within and to the area. Within the valley floor, small linear fields of arable farmland, fringed by wet pasture and unimproved wet grassland are also sensitive to changes in land management. Sunken lanes and species-rich embanked verges are also key features. Strong historic integrity is visible within the settlement pattern in the form of village greens and former commons, isolated farms, many moated sites, smaller hamlets and historic cores containing many vernacular buildings (for example Stansted Mountfitchet). The slopes of the valley are visually sensitive with long panoramic views across and along floodplain. Views to the valley sides from adjacent Landscape Character Areas area also sensitive. Overall this character area has relatively high sensitivity to change.

For the most part the topography and existing vegetation limit views into the site from much of the surround area. The visual influences on the landscape of the M11, the railway line, and the 20th century development elements of Elsenham, Old Mead Lane, and the southern edge of Henham (As referred to in the David Lock Associates submission, dated 01 June 2015, on behalf of the site promoters Fairfield (Elsenham) Ltd.) are acknowledged, however, the railway line is relatively well assimilated into the landscape, similarly the matured landscaping along the M11 reduces the motorway's visual impact on the surrounding landscape. The 20th Century development in Old Mead Lane, whilst of no great merit, it relatively low key in character and does not significantly impact on the surrounding landscape.

I am concerned that the development of the north eastern extent of the site and adjacent to Mill Road will give raise to visual coalescence with Henham village. Significant mitigating measure would need to be put in place to seek to ameliorate this.

The north western part of the proposed development west of the railway is on sloping land which is particularly prominent in views taken from the road leading from Henham to Old Mead Road. The suitability of this parcel of arable land for

development is considered highly questionable because of its visual sensitivity and capacity for development.

The northern parts of the site to the east of the railway are visually sensitive to development, by reason of the rolling landform. This northern edge would need significant mitigating measures to reduce the visual impact of development on the wider landscape.

The southernmost part of the site west of Elsenham Hall is not considered to be of high landscape value, the relationship between the Hall and this former parkland area has been for the most part disconnected. Nevertheless, it is considered important that there is a suitable buffer between this part of the development site and the Hall in order to protect the visual quality of the setting of the Listed Hall.

Whilst parts of the proposal site are considered to have landscape capacity to accommodate development there are specific areas which are considered to have high sensitivity to development which would need to be addressed.

Takeley – Priors Green

Land north of Priors green and south/west of Priors Wood.

Site area: 85.2ha (Developable Area 58.1ha)

Total number of housing units proposed 1,700.

Employment land proposed 0.6ha.

1no. Primary School.

Local Centre 0.4ha.

The proposal site lies on predominantly arable farmland north of Priors Green and south west of Priors Wood. The northern most extent of the site is bound by the A120, which lies in cut in the section bordering the site. The southern edge of the site, for the greater part, abuts the Priors Green residential development, and, in part and to the east, the Stortford Road (B1256). The eastern most edge of the site extends, in part, to Frogs Hall Lane. The western part of the site is bound for the greater part to the north by Priors Wood, and to the south by the edge of Smiths Green, and Takeley village

Across the whole of the proposal site the change in ground levels is some 20m, although for much the greater part the site is relatively flat.

The site's underlying geology is London Clay Formation with clay silt and sand and Lowestoft Formation superficial deposits.

The site is within the Broxted Farmland Plateau as defined in the Blandford Landscape Character Assessment (B10 Broxted Farmland Plateau).

The Broxted Farmland Plateau as described in Blandford's Landscape Character Assessment (B10):

Key characteristics for this area include:

- Gently undulating farmland on glacial till plateau, dissected by the River Roding.
- Large open landscape with tree cover appearing as blocks on the horizon or as scattered trees along field boundaries, with intermittent hedgerows.
- Higher ground where plateau broadens and flattens is expansive and full of big sky views.
- Dispersed settlements and few villages of any size.
- Some sunken lanes.
- Moats, halls and historic farmlands scattered over the area.

Visual characteristics include:

- Churches set on hills are visible in long views.
- Telecommunication masts occasionally visible.
- Stansted airport and control tower visible in long views from many locations within the character area.

- Commercial premises growing around airport.

Sensitivities to change identified within this character area include:

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include blocks of mixed deciduous woodland (visible on the horizon) and scattered trees within field boundaries (which are sensitive to change in land management). The open nature of the skyline of higher areas of plateau is visually sensitive, with new development potential visible within expansive views across the plateau. Sunken, often tree-lined lanes are also sensitive to new development, or increases in traffic flow associated with such development. There is a sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern and several visible moats and halls (the pattern of which is sensitive to change or new development). Overall, this character area has moderate to high sensitivity to change.

Whilst the proposed development would undoubtedly result in a significant change to the visual character of the site itself, it is considered the visual impact of the development on the surrounding landscape would be limited with the implementation of appropriate landscape mitigation measures. The relatively flat nature of the site combined with the visual containment provided by Priors Wood to the north east of the site, and the physical containment of the northern extent of the proposed development provided by the A120, reduces the potential impact of the proposed development on the wider landscape.