

Land at Townsend Farm, Melksham

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

Date of report: 21/07/2026

PREPARED FOR

Bellway

savills

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Separate Documents

Appendix B – Figures and Photographs

Document History

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been produced to consider the potential landscape and visual effects of proposed residential development of up to 225 dwellings, associated public open space and access infrastructure on land forming part of Townsend Farm, located on the southern edge of the town of Melksham, Wiltshire. The report has been prepared by Savills Urban Design Studio for Bellway Homes Limited with the work carried out by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 This report describes and evaluates any changes to landscape character, features and visual amenity that may arise due to development set out in the drawings for the scheme.
- 1.3 The application is defined as *“Outline application for up to 225 dwellings, with access from Semington Road, along with public open space and landscape buffers to incorporate existing rights of way and to accommodate the route of the proposed Melksham Link Canal (under separate application W/12/01080/FUL). Demolition and clearance of all existing buildings and structures on the site. All matters reserved other than vehicular access from Semington Road.”*
- 1.4 The main objectives of this Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVA) are as follows:
- Establish the baseline landscape and visual conditions, including the sensitivity/value of receptors
 - Identification and assessment of the magnitude of any potential landscape and visual effects
 - Appraisal of the significance of any effects
- 1.5 The term ‘Site’ is used throughout the report to describe the area within the redline boundary, as shown in the Figures provided in Appendix B. Land making up the site is made up of a series of fields which extend from Berryfield Lane, which runs along the western edge of part of the site, to Semington Road which defines the eastern extents

2. Scope of the Appraisal and Methodology

2.1 Proposals

- 2.1.1 The review assumes a development will take place in accordance with Brandt Urban Design drawing “Development Framework Plan” (drawing P25-0016_CMP-02). As the proposals are for an outline application the precise nature of the development as shown on this layout may be subject to change.
- 2.1.2 The proposed development is to include the following components:
- Residential development to the northern part of the site extending from Berryfield Lane to Semington Road and up to the adjacent development to the north (Application reference 20/07334/OUT and PL/2023/00808 and PL/2024/11665)
 - Residential development to the southern part of the site extending from Berryfield Lane to the proposed Berryfield Lane application to the south and east of the site (Application reference PL/2025/00626)
 - Vehicular access from Semington Road to the north eastern corner of the site with a connecting road to the southern development parcel
 - A central green space running between the northern and southern parcels part of which is to provide a potential future canal link
 - A network of pedestrian routes through the site and proposed open space with connections to Semington Road and Berryfield Lane
 - Internal vehicle circulation routes
 - Creation of ‘Townsend Park’ which will be part of a network of green spaces running through the site
 - Attenuation basins and features as part of Sustainable Drainage measures which are to be integrated into the open space proposals
 - New landscape and planting, including street trees, a community orchard and buffer planting to strengthen the site boundaries

2.2 Methodology

Introduction

- 2.2.1 The appraisal has been informed by the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition* (GLVIA3) (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2013). The guidelines suggest that impacts are assessed from a clear understanding of the development proposed and any related landscape mitigation measures.
- 2.2.2 GLVIA3 calls for an understanding of the visual form of the existing landscape, its quality and sensitivity to change, considering the nature of the development. It further calls for an evaluation of the value of the views and susceptibility to change (overall sensitivity) of the potential landscape and visual receptors (viewers).
- 2.2.3 For there to be a visual impact, there is the need for a viewer (receptor). Visual receptors include users of residential properties, workplaces, recreational facilities, and other outdoor sites used by the public, roads, railways and footpaths, which would be likely to experience a change in existing views as a result of the construction and operation of the proposed development. This baseline identification of landscape and visual receptors is provided in Sections 4 and 5 of this report.

Desk-based Surveys

- 2.2.4 The desk study included a review of the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps for the area, GIS data, aerial photographs, and relevant landscape related designations and published landscape character assessments. The documents reviewed included:
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)
 - National Character Areas within the study area
 - Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2005
 - West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment (2007)
 - Local Plan: Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015
 - Wiltshire Design Guide adopted March 2024
 - Emerging policy: Draft Wiltshire Local Plan
 - Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2020 – 2038 and associated evidence base

Site Visit

- 2.2.5 The site visit was undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect on 20th March 2026. The site visit was informed by the preparation of a Zones of Theoretical Visibility drawing (ZTV) which indicates where development may be seen. The late winter timing of the site visit meant that foliage had not yet come into full leaf on deciduous plants representing the preferred time for a survey to understand the potential visual effects.
- 2.2.6 The site visit confirmed the information arising from the desk study, produced a photographic record of the site, highlighted any landscape features not already apparent from the desk study and enabled views into and out of the site to be appraised. It also allowed us to advise Brandt Urban Design on ways to mitigate landscape and visual impact when preparing the illustrative Masterplan.

Photography

- 2.2.7 Photographs of key views were taken with a Canon EOS 5D digital full frame SLR camera with a 50mm lens. This is compliant with Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals. Photographs are presented as 'Type 1' Visualisations, namely Annotated Viewpoint Photographs, together with associated panoramas to provide the wider context. They are presented as Annotated Viewpoints with each view accompanied by a panorama to give a more realistic representation of the wider context. Locational data was surveyed with a Garmin GPS.

Landscape Appraisal Evaluation Methodology

- 2.2.8 The appraisals are based on an evaluation of the 'sensitivity' of the landscape and visual receptors and the 'magnitude' of the changes. These are defined within the tables set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2.9 The 'sensitivity' of the landscape receptor is based on an evaluation of their 'value' (see definitions in Appendix A, Table A) and their 'susceptibility to change' (Table B) and the 'overall sensitivity' based on value and susceptibility (Table C).
- 2.2.10 'Value' refers to the value that is attached to different landscapes by society, bearing in mind that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons (GLVIA3 paragraph 5.19). The baseline review considers the individual elements and aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape and the condition/quality and 'representativeness' of its elements and features. Judgements are based on a review of the following, as set out in GLVIA3 paragraphs 5.20 to 5.31 and 5.44 to 5.45:
- National designations, and how the site relates to the criteria for its designation
 - Local designations and policies

Information on the status of individual or groups of features such as, for example, Conservation Areas, listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders, important hedgerows, cultural heritage elements such as historic landscapes of various forms, archaeological sites of importance and other special historical or cultural heritage sites such as battlefields or historic gardens

- Art and literature associations, including tourism literature and promotional material which may indicate the value attached to the identity of particular areas
- Material on landscapes of local or community interest, such as local green spaces, village greens or allotments

- 2.2.11 'Susceptibility to change' refers to the ability of the landscape receptor (the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies (GLVIA3 paragraph 5.40). In this instance, the 'proposed development' is the proposed site access, road infrastructure, housing and green infrastructure and the categories range from 'low' to 'high,' in line with paragraph 5.43 of GLVIA3.
- 2.2.12 The 'magnitude' of the impact of the proposals on the receptors is then judged (Appendix A, Table D). This considers the scale and geographical extent of the effect. It is assumed that the changes will be permanent and irreversible for this development.
- 2.2.13 Finally, the overall 'significance' of the effects is judged by considering both the magnitude of the change and the sensitivity of the receptor together (Appendix A, Table E). As recommended by the GLVIA3, the rationale for this decision-making process is also based on professional judgement, rather than relying solely on matrices. These tables are provided to give a consistent framework to how decisions relating to the changes are made and clarify what the definitions mean.
- 2.2.14 Once the potential landscape receptors were identified, the magnitude of change likely to result from the implementation and use of the development was identified and, in turn, the significance of these effects, based on the sensitivity of the receptors. This appraisal of effects on landscape receptors is provided in Section 4.
- 2.2.15 For the purposes of this assessment, impacts of moderate and above are considered to be significant.

Visual Appraisal Evaluation Methodology

- 2.2.16 The visual appraisal was based on a comprehensive site visit to ascertain where key views of the site are. This was informed by a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) based on the proposed layout as shown on the Brandt Urban Design Concept Masterplan, and taking into account the screening effects of terrain and existing buildings and trees (see Figure LA005).
- 2.2.17 Like the landscape appraisal, the visual appraisal was based on the identification of potential visual receptors, evaluating their sensitivity, and considering this in combination with the magnitude of the changes to their views.
- 2.2.18 The preliminary survey work highlighted the main areas where impacts could occur. The 'value' of the views was judged, based on the definitions set out in Appendix A, Table F and the 'susceptibility to accept change' of the visual receptors was based on the definitions set out in Table G. These were then combined to give an overall indication of the 'sensitivity' of the receptors, based on the matrix set out in Table H as well as professional judgement.
- 2.2.19 The anticipated magnitude of change to the views of the identified receptors was then considered, based on the definitions set out in Table I which has been adapted from GLVIA3 methodology. Magnitude of change considers the extent of development visible, the extent of the existing view that would be occupied by the development, the influence of the development within the view and

the viewing distance from the receptor to the development. The visual prominence of the proposals would vary according to weather conditions.

- 2.2.20 Finally, as with the landscape appraisal, the overall 'significance' of the effects is judged by considering both the magnitude of the change and the sensitivity of the visual receptor together (Table E). Again, the rationale for this decision-making process is also based on professional judgement, rather than relying solely on matrices. These tables are provided to give a consistent framework to how decisions relating to the changes are made and clarify what the definitions mean.
- 2.2.21 For the purposes of this appraisal, impacts of 'moderate' and above are considered to be significant.

3. Policy and Designation Review

3.1 Landscape and Visual Amenity Designations

- 3.1.1 This section sets out relevant policies and designations relating to landscape and visual amenity. The relevant designations are shown on Figure 1 (see Appendix B).
- 3.1.2 The site is not covered by any adopted landscape amenity designations.
- 3.1.3 There are no trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders within or adjacent to the site boundaries.
- 3.1.4 There are no listed buildings on the site with the closest Listed building the Grade II Berryfields Cottages located just over 60m from the southwestern corner of the site on the western side of Berryfield Lane.
- 3.1.5 There are no Scheduled Monuments on the site or in proximity to it.
- 3.1.6 There are three National Landscapes in Wiltshire: part of the Cotswolds to the north of the county, together with Cranborne Chase and the West Wiltshire Downs, however, the site does not lie within their boundaries and would not impact on these.

3.2 International Landscape Policy

- 3.2.1 The UK signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2006-2007. This international convention focuses specifically on landscapes, promoting the importance of policies relating to their protection, management and creation. It applies to all landscapes, towns, open countryside, coast and inland areas, and includes ordinary and degraded landscapes as well as those afforded protection. The ELC does not confine itself to cultural or man-made landscape elements alone, but to all elements and the way they interact. The use of Landscape Character Assessment to inform policymaking is a well-established example of the implementation of the convention in the UK.
- 3.2.2 The ELC recommends that landscape policies should aim to 'protect, manage or plan' as defined below:
- *"Landscape protection: action to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by the landscape's heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or human activity."*
 - *Landscape management: action from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.*
 - *Landscape planning means: strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscape."*

3.3 National Planning Policy

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (HM Government, 2018, updated 2023)

- 3.3.1 The 25 Year Plan sets out strategic environmental policy covering a range of aspirations. Goal 6 'enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment' sets out the commitments to ensure we conserve and enhance the beauty of the natural environment, and make sure it can be enjoyed, used by and cared for by everyone. It sets out the following measures as ways to achieve this goal:

a) *"Safeguarding and enhancing the beauty of our natural scenery and improving its environmental value while being sensitive to considerations of its heritage.*

b) *Making sure that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces close to where people live and work, particularly in urban areas, and encouraging more people to spend time in them to benefit their health and wellbeing.*

c) *Focusing on increasing action to improve the environment from all sectors of society."* (Page 28)

- 3.3.2 This goal, along with the other seven presented in the 25 Year Plan, are supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (see below).

National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (updated December 2024) (NPPF) is a material consideration in dealing with planning applications for development. The Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied and provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

- 3.3.4 The NPPF describes how the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to achieve sustainable development through three overarching objectives. Objective c), the 'environmental objective', is to *"protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy" (NPPF paragraph 8).*

- 3.3.5 Policy sections that are particularly relevant to the landscape design of the site are:

- Section 15 'Conserving and enhancing the natural environment'

- 3.3.6 Chapter 15 of the NPPF relates to conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment. Paragraph 187 states that Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by:

"protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).

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".

Natural Environment Planning Practice Guidance

- 3.3.7 The NPPF is supplemented by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 3.3.8 In relation to landscape matters under the Natural Environment NPPG (published 2016, updated June 2025), this NPPG explains the key issues in implementing policy to protect biodiversity and natural environment and provides advice on how the character of landscapes can be used to inform planning decisions and what green infrastructure is and why it is important to delivering sustainable developments.
- 3.3.9 The NPPG makes reference to the National Planning Policy Framework, stating: *“it is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes”*. The NPPG also goes on to state, *“the cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully”* (Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721, Revision date: 21 July 2019).
- 3.3.10 At paragraph 037, the NPPG identifies that landscape character assessments can be prepared, as well as Landscape and Sensitivity and Capacity Assessments to help assess the type and scale of development that may be accommodated without compromising landscape character (Paragraph: 037 Reference ID: 8-037-20190721, Revision date: 21 July 2019). The NPPG also states that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment can be used to demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development.

3.4 Adopted Local Planning Policy

Local Plan: Wiltshire Core Strategy (Adopted January 2015)

- 3.4.1 There are a number of policies in this document that relate to the site, this includes the following:
- 3.4.2 **Core Policy 51: Landscape** relates to the site with the following commentary:
- “seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Wiltshire’s distinctive landscape character. The term ‘landscape’ here is used to refer to the built, historic and natural environment in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.”*
- Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment(s) and any other relevant assessments and studies. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures”*
- 3.4.3 **Core Policy 52: Green Infrastructure**, sets out the following:
- “Development shall make provision for the retention and enhancement of Wiltshire’s green infrastructure network, and shall ensure that suitable links to the network are provided and maintained. Where development is permitted developers will be required to: i. retain and enhance existing on site green infrastructure ii. make provision for accessible open spaces in accordance with the requirements of the adopted Wiltshire Open Space Standards iii. put measures in place to ensure appropriate long-term management of any green infrastructure directly related to the development iv. provide appropriate contributions towards the delivery of the Wiltshire Green Infrastructure Strategy v. identify and provide opportunities to enhance and improve linkages between the natural and historic landscapes of Wiltshire.”*

3.4.4 **Core Policy 53:Wiltshire's Canals**

"Core Policy 53 supports the restoration and improvement of the historic canal network in Wiltshire, which provides considerable opportunities to enhance green infrastructure in the area"

3.4.5 **Core Policy 57: Ensuring High Quality Design.** Within this policy relevant considerations for development include:

"A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality."

Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (2020 – 2038) Made August 2025

3.4.6 Several policies in the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan (JMNP2) are relevant to the site, these include:

- Policy 12 – Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Policy 13 – Biodiversity
- Policy 14 – Open Spaces
- Policy 16 – Local Green Spaces
- Policy 17 – Trees and hedgerows
- Policy 18 – Landscape Character
- Policy 20 – Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design
- Policy 21 – Local Heritage

3.5 It was recommended by the Inspector of the JMNP2 submitted plan that the proposed 'Green wedge' between Melksham and Berryfield (paragraph 7.175) be omitted as it was considered that the gap between Melksham and Berryfield has 'already coalesced elsewhere' differentiating it from other green gaps. As such no reference has been made to this policy.

4. Landscape Baseline and Appraisal

4.1 Baseline Landscape Character: National Assessments

- 4.1.1 The study area is covered by two tiers of landscape character assessments, the national Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England), and the local level Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2005) and the West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment (2007). The character area boundaries in these respective assessments are shown in Appendix B, Figures 2 and 3 (Drawing LA002).

National Character Area 117 Avon Vales

- 4.1.2 The site is situated within NCA 117 Avon Vales (Natural England, 2012). This description of this character area is as follows: “...a low-lying, clay-dominated open landscape, with the higher ground of the Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs National Character Area (NCA) to the south, Berkshire and Marlborough Downs NCA to the east, and the Cotswolds NCA to the west. In the south and north there is a gradual merging with the clay of the Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour NCA and the Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA respectively.”
- 4.1.3 Key characteristics of the character area that relate to the site include the following:
- An undulating clay vale with a mix of arable and pasture.
 - Small- and medium-sized fields with mostly hedgerow boundaries with few hedgerow trees, varying in shape from irregular piecemeal enclosure to rectilinear planned enclosure.
 - Numerous low ridges with local views over towns and villages.
 - Wide River Avon corridor, with an ancient pattern of flood meadows and closely associated settlements and more recent development.
 - Transport corridors along roads and watercourses, heavily influential on all development in the NCA.
 - Attractive stone-built centres to market towns that reflect the former agricultural productivity and wealth of the area.
 - Wide views across whole area from higher areas of surrounding chalk downs.
- 4.1.4 A series of landscape opportunities are identified and those relevant to the site include the following;
- Manage the restoration and replanting of hedgerows and hedgerow trees both to reinforce the traditional field patterns and the local landscape character and in the interests of biodiversity and habitat connectivity.
 - Plan to engage local communities in the work to accommodate development pressure in towns such as Melksham, Calne, Westbury and Trowbridge by designing and establishing a network of multi-functional greenspaces which both respects the current landscape and increases opportunities for people and nature.
 - Protect the many small well-established villages, particularly their historic cores, settlement pattern, green spaces and notable buildings, and the narrow winding lanes that connect them aiming to retain their sense of isolation while ensuring viable and vibrant local communities.
 - Seek to maintain the connections between settlements and their agricultural and historical origins.
- 4.1.5 The Statement of Environmental Opportunities for the character area include several interventions and enhancements and include the following:
- SEO 1: Protect, manage and enhance the semi-natural habitats, including the pastoral waterside landscape of permanent pasture and wet grassland, calcareous and neutral grasslands, and (as site appropriate) ponds, and investigate and pursue opportunities to create

such habitats, to increase resilience to climate change, reduce soil erosion and provide benefits to the water environment and biodiversity in general.

- SEO 3 - Plan for the creation of new landscapes associated with the expansion of towns such as Chippenham, Melksham and Trowbridge, while incorporating the existing landscape features into green infrastructure planning. This will serve the interests of local landscape character, access and recreation, biomass provision, biodiversity and water flow regulation
- SEO 4: Protect and manage the varied rural landscape of small urban areas amid gently rolling arable and pasture, and thick hedges interspersed with small woods, securing wide-ranging views, reinforcing landscape character, preventing soil erosion, promoting sense of place and tranquillity, and providing recreational benefits.

4.2 Baseline Landscape Character: Local Assessments

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.2.1 At a county level, Wiltshire's landscape character assessment describes the variations in character between different areas and landscape types. In 2005, work was completed to divide the county into 16 landscape character types and 38 landscape character areas, setting out the individual qualities and characteristics.
- 4.2.2 The site is located in the Avon Clay Vale (12B) with key characteristics described as:
- Level land form with wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.
 - Pastoral land use with some arable.
 - Large scale geometric fields with hedgerows or open drainage channels defining boundaries.
 - Presence of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies
 - Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation and prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).
 - Floristically rich hay meadows
 - Settlement pattern varies from large towns and small scattered villages to sparse farmsteads.
 - Buildings in varied materials of brick, render and stone.
 - Crossed by major transport corridors, and a network of minor roads linking settlements.
 - Historic use for transport evident in canals.
- 4.2.3 Adjacent areas include the Malmesbury-Corsham Limestone Lowlands (16A) to the west, beyond the River Avon corridor.

West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment (2007)

- 4.2.4 At a district level, a finer grained assessment was carried out in 2007 to provide "*an integrated assessment of the character of the District at 1:25,000*".
- 4.2.5 The site lies in the Avon floodplain (B1) with the eastern boundary abutting the Semington Open Clay Vale (C2) character area.
- 4.2.6 The characteristics of the Avon Floodplain (B1) are set out below:
- Meandering River Avon and its adjacent low-lying, flat floodplain
 - Intimate river corridor, lined with riverside trees (including alder and willow)
 - Patchwork of rough grassland and arable fields within the floodplain, along both sides of the river channel
 - General lack of settlement pattern
 - Away from the settlements, a strong sense of tranquillity throughout the area
 - River corridor is generally inaccessible by road, although a comprehensive network of footpaths leads to, and along the river corridor

- 4.2.7 The current condition of this character area is evaluated as being: *“Overall, field boundaries generally mature and intact. The area is however, relatively intensively managed, loss of hedgerows apparent (gappy) in certain locations (as a result of intensive cultivation). Overall, however, the condition of this landscape is perceived to be good.”*
- 4.2.8 Specific management strategy and objectives are as follows:
- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of existing settlements/ urban areas (such as Melksham and Bowerhill).
 - Conserve open views across the clay vale to distant downland ridges.
 - Encourage screening of visually intrusive modern farm buildings.
 - Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the A3102 and A365 main road corridors.
 - Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow network.
 - Introduce arable field margins as an important nature conservation feature.
 - Screen visually intrusive urban edges of Melksham and Bowerhill.
- 4.2.9 The characteristics of the adjacent Semington Open Clay Vale (C2) are identified as being:
- Predominantly flat, sloping gradually upwards to the south of Bowerhill and at Hill Farm east of Hilperton
 - Gently meandering course of Semington Brook, lined in places by mature vegetation
 - Kennet and Avon canal and disused railway corridor are distinctive corridor features
 - A mixture of arable fields and pasture
 - Urban fringe character apparent, adjacent to Trowbridge and Melksham/Bowerhill
 - Hampton Business Park and Police Headquarters are dominant visible features within views from surrounding landscape
 - Several interconnecting main road corridors cross the area
 - Settlement pattern comprising Semington village and a number of isolated farmsteads
 - Strong sense of openness
 - Sense of tranquillity disturbed by proximity to major road corridors
- 4.2.10 The current condition is evaluated as follows: *“The hedgerow network is gappy in places and the landscape pattern relatively fragmented by major road corridors and the canal/ dismantled railway corridors. The area is intensively managed and in several places, character is strongly influenced by human activity.”*
- 4.2.11 Specific management strategy and objectives are identified as:
- Enhance visually intrusive harsh urban edges of Trowbridge, Melksham and Bowerhill.
 - Conserve open views across the clay vale to distant downland ridges.
 - Restore gappy hedgerows with species appropriate to local landscape character.
 - Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the A361 and A365 road corridors.
 - Introduce arable field margins as an important nature conservation feature.
 - Screen visually intrusive large developments (such as Hampton Business Park and the Police Headquarters).
 - Encourage any new development within villages to fit with the local vernacular character.
- 4.2.12 The site is located on the edge of Character Area B1 which has a focus on the river corridor and its immediate setting. The site does not have a particularly strong sense of connection to the River Avon with a greater influence from Semington Road and development associated with this route. Given the assessment was undertaken in 2006 it is to be expected that the features and influences on the landscape will have changed over the intervening period. Although the proposals still align with some of the objectives identified, such as the conservation and enhancement of hedgerows.

- 4.2.13 In relation to C2 the site has more of a relationship to the “urban fringe” character although other aspects are less relevant to the site given the current context. Again, the proposals align with some of the management objectives particularly those relating to the restoration of hedgerows.

4.3 Site Landscape Features and Context: Baseline

Land Use and Vegetation

- 4.3.1 The site comprises approximately 11.11ha of agricultural land set between Berryfield Lane which runs long the western edge of the site and Semington Road which defines the eastern extents. The main part of the site comprises a broadly rectangular area made up of a series of fields, with established hedgerows defining several field boundaries, including those adjoining the adjacent highways. There are several agricultural buildings located within the central part of the site these are a mix of low-level sheds, together with several taller elements including a barn, concrete tower (associated with wartime uses on the site) and silo type structures. A further block of low-level agricultural poultry or ‘chicken’ sheds are located on the southern part of the site.
- 4.3.2 At the time of the site visit a new residential development was under construction immediately to the north of the site. Once completed this development will extend to the A350 which wraps around the southern and western edges of Melksham. A line of existing trees and vegetation defines the boundary between the site and the adjacent residential development.
- 4.3.3 To the east much of the site is defined by Semington Road with existing residential development beyond this, comprising a new development at Telford Drive and a mobile home park to the north of this. Part of the site abuts the rear boundaries of several existing dwellings that front onto Semington Road, with these defined by a close board timber fence. Where the site boundary ‘steps in’ the eastern edge currently abuts adjacent farmland, although an application for a residential development on this area has been submitted.
- 4.3.4 To the south of the site is a strip of agricultural land which extends to Berryfield Lane with the residential area of Berryfield beyond. The application for residential development is to extend along the southern boundary of the site replacing the existing use; with the boundary vegetation between the site and this area to be retained.
- 4.3.5 Berryfield Lane runs along the western edge of the site where it becomes a single width track for access only. Existing hedgerows define the edge of the track and beyond this route is an area of farmland with Boundary Farm located adjacent to the site. This agricultural use to the west of Berryfield Lane extends to the River Avon further to the west and to Bradford Road (B3107) beyond.
- 4.3.6 Vegetation on the site comprises a network of existing hedgerows and lines of trees mainly associated with the site boundaries, these vary in condition with several gaps occurring at various points. Further sections of hedgerow and small tree blocks run along some of the field boundaries within the site.
- 4.3.7 A tree survey has been produced by FPCR, together with an Arboricultural Assessment (AA) report. The tree survey identifies that trees, tree groups and hedges are primarily associated with the field boundaries with hedgerow trees a feature of several hedgerows. The hedgerows on the site are identified as Category C with trees and tree groups varying in condition from A to C; trees associated with the northern edge of the site comprise 2 Category A groups.
- 4.3.8 The AA identifies the existing trees that require removal to enable the development to be delivered, this comprises the following:
- One individual Category C tree – T3
 - Six Category C tree groups (including those requiring partial removal)

- Four Category C hedgerows (including those requiring partial removal)

- 4.3.9 Removals are associated with providing the new access to the site from Semington Road and emergency access onto Berryfield Lane, together with pedestrian access; and with providing new housing to both the northern and southern parts of the site.
- 4.3.10 This report concluded that *“the overall arboricultural quality of the site was regarded as being poor”* and that proposals offer *“the opportunity...to improve and embellish the current overall arboricultural quality of the site.”*

Landform and Water Features

- 4.3.11 Landform and water features are shown on Figure 4 (Appendix B).
- 4.3.12 The site is relatively flat with levels ranging from +37.64 AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) in the south-eastern corner rising gently up to +38.60 AOD in the north eastern extents.
- 4.3.13 There are several existing ditches on the site, typically associated with field boundaries and hedgerow planting. These include a section of ditch extending from Berryfield Lane on the eastern edge to the collection of farm buildings located in the central part of the site; a further ditch runs between the two ‘chicken shed’ buildings immediately to the south of the first ditch and another ditch follows part of the field boundary that runs diagonally through the eastern portion of the site. These are seasonally wet features and are described in more detail in the FRA report for the proposals.
- 4.3.14 There are no permanent water bodies present on the site.

Access and Movement

- 4.3.15 Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) are shown on Figure 5.
- 4.3.16 There are several footpaths running through the site, these include MELW2 which runs diagonally across the site in a south-eastern alignment. This path extends from Berryfield Lane to the second footpath, MELW1, which runs through the site. MELW1 runs diagonally through the south-eastern part of the site, extending to Semington Road where a pedestrian gate provides access to this route.
- 4.3.17 Other footpaths are located beyond the extents of the site providing connections to the wider landscape and include routes to Semington to the south and Broughton Gifford to the west.
- 4.3.18 National Cycle Route (NCN) 403 runs along Semington Road as an ‘on carriageway’ cycle route.
- 4.3.19 The Local Protected Route of the Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal; Restored Wilts & Berks Canal Route runs diagonally through the site although at this stage no works to form this route have been submitted or agreed with no projected timetable for the delivery of this project.

Landscape Character and Features – Landscape Sensitivity Conclusions

- 4.3.20 Based on the findings of the site visit, the published landscape character assessments and desk-based reviews, the landscape ‘value’ of the site is judged to be **‘medium-low’** (see definitions in Appendix A Table A). It is not designated for landscape or visual amenity value and is located adjacent to Semington Road and its associated highways infrastructure. This, combined with the presence of existing residential developments to the north and east, reduces the sense of this being a rural location and influence its overall setting. Established vegetation helps provide some enclosure to the site boundaries although the extent and in some instances ‘gappy’ nature of this reduces its effectiveness. The condition of the existing buildings and structures on the site varies with some of these in a state of disrepair, which further reduces the landscape value.

- 4.3.21 The site is judged to be of ‘**medium**’ susceptibility to change (Appendix A, Table B) given the existing and proposed housing developments to three sides of the site and the proximity of Semington Road, contributing to an ‘edge of settlement’ quality. The proposals offer an opportunity to provide accessible green space which extends out to the western boundary of the site and create a generous area of landscape separating the two elements of the proposed development and providing a focal point. The proposals also allow for the existing PRowWs running through the site to be retained and set within areas of open space, while safeguarding land for any future canal extension works.
- 4.3.22 Overall, the landscape sensitivity of the site based on its value and susceptibility to change is judged to be ‘**medium-low**’ (see Appendix A, Table C). This is due to the surrounding context with the presence of existing residential development adjacent to several boundaries of the site and the existing, often large-scale agricultural buildings or structures on the site which form detracting elements. Beyond the site numerous overhead cables and associated pylons are visible and influence the quality of the views available.

4.4 Appraisal of Landscape Effects

Magnitude of Landscape Effects

- 4.4.1 Although this is an outline application, the general effects on landscape features and character are likely to be:
- Land use changes: The proposals will require the replacement of agricultural land and associated farm buildings with a new residential development and associated landscape features and open space, including;
 - Retention of existing trees and hedgerows, where possible, and the creation of new landscape spaces around these
 - Creation of ‘Townsend Park’ set between the two areas of proposed development
 - Provision of a SuDS network including attenuation basins, swales and linear ponds wrapping around the edge of the central open space
 - A new landscape gateway area associated with the proposed site access off Semington Road
 - Provision of new play spaces including a larger play facility in the centre of the site and a further play area associated with the northern edge
 - A green infrastructure network on site including a series of public open spaces, including the central green space, a pocket park and further green space associated with the northern development parcel
 - New tree planting associated with the green spaces and street planting to the highways routes
 - Creation of a new community orchard
 - New boundary planting, including strengthening of existing hedgerows
 - Creation of an area of buffer planting adjacent to the boundaries of the existing properties fronting onto Semington Road
 - Access changes: The scheme will require a new access point to be created off Semington Road with a connecting route to be provided between the two development parcels. The two existing footpaths running through the site would be retained in their current alignment and the proposals allow for the creation of new pedestrian links to Berryfield Lane and the PRowW network further to the west offering additional recreational opportunities.
 - Vegetation changes: The scheme will require some changes to the existing vegetation on the site with the need for the localised removal (including partial removal of three sections of hedgerows, six tree groups and one individual specimen tree, all of which have been recorded

as Category C. This is needed to construct the proposed development, emergency access routes and site entrance.

- These removals would be compensated through the proposed landscape enhancements and new planting to meet Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and to provide an enhanced landscape setting to the development.
- **Water feature changes:** The proposals would require the removal of the existing ditches running through part of the site, although a range of new sustainable drainage features are to be provided. This is to include swales, attenuation basins and potentially ponds, managing runoff and contributing to biodiversity enhancement on the site. The design of these would form part of any detailed application and would be subject to further design development and capacity testing. Despite the loss of the existing ditches, it represents a positive addition to the landscape associated with the development.

4.4.2 Overall, there will be an inevitable change to the landscape character of the site, which will comprise the replacement of the existing agricultural fields and associated agricultural buildings with a new residential development.

4.4.3 Using the definitions set out in Table D, Appendix A, this will result in a:

- **‘medium adverse’** magnitude of change to the land use and character of the site. The proposals would be at odds with the current agricultural use of the site but acknowledge the detracting elements and influences together with the new landscape elements, open spaces and positive enhancements associated with the proposed development. The visual setting of the land is already affected by the presence of existing residential development, together with the adjacent highway.
- Low beneficial magnitude of change on water features, accepting the loss of the existing drainage ditches, but taking account of the introduction of new SuDS features across the site
- Low beneficial magnitude of change on recreation and access through enhanced public access and the creation of accessible open spaces for use by residents and the wider community
- Low beneficial magnitude of change on vegetation, while there will be some localised loss of hedgerow the proposals include new planting offering a more diverse range of approaches and typologies including areas of meadow and species rich grassland, new trees, scrub planting and hedgerow.

Duration of Landscape Effects

4.4.4 Upon maturity of the proposed planting the effects on all of the landscape receptors are assumed to be long term and permanent.

Significance of Landscape Effects

4.4.5 Given that the landscape is judged to have an overall ‘medium-low’ sensitivity (paragraph 4.3.20), the proposals are likely to have an overall **‘minor adverse’** effect on landscape character and land use within the site and a **‘minor beneficial’** effect on landscape features such as vegetation, water feature and public access, based on the Table E matrix (appendix A).

4.4.6 The proposals conserve and enhance much of the existing hedgerows, trees and tree groups on the site, by creating a landscape corridors or areas of open space associated with these features. The provision of the generous central open space, together with various smaller green spaces form part of a green infrastructure network across the site with the inclusion of a series of SuDS features integrated into this, is consistent with recommendations identified in the Joint Landscape Character Assessment.

4.4.7 The development would not directly affect areas with landscape designations.

Landscape Policy Compliance

- 4.4.8 The site is in NCA 117 Avon Vales where the most relevant aspect falls under SEO 1 and 3 through maintain and enhancing hedgerows and creating multi-functional greenspaces. The proposals retain much of the existing hedgerow network with short breaks associated with the highways infrastructure with these to be set within new green routes and the central landscape area will provide a multi-functional open space for use by residents and the wider community.
- 4.4.9 The site is located within Wiltshire Landscape Character Area 12B – Avon Open Clay Vale. This also outlines a strategy to *“improve elements in decline such as the hedgerows and hedgerow trees”* with the proposals maintaining and enhancing these features through new planting and the overall landscape approach.
- 4.4.10 Regarding Core Policy objectives, ‘Policy 51- Landscape’ the proposals help achieve several of the aims and objectives through proposed mitigation and enhancements. This includes the retention of existing trees and hedgerows and the provision of new planting to strengthen boundaries and enhance vegetation cover on the site. The scheme layout has been informed by an approach consistent with the aims of this policy for *“sensitive design and landscape measures”* to any mitigation proposed.
- 4.4.11 Regarding Core Policy 52 – ‘Green Infrastructure’, the proposals will deliver various enhancements consistent with this policy in relation to improvements to the rights of way network, green infrastructure enhancements, the use of SuDS and the creation of accessible green space.
- 4.4.12 Regarding Core Policy 57 – ‘Ensuring High Quality Design’, although the proposals relate to an Outline Application the approach developed is to deliver a high quality and well-designed development. In addition, key aspects of this policy in relation to *“the retention and enhancement of existing important landscaping and natural features”* has informed the design approach.
- 4.4.13 With regards to the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2), the layout for the development has been produced to provide a positive response to the following policies:
- 12 – Green and Blue Infrastructure
 - 13 – Biodiversity
 - 17 – Trees and Hedgerows
 - 18 – Landscape Character
 - 20 – Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design
 - 21 - Local Heritage
- 4.4.14 Policy 14 – ‘Open Spaces’ relates to the loss of existing provision, with the development contributing to additional provision, and Policy 16 – Local Green Spaces relates to the development of existing open spaces which are not relevant.
- 4.4.15 Policy 19 relating to gaps between settlements has not been considered due to its recommendation for removal by the Inspector.

5. Visual Baseline and Appraisal

5.1 Changes to Views

- 5.1.1 The key changes to views would result from the

5.2 Potential Visual Receptors

- 5.2.1 The survey work included a visit to the site itself and driving along roads and walking PRowWs that could have views of the site from the surrounding area. This was informed by a Zone of Theoretical Visibility drawing (see Figure 6, Appendix B) The survey extended to the northern edge of Melksham, Broughton Gifford to the west, Telford Drive to the east and the village of Semington to the south.
- 5.2.2 Due to the PRow running through parts of the site changes in view will occur from these as a result of the proposed development. From beyond the site views are limited due to the consistent, relatively flat topography which extends to the surrounding area; combined with existing trees and vegetation. Views occur from Semington Road and Berryfield Lane where these routes pass along the site boundaries although they are relatively short lived. Beyond the site extents views occur from the PRow which run through the farmland to the west of Berryfield Lane. Views from the wider landscape are limited by a combination of existing vegetation, built form and localised topography. The potential visual receptors are summarised in Table 5.1.
- 5.2.3 Views from the south include the footpaths which run through or close to the site (Views 1, 2 and 3) and from Semington Road (View 15). Further to south potential views from Berryfield Lane (View 16) and various locations around the village of Semington were identified on the ZTV (Views 17, 18, 19 and 20), although the site work demonstrated that views from these locations are limited.
- 5.2.4 To the west views occur from the site boundaries or footpaths just beyond Berryfield Lane, this includes footpath MELW2 (View 4), footpath MELW3 (View 5) and footpath MELW117 (view 6). Further to the west potential views from the footpath network around Broughton Gifford were assessed (Views 8 and 9) although views to the site were limited by a combination of existing buildings and vegetation in the wider landscape.
- 5.2.5 To the north there are limited viewpoints available with existing vegetation restricting potential views, locations in proximity to the site were assessed from Berryfield Lane (View 7) and Semington Road (View 11). Further to the north-west a potential viewpoint from footpath MELW105 (View 10) was also assessed, although existing vegetation helps screen the site.
- 5.2.6 Views from the east occur from footpath MELW1 which runs through the site (Views 12 and 13). Beyond the site views from the Bowood development at Telford Drive were assessed (View 14) with existing boundary vegetation on the site adjacent to Semington Road visible from this location.

Table 5.1: Baseline Sensitivity of Potential Visual Receptors

See Appendix 1 for definitions

Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref	Value of View (Table F)	Susceptibility to change (Table G)	Overall Sensitivity (Table H)	Nature of Views
Views from the south					
Users of footpath MELW1 looking north	1	Medium	Medium	Medium	View experienced by users of the footpath network running just beyond the site extents. Vegetation associated with field boundaries is apparent in the foreground with the existing farm buildings on the site visible beyond. The north-eastern part of the site is visible from this location with new housing under construction to the north of the site also visible. The view is of limited scenic value due to the existing buildings on the site and the presence of adjacent development to the north and east.
Users of footpath MELW2 looking north	2A and 2B	Medium	Medium	Medium	This view is experienced by footpath users where this route runs through the site. Due to the alignment of this path, it offers views across the site extending to Berryfield Lane to the west and to the vegetation associated with the northern boundary. Existing farm buildings on the site are visible together with the residential development immediately to north. Distant views are limited due to the relatively flat topography, and overhead cables detract from the scenic quality of the view.
View from within the site looking west	3	Medium	Medium	Medium	This view is taken from within the site to show the context of the footpath network in relation to the existing site features. Existing vegetation associated with Berryfield Lane limits views to the west with overhead cables and pylons visible beyond.
Users of Semington	15	Low	Low	Low	Drivers travelling towards Melksham would primarily experience this view together with pedestrians using the adjacent footway. Views to the site are

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref	Value of View (Table F)	Susceptibility to change (Table G)	Overall Sensitivity (Table H)	Nature of Views
Road looking west					limited through a combination of existing vegetation and dwellings which front onto Semington Road.
Users of Berryfield Lane looking north	16	Medium	Medium	Medium	This view is experienced by drivers and users of the adjacent footpath. Existing vegetation restricts views to the site and the proposal for new housing to the south, if implemented, would further limit views. Due to a lack of visibility this viewpoint has been scoped out of the assessment.
Users of St George's Road looking north	17	Medium	Medium	Medium	This view is taken from the junction of St George's Road and the access road leading to the BOAT. Existing vegetation effectively screens any views to the site and as a result it has been scoped out of the assessment.
Users of BOAT HILP21, HILP22, SEM19A	18 and 19	Medium	High	Medium-high	Views along this route are restricted by existing vegetation hedgerows and trees. More distant views are available where breaks in the planting occur although vegetation in the wider landscape limits the extent of these. Overhead power lines and pylons are a detracting feature, together with the large sheds associated with the Bowerhill Industrial Estate. Due to the lack of available view to the site this viewpoint has been scoped out of the assessment.
Users of footpath HILP23	20	Medium	High	Medium-high	This represents a distant viewpoint where existing vegetation in the wider landscape limits views to the site. Overhead power lines and pylons are a detracting feature. Due to the limited visibility of the site this viewpoint has been scoped out of the assessment.
Views from the west					

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref	Value of View (Table F)	Susceptibility to change (Table G)	Overall Sensitivity (Table H)	Nature of Views
Users of footpath MELW2	4A and 4B	Medium	Medium	Medium	This panoramic viewpoint is taken from where the footpath meets Berryfield Lane, offering a view across the site. The housing development to the north of the site, currently under construction, is visible together with the agricultural buildings, including several large barns, located on the site. Existing vegetation limits the extent of the view further to the east and frames housing on Semington Road.
Users of footpath MELW6	5	Medium	Medium	Medium	Existing buildings on the site and the housing development to the north of the site, currently under construction, are visible from this viewpoint, although vegetation associated with Berryfield Lane and the site boundary provide some screening. Agricultural sheds feature in the view together with the overhead lines which follow Berryfield Lane.
Users of footpath MELW117	6	Medium	Medium	Medium	This view occurs along the footpath which runs through farmland immediately to the west of Berryfield Lane. Existing vegetation associated with this route provides some screening although the farm buildings on the site and the adjacent housing under construction can be seen. Existing agricultural sheds are visible in the foreground together with overhead lines.
Users of footpath GGIF38	8	Medium	High	Medium-high	This represents a more distant viewpoint with views to the site limited by existing vegetation in the wider landscape. The ridgeline of the housing current under construction to the north of the site is just visible. There are several detracting features in the form of multiple overhead power lines and associated pylons together with large scale industrial units which are visible to the right of the image.
Users of footpath BGIF22	9	Medium	High	Medium-high	Views to the site are limited from this more distant location with existing vegetation effectively screening the site. Several overhead power lines and associated pylons detract from the quality of view.

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref	Value of View (Table F)	Susceptibility to change (Table G)	Overall Sensitivity (Table H)	Nature of Views
					Due to the lack of an available view this viewpoint has been scoped out of the assessment.
Views form the north					
Users of Berryfield Lane	7	Medium	Medium	Medium	View from Berryfield Lane where this runs along the western edge of the site. Despite the relatively close proximity to the site views are restricted due to existing vegetation. As a result, this view has been scoped out of the assessment.
Users of footpath MELW105	10	Medium	High	Medium-high	Views to the site are restricted by a combination of existing vegetation and buildings, including several large agricultural units. Overhead power lines and pylons detract from the quality of the view. Due to the lack of an available view this viewpoint has been scoped out of the assessment.
Users of Semington Road close to the Semington Road roundabout	11	Low	Low	Low	Road users travelling along this route have restricted views of the site due to existing vegetation associated with the site boundary. The new housing currently under construction features in the view, together with existing housing fronting onto Semington Road.
Views from the east					
Users of footpath MELW1	12	Medium	Medium	Medium	Users of footpath MELW1 close to where the PRoW joins Semington Road. Traffic influences the experience when walking along this route and existing housing which backs onto the site a feature of the view together with the farm buildings on the site. The extent of the view is limited by existing vegetation.

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref	Value of View (Table F)	Susceptibility to change (Table G)	Overall Sensitivity (Table H)	Nature of Views
Users of footpath MELW1	13A and 13B	Medium	Medium	Medium	Users of footpath MELW1 where this runs through the northern part of the site. This is shown as a panoramic view to demonstrate the different elements that occur along this route. This includes Semington Road where boundary vegetation is more sparse and the road can be seen beyond, together with the adjacent residential development currently under construction to the north. This path also offers a view across the site where the existing farm buildings are a feature and views extend to Berryfield Lane to the west. Trees and vegetation in the wider landscape beyond the site can be seen along with overhead lines and pylons which are a detracting feature.
Users of footpath located off Telford Drive looking west	14	Medium	Low	Medium-low	Users of the footpath network associated with Telford Drive. Views to the site are limited due to existing dwellings associated with Telford Drive and boundary vegetation running along Semington Road which forms the extent of the view.

5.3 Visual Appraisal

- 5.3.1 This section of the report considers the potential impacts on the visual amenity of the study area anticipated to result from the proposed development. It describes and evaluates the potential change in existing views and the extent to which these affect residents and users of the surrounding area. Photographs of key views are included in Appendix B and descriptions of the effects on key visual receptors and the rationale behind these judgements is provided in Table 5.2 below.

Views from within the site

- 5.3.2 Footpaths MELW 1 and MELW2 run through the northern part of the site, providing a connection to Semington Road to the east and Berryfield Lane to the west (see Views 2A, 2B, 4A and 4B, 12 and 13A and 13B). Footpath MELW1 extends to the south providing a link to Berryfield, with the route running along part of the eastern edge of the site (see View 1).
- 5.3.3 Footpaths MELW1 and MELW2 offer views across the site extending to Berryfield Lane, which defines the western edge of the site, and to Semington Road to the east. Boundary vegetation associated with the northern edge of the site is also visible together with the adjacent housing development, under construction at the time of the site visit. The existing farm buildings and structures on the site feature in views with these forming detracting elements being of a large scale with a utilitarian appearance and in a varied, often poor, condition.
- 5.3.4 Close to Semington Road the existing dwellings which front onto the road are visible together with the associated boundary treatments to the properties, comprising a close board timber fence.
- 5.3.5 The development will result in a clear change in the view experienced from these footpaths with a change from land used for grazing to new homes and associated infrastructure. The inclusion of a generous new 'park' and various other elements of green space will mean that footpaths are in landscape areas. These will include retained vegetation and new planting in the form of trees, scrub and understorey planting, with areas of species rich grass and meadow.
- 5.3.6 As a result, changes to views from footpaths running through the site will be '**high/moderate adverse**'. While the proposals will maintain a landscape setting to the footpaths and offer the potential to improve the character of these, particularly adjacent to Semington Road there will be a distinct change in the character of the view from farmland to new housing.

Views from the south

- 5.3.7 To the south views occur from Semington Road (View 15) close to the New Inn Public House. These are limited due to existing vegetation which helps screen the site with views mainly experienced by drivers travelling along this route towards Melksham. Changes to views near the site will be '**minor adverse**'. Only the upper elements of new development are anticipated to be visible, and this will be softened through new planting and a landscape buffer to be created around the site extents.
- 5.3.8 This route also forms part of the NCN so would be experienced by cyclists, although the on-road nature of this means that users would be focussed on the road, compared to an off-road or more scenic section of the route. As above changes in views are considered to be '**minor adverse**'.

Views from the west

- 5.3.9 Views in proximity to the site occur from where footpaths MELW3 and MELW 6 meet (View 5) and from footpath MELW 117 (View 6) with these routes running through agricultural land immediately to the west of Berryfield Lane. Existing vegetation associated with Berryfield Lane helps limit views into the site although the upper elements of the existing buildings on the site are visible together with the development to the north. It is anticipated that the upper elements of the proposed

development will be visible although the central green space will help maintain an open area of landscape in the view. New planting to strengthen the existing vegetation associated with Berryfield Lane will help filter views once established with the change to both these views considered to be **'moderate adverse'**.

- 5.3.10 Further to the west a view is available from footpath BGIF38 (View 8) although this is restricted by existing vegetation in the wider landscape. The ridge line of the houses currently under construction are visible, although more prominent due to the exposed roof timbers. Buildings associated with the Bowerhill Industrial are also visible to the right of the view along with numerous overhead lines and associated poles and pylons. The change to this view will be **'minor adverse'** as it is anticipated that the ridge line of the proposed housing will be visible although new planting and landscape associated with the proposals will help soften this and provide screening once established.

Views from the north

- 5.3.11 Views to the north are limited and occur in close proximity to the site from Semington Road (View 11), this is primarily experienced by drivers and those travelling south away from Melksham. Existing boundary vegetation adjacent to Semington Road provides some screening and existing houses along Semington Road feature in the view, together with the new residential development currently under construction. The proposed site access will be visible from this location and will result in some vegetation clearance although the proposals include a landscape gateway area which will help compensate for any losses. The change to the view will be **'minor adverse'** while it is anticipated that the upper elements of the proposed housing will be seen proposed planting will help soften this and provide partial screening over time. The view is relatively short lived and existing housing is already a feature.

Views from the east

- 5.3.12 From the east there are limited views and these occur mainly from the Bowood development accessed via Telford Drive which joins Semington Road opposite the site. The road and footpath network associated with this relatively recent residential development offer limited views to the site and these occur when approaching Semington Lane (View 14). Existing boundary vegetation adjacent to Semington Road helps screen views into the site and it is anticipated that the change to this view would be **'minor adverse'** with glimpsed views of the upper elements of the proposed housing likely to be visible. Proposed trees and planting would provide screening over time, and the extent of the view is limited.

Table 5.2: Visual Appraisal

See Appendix 1 for definitions

Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref.	Overall Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Significance of Effect (Winter, Year 15)	Change to Views
Views from the site					
Users of footpath MELW1	1	Medium	High	Major/moderate adverse	The overall character of the view would change as a result of the proposed development with the current grazing pasture replaced by new housing and associated infrastructure. The footpath would be maintained on its current alignment and would run through the proposed central open space (Townsend Park) to be created as part of the proposals. The landscape treatment is to include trees, scrub and species rich grassland and meadow adding interest and variety. Existing farm buildings and agricultural sheds, some of which are in a poor state of repair and detract from the view, will be removed. At this point the proposed landscape will have had time to establish and provide a setting to the new homes.
Users of footpath MELW2	2	Medium	High	Major/moderate adverse	As with users of footpath MELW1 users of this route will experience a similar level of change as set out above with new housing replacing the current agricultural use. The proposals mean that this route will continue to be set within an area of landscape with new planting supplementing the existing, retained vegetation. The existing agricultural buildings are a dominant feature of the view and detract from the quality of this. Although new development would be a feature this would be high quality new homes overlooking an attractive green space.

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref.	Overall Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Significance of Effect (Winter, Year 15)	Change to Views
Views from the south					
Users of Semington Road	15	Low	Low	Minor adverse	Road users with low susceptibility to change passing by the southern edge of the site. The existing boundary vegetation associated with the site will continue to provide screening and will be strengthened through new landscape associated with the proposed development. Upper elements of some new houses are anticipated to be visible, although softened by the new landscape and would be seen in the context of existing dwellings which front onto Semington Road.
Views from the west of the Site					
Users of footpath MELW2	4	Medium	High	Major/moderate adverse	Footpath users with high susceptibility to change. This viewpoint offers views across the site from where the footpath meets Berryfield Lane. Views extend to Semington Road to the east where existing housing can be seen. To the north the adjacent development under construction is visible although the view is filtered by existing trees and vegetation associated with this boundary. The existing agricultural buildings on the site are a prominent feature in the view. The view would change as a result of the proposed development with new housing a feature, although the immediate outlook would be across the central green space to be created. By this point the vegetation would be established and the landscape area would provide an attractive outlook albeit framed by new development.
Users of footpath MELW3	5	Medium	Low	Minor adverse	This view is experienced from beyond Berryfield Lane where the footpath crosses a series of agricultural fields. The existing barns and agricultural buildings would no longer feature in the view, and new development would be visible, particularly to the left of the view; although views already existing to the new development to the north of the site. The landscape associated with the western boundary of the site and the proposed central green space would be visible and by this point vegetation would have established and start to soften views of the new development.

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Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref.	Overall Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Significance of Effect (Winter, Year 15)	Change to Views
Users of footpath MELW117	6	Medium	Low	Minor adverse	This viewpoint is located beyond Berryfield Lane where the footpath runs through the agricultural land beyond the site. Existing housing along Semington Road can be seen along with the new development beyond the northern site boundary. Existing agricultural buildings which feature in the view would no longer be present although new housing would be visible. The new landscape, particularly planting to the western boundary would help soften and filter views to the development with planting to the central green space also being a feature of the view
Users of footpath BGIF38	8	Medium-high	Negligible	Minor adverse	This more distant viewpoint offers limited views of the site with the ridge line of houses on the adjacent development, to the north of the site just visible along with other more distant buildings. The ridge line of houses associated with the proposed development are anticipated to be visible although the proposed landscape including planting to the western boundary would soften and help filter views of the new housing.
Views from north					
Users of Semington Road travelling south	11	Low	High	Minor adverse	Road users with low susceptibility to change. Boundary vegetation adjacent to the highway helps screen the site although it is anticipated that the upper elements of the proposed development close to the road would be visible. This would be partially screened by proposed planting and would be seen in the context of existing houses along Semington Road. The new site entrance would be visible from this approach although a proposed gateway landscape space will help maintain a green edge adjacent to this route.
Views from east					
Users of footpath MELW1	12	Medium	High	Major/moderate adverse	Footpath users would experience a change in view as a result of the proposals although the footpath is to be set within an area of open space with tree and scrub planting. This will help soften views to the proposed development and of the existing boundary fence associated with houses fronting onto Semington Road.

Land at Townsend Farm, Melksham

Potential Visual Receptor Group	Photo Ref.	Overall Sensitivity	Magnitude of change	Significance of Effect (Winter, Year 15)	Change to Views
Users of footpath MELW1	13	Medium	High	Major/moderate adverse	This view is experienced where the footpath joins Semington Road with the existing agricultural buildings visible along with the new development immediately beyond the northern site boundary. Users of the footpath will experience a change in view from the current grazing pasture to new housing and associated infrastructure. The proposed landscape will provide a green component in the view and by this time planting will have become established. The footpath will be retained in its current alignment and set within greenspace helping to provide some separation to the adjacent housing.
Users of POS associated with Telford Drive	14	Medium	Low	Minor adverse	This view occurs when travelling towards Semington Road along Telford Drive and associated POS on the Bowood development. It is anticipated that there will be glimpsed views of new housing although seen in the context of existing and proposed trees and vegetation. New landscape elements will be established by this time and help provide screening of the development which will also be seen in the context of existing dwellings associated with Telford Drive.

6. Summary

- 6.1.1 A landscape and visual appraisal has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect to appraise the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development of 225 new homes at Townsend Farm, Melksham. The appraisal was informed by *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Appraisal 3rd edition* (GLVIA3) (Landscape institute and IEMA, 2013) and based on desk-based reviews and a site visit. The appraisal considered effects on landscape related designations, landscape features, landscape character and visual amenity.
- 6.1.2 The site is not covered by any landscape designations and currently comprises a series of agricultural fields used for grazing together with various farm buildings and structures. Boundaries are defined by vegetation with further hedgerows and hedgerow trees present on the site associated with the field boundaries. Three sections of drainage ditch run through the site and are typically associated with the field boundaries.
- 6.1.3 The proposed development would introduce new homes predominantly up to 2 storeys in height with a small central core up to 3 storeys fronting onto the proposed central green space.

Summary of Landscape Effects

- 6.1.4 While this is an outline application the proposals are anticipated to provide some enhancements associated with the removal of the existing agricultural buildings and the proposed landscape elements which will introduce new and varied planting and contribute to an increase in biodiversity on the site.
- 6.1.5 Existing public rights of way will be retained in their current alignment with a further network of accessible pedestrian routes to be created associated with the new open space and development as a whole.
- 6.1.6 There will be an inevitable change to the overall landscape character through the development of an area of pasture to a new residential neighbourhood. This will be of **'medium-adverse'** magnitude accepting the inevitable change associated with the development while acknowledging the removal of the existing agricultural buildings and the positive landscape elements associated with the development.
- 6.1.7 The site is located in the Avon Vales (117) Character Area with the landscape objectives most relevant to the site relating to hedgerows and multi-functional green spaces. In both regards the scheme accords with these aspirations through the retention of existing hedgerows and the creation of landscape corridors to these, together with proposals for a generous open space in the form of Townsend Park which will offer a range of landscape and recreational opportunities.
- 6.1.8 The proposals also include elements that respond positively to Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan in relation to Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity, Trees and Hedgerows and High Quality Design.
- 6.1.9 At a more local scale the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment and the West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment relate to the site with 12B - Avon Clay Vale and B1 - Avon Floodplain being the respective area types. The West Wiltshire District Character Assessment in particular was drafted some time ago and changes to the area around the site since this was drafted mean that several of the characteristics described are less applicable due to adjacent development.
- 6.1.10 The proposed development would not affect any areas with landscape designations due to the distance of these from the site.

- 6.1.11 The proposals would also not impact on any listed buildings, Scheduled Monuments or Conservation Areas.
- 6.1.12 While there would be the loss of some tree groups, hedgerows and a single specimen tree these are all Category C and the proposals offer the opportunity for extensive new planting to provide a greater level of tree cover, including new planting in landscape spaces.

Summary of Visual Effects

- 6.2 The main significant adverse changes to views will occur from the existing public rights of way which run through the site. The proposed development will result in obvious changes in the views from these routes, from areas of grazing land to new streets and homes, although the retention of existing trees and the majority of hedgerows together with the proposed open space will mean that these routes are set within landscaped areas. The removal of the existing agricultural buildings will also provide some enhancement as these are dominant features and due to their condition and overall appearance detract from the current view. These routes are also experienced for a relatively short duration when passing through, or in close proximity to the site.
- 6.3 The adjacent developments either proposed, or under construction will also influence the views from these routes, with new housing to the north of the site visible, together with existing housing on Semington Road to the east of the site.
- 6.4 Beyond the site the significance of the visual effects diminishes due to the presence of existing vegetation associated with the site boundaries, or due to the lack of available view or the surrounding context which includes existing residential development or highways. This applies to views from the footpath network immediately to the west of Berryfield Lane.
- 6.5 Distant views are limited and glimpsed views only occur from the footpath network to the west of the site. Existing vegetation provides some screening and only the upper most elements of the proposed development are likely to be seen with new planting anticipated to limit visibility further, once established.
- 6.6 In summary the proposals would result in changes to the landscape character of the site as would be expected from the development of farmland to a new residential development, together with changes to views experienced from within the site. The development will, however, provide opportunities for boundary planting to be strengthened, together with the provision of extensive areas of accessible open space which will offer a range of amenity and recreational benefits to new residents and the surrounding community. These align with policy objectives for the area and provide an opportunity to bring wider landscape benefits through habitat creation.

Appendix A – LVIA Appraisal Definitions

Table A: Landscape Value Criteria

Landscape Value	
High	▪ A landscape/townscape element or area of high scenic/perceptual qualities ▪ Good condition. ▪ Highly valued for its quality and/or Landscape character, and may be designated at international or national level, such as World Heritage Sites, Listed Buildings and Registered Parks and Gardens.
Medium	▪ A landscape/townscape element or area of medium scenic/ perceptual qualities ▪ At least moderate condition. ▪ Valued at a local level, for example, Areas of Great Landscape Value, Conservation Areas and Locally Listed Buildings. ▪ May also include undesignated landscapes with some of the following: ▪ High scenic quality ▪ Intact Landscape character ▪ Presence of distinctive elements/ features in the landscape ▪ Features of particular landscape or cultural heritage importance ▪ Recreation value ▪ Historical associations
Medium-Low	▪ An undesignated landscape/townscape that has some landscape features that contribute to its sense of place and are of value to the local community, but that may be in mixed condition and include some detractors that weaken its overall character and scenic quality. ▪ Common landscape type
Low	▪ Degraded landscape/townscape with small number of characteristic elements and a high number of detractors. ▪ Very common

Table B: Landscape Susceptibility to Change Criteria

Landscape Susceptibility to change	Criteria
High	An area where landscape/townscape character would be noticeably changed by the proposed scheme, either due to the loss of important landscape features, or due to the introduction of new features that are not typical of the area. The potential for intrusive development may also be due to a relatively open character with few elements that could screen the proposed development.
Medium	A landscape/townscape which is partially tolerant to change of the type proposed. This may be due to the presence of existing landscape detractors or the relative lack of a strong concentration of typical landscape characteristics. The capacity of the landscape to accept change may also be due to the presence of some elements that may screen the proposed scheme, such as vegetation, buildings or landform features.
Low	An area that is tolerant of substantial change of the type proposed. This may be due to a lack of existing distinctive landscape elements or characteristics, the presence of a number of landscape detractors, or the presence of elements that may screen the proposed scheme.

Table C: Overall Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape Susceptibility to change (from Table B)	Value (form Table A)			
	High	Medium	Medium-low	Low
High	High	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-low
Medium	Medium-High	Medium	Medium-low	Medium-low
Low	Medium	Medium-low	Low	Low

Table D: Magnitude of Landscape Effect

Landscape Scale/ Size of Change	Criteria
High adverse/ beneficial	The proposals would be at total variance (adverse) or totally accord (beneficial) with the key characteristics of the existing landscape, and/or there would be a very noticeable loss or change in landscape/townscape elements, features or characteristics. Beneficial effects would restore, recreate, or permanently benefit the condition or character of the landscape.
Medium Adverse/beneficial	The proposals would noticeably be at odds (adverse) or fit well (beneficial) with the key characteristics of the existing landscape, would noticeably improve or harm the condition or character of the landscape, and/or would result in the partial loss or alteration to one or more key landscape elements, features or characteristics
Low Adverse/beneficial	The proposals would not quite fit (adverse) or have a degree of fit (beneficial) with the key characteristics of the existing landscape, and/or there would be minor loss or alteration of landscape elements, features or characteristics. Beneficial effects would go some way towards improving the condition or character of the landscape.
Negligible Adverse/beneficial Landscape impact	The proposals would create a just discernible loss/change, or improvement to the key characteristics of the existing landscape. The proposals may not be uncharacteristic of the existing landscape.
No change	The proposals would not cause any change to the key characteristics of the existing landscape/townscape.

Table E: Overall Significance of Landscape and Visual Effects

Magnitude of Landscape/Visual Change (from Table D)

Sensitivity of Landscape/Visual Receptor (from Table C)	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major/moderate	Moderate	Minor
Medium-high	Major/moderate	Major/moderate	Moderate	Minor
Medium	Major/moderate	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
Medium-low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible
Low	Minor	Minor	Minor	Negligible

Table F: Visual Receptor – Value Criteria

Value	Criteria
High	Views with high scenic value, views to heritage assets or valued landscape features. Recognition of value shown through planning designations or in relation to heritage assets. Views may be referenced in tourist guides or maps and accompanied by facilities to facilitate their enjoyment, such as parking or interpretation boards.
Medium	Views of medium scenic value. Views not necessarily promoted widely for their value but may be appreciated by the local community as a popular place to walk/visit.
Low	Views are of low value, for example, due to landscape detractors, and may only be seen for periods of shorter duration such as visibility from roads or railways.

Table G: Visual Receptor – Susceptibility to Change Criteria

Susceptibility to Change	Criteria
High	Residents at home. People engaged in outdoor recreation whose attention is likely to be focused on the landscape and particular views. Visitors to heritage assets or other attractions where views are an important contributor to the experience. Communities where views contribute to the townscape setting enjoyed by residents.
Medium	Travellers on road, rail or other transport, where travel involves recognised scenic routes. People at their place of work where views are an important contributor to the setting and quality of working life.
Low	Vehicle users on roads used principally for passage, where the attention is not necessarily focused on the view. People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the townscape. Occupants of places of work whose attention may be focused on the work and where the setting is not important to the quality of working life.

Table H: Visual Receptor – Overall Sensitivity

Susceptibility to change (from Table G)	Value (From Table F) High	Medium	Low
High	High	Medium-high	Medium
Medium	Medium-high	Medium	Medium-low
Low	Medium	Medium-low	Low

Table I: Magnitude of Visual Change – Definitions

Size/Scale Of Effect	Criteria
High	Where the development would cause a dominant or complete change to the composition of the view, and the appreciation of landscape/townscape character, contrasting in terms of form, scale and mass, height, colour and/or texture. Views of the scheme are unlikely to be screened to any extent.
Medium	Where the development would cause a clearly noticeable change in the existing view, which would have some effects on its composition, and/or the appreciation of landscape/townscape character. It would not result in a dominant change to the view however and the overall effect is likely to be mitigated either due to distance from the viewer, complementary colours and textures, or the presence of some screening elements
Low	Where the development would cause a perceptible change in the existing view, but would not materially affect its composition, or the appreciation of landscape/townscape character, either due to its distance from the viewer, the presence of screening elements or complementary colours and textures. Views of the proposals are more likely to be glimpsed rather than full.
Negligible	Where the development would cause a barely perceptible change in the existing view, either due to the presence of screening elements or distance from the viewer. Whilst the development would be visible, it would not result in a change to the overall composition of the view or landscape character of the area.

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