



WOODHAM LANE

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AND GREEN BELT REVIEW

for

Woking Borough Council

by

Hankinson Duckett Associates

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Contents

	Page
1	Introduction 1
1.1	Background 1
2	The Local Area 1
2.1	Description of the Local Area 1
2.2	Landform and Drainage 1
2.3	Land Use and Vegetation 2
2.4	Landscape Character 3
2.5	Designations 5
3	Green Belt 6
3.1	National Green Belt Policy 6
3.2	Local Green Belt Policy 7
3.3	Green Belt Review 7
3.4	Analysis of Parcels A and B... 10
3.5	Parcel Comparison... 18
4	Conclusions..... 19

Plans:

- HDA 1:** Site Location and Designations
- HDA 2:** Topography
- HDA 3:** Land Use and Vegetation
- HDA 4:** Landscape Character
- HDA 5:** Landscape Designations
- HDA 6:** Opportunities & Constraints

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Hankinson Duckett Associates has been instructed by Woking Borough Council to provide landscape and visual advice as to whether or not the site to the north of the A245 Woodham Lane can be developed for housing without significant damage to the landscape character and setting of the area. The site will be assessed as a whole, but taking into consideration the two individual parcels, known as Parcel A to the north of the site and Parcel B to the south. Each parcel will be assessed against Woking Borough Council's need for housing and their aspirations for number of dwellings within each parcel. Parcel A would aim to comprise around 900 dwellings, and Parcel B would aim to comprise around 2,000 dwellings.

1.1.2 This report will include a landscape and visual appraisal of the site and advice on the site's assessment against Green Belt objectives.

2 THE LOCAL AREA

2.1 Description of the Local Area (*Plan HDA 1*)

2.1.1 The site is located adjacent to the northern edge of Woodham, Woking, off the A245 Woodham Lane. The site is approximately 0.9km south of the settlement of Ottershaw, 2.3km west of the M25 and 2.6km north of the centre of Woking.

2.1.2 The main roads through the local area are the A320 Guildford Road, which runs north to south, connecting the large settlements of Chertsey/Weybridge and Guildford, and the A245 Woodham Lane, which runs west to east connecting Woking and Leatherhead.

2.1.3 The M25 lies 2.3km to the east and aligns through the landscape in a north - south alignment; its heavily engineered landform of cuttings and embankments has a marked effect on the character and continuity of the landscape. The M3 lies 5.5km to the north of the site and aligns through the landscape in an east – west alignment. The A3, located 5.2km south of the site also aligns through the landscape in an east – west alignment.

2.2 Landform and Drainage (*Plan HDA 2*)

2.2.1 The landform of the area is characterised by small spurs and associated valleys with higher ground to the north and south of the site. The settlement of Woking to the south of the site is located within a valley and encroaches up the valley sides.

2.2.2 Within the valleys surrounding the site is a network of rivers and streams. These watercourses include the River Wey, located in the valley between Woking and the A3,

The Basingstoke Canal, located through the centre of Woking, and The Bourne River located in the valley just north of the site.

2.2.3 The site is located on the southern valley side that leads down to The Bourne River. A localised spur is located along Woodham Lane, along the site's southern boundary. The valley has a gentle slope down to the river, with the majority of the site being relatively flat in parts. The site reaches a high point of 36m AOD on the A245 and a low point of 20m AOD in the valley bottom (over a distance of 0.9km).

2.3 Land Use and Vegetation (Plan HDA 3)

2.3.1 The local area is predominantly agricultural land to the north of the site, leading up towards the M3 motorway. The large settlement of Weybridge is located to the east of the site, with the London conurbation beyond. The settlement of Woking is located immediately south of the site, with the larger settlement of Guildford further south. To the west of the site are the large settlements of Bracknell, Camberley and Aldershot. Small towns and sporadic development are common within the wider area and connected by a large road network, including the M25, M3 and A3.

2.3.2 Areas outside of the Green Belt are heavily urbanised. Vegetation to the east, south and west, within the Green Belt, is fragmented and sparse in places, with the majority of woodland located on settlement edges and along road networks. To the north of the site, large pockets of woodland connected by mature tree belts divide up the landscape, including areas of ancient woodland which are sporadically located through the landscape. Belts of trees and scrub are aligned along the surrounding rivers and watercourses, with rough grassland and pasture commonplace along the riverbanks.

2.3.3 The site is heavily treed with deciduous and coniferous mixed woodland. An 18-hole golf course on the southern part of the site has been carved out of the woodland, leaving large internal belts of woodland and introduced ornamental trees and shrubs reaching heights of over 16 metres. The golf course extends across Martyr's Lane to the west. There is an area of unmanaged grassland and scrub to the centre of the site, which is separate from the golf course. Woodham Court Sports Club is located within the northern area of the site. It comprises sports pitches that are no longer in regular use, and tennis courts that have fallen in disrepair. Mature tree and hedge lines reaching heights of 14-16m bound the sports club. Adjacent to the sports club, within the north-western area of the site, are tree nurseries. It appears that some are no longer in use, so there are large areas of unmanaged, densely planted trees, in unnatural rows, leading to poor specimens.

2.3.4 The site's boundaries are heavily vegetated with a mixture of dense mixed woodland, mature tree belts and hedgerows. The majority of the woodland planting within the site expands beyond the site boundaries. There is a strong structure of mature vegetation within the site, which drastically reduces intervisibility with areas outside the site. There is also little visual connection between the north and south of the site.

2.4 Landscape Character

National Scale

2.4.1 The site falls within the Thames Basin Heath (NCA 129) National Character Area (Ref 1). Relevant key characteristics of this character area are:

- Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys floored by London Clay. In the far west, Chalk forms the Hampshire Downs escarpment and the river beds of the Kennet and Pang;
- High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites;
- Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium;
- Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses;
- Prehistoric earthworks such as barrows and hill forts mark promontories on the plateaux. Archaeology is well preserved on historic heathland. Mosaics of open heathland and grassland with scrub, secondary woodland and plantation. Valley bogs, ponds and streams enhance diversity. Large, continuous mosaics are found in the east: they include Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Chobham Common National Nature Reserve (NNR);
- Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland. Ministry of Defence ownership restricts (but does not entirely prevent) public enjoyment;
- 'Churring' nightjars, dragonflies and purple heather are all readily identified with heathland. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA protects internationally important populations of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler;
- Valley floors are wet with ditches, numerous watercourses, ponds, water-filled gravel pits, reedbeds and carr. Historic features include mills, relict water meadows, and canals such as the River Wey Navigations;
- 20th-century conurbations, including Camberley, sprawl along the Blackwater Valley, with associated roads (including the M3) dissecting heathland and woodland into blocks. Elsewhere, there are winding lanes and historic dispersed villages and farmsteads of traditional, locally made brick and tile.

2.4.2 The presence of high woodland cover and coniferous plantation on heathland across the site is the most characteristic feature of the site from the Thames Basin Heath National Character Area. The heathland landscape is located within the southern section of the site and has many characteristics of the nearby Thames Basin Heath SPA. The northern

part of the site comprises medium-sized pasture fields with associated woodland; a common feature along with woodland and heathland edges as defined in the Thames Basin Heath National Character Area. The site is located on The Bourne River valley side and falls north towards the valley bottom. The northern part of the site has numerous connected ditches along the field boundaries, including small ponds south of the sports club.

County Scale (*Plan HDA 4*)

2.4.3 Surrey County Council in its Surrey Landscape Character Assessment (April 2015- Ref 2) places the site in the landscape character type 'Settled and Wooded Sandy Farmland' (SS). Relevant key characteristics for this character area are:

- Rolling landscape based on the sand solid geology formations;
- Predominately farmland, with varying degrees of settlement and woodland, with the amount of these elements, along with varying field sizes, openness and the degree of other human influences including golf courses, horse paddocks, and nurseries, broadly defining the extent of each individual character area;
- Urban influence and activity from settlement and transport, increases to the north;
- To the south, settlement becomes more scattered, with dwellings often edging commons and rural roads;
- Heavily wooded in places, with heathland commons, now largely regenerated with secondary woodland, or plantation woodland creating an enclosed landscape with glimpses to pastures, open heathland and water bodies;
- A predominately intimate landscape, with intermittent views across farmland framed by woodland;
- Varied historical sites and designed landscapes including cemeteries and memorials with important local historic, architectural, cultural or military associations.

District Scale (*Plan HDA 4*)

2.4.4 The landscape character as defined in the Woking Borough Council section of the Surrey Landscape Character Assessment (April 2015- Ref 2) for the site is 'Wentworth to Sheerwater Settled and Wooded Sandy Farmland' (SS4). Relevant key characteristics for this character area are:

- An undulating landscape, underlain by Bagshot Formation Sand solid geology, and small areas of Windlesham Formation Sand, Silt and Clay;
- Locally falls towards a number of watercourses and ponds, across the character area;
- There are watercourses and ponds throughout the character area, including The Bourne, which flows through the southern part of the character area;
- The character area consists of considerable areas of woodland, including some areas of ancient woodland. To the north of the character area is Wentworth golf course set in clearing in the woodland, and the former Ministry of Defence site at Longcross, now used for various commercial purposes, including film studios and a test track facility. Foxhills and Queenswood golf courses occupy the central part of the character area. Elsewhere, particularly to the south of Ottershaw, the

character area is more rural, with woodland interspersed with arable and pastoral fields, although uses including horse paddocks and nurseries are also present;

- Field boundaries are generally well vegetated with hedges and trees;
- Although dispersed, settlement in the form of areas of very low-density large dwellings, scattered small groups of settlement and farmsteads, is spread across the majority of the character area, mostly hidden by surrounding tree cover;
- Occasionally there are views across fields to the nearest woodland, but long distance views are restricted by tree cover in most parts of the character area;
- There is a moderate network of public rights of way, but some areas have limited public access due to land uses such as golf;
- A short length of the M3 motorway crosses the character area, screened by embankments and tree cover. A limited number of 'A' roads cross the area and connect with minor roads and tracks to provide access to dwellings;
- The Waterloo to Reading railway line also crosses the character area, with Longcross railway station located within the north-western part of the character area. However, there is limited direct public access, other than to the golf course to the north, and despite frequent passing services, few trains currently stop at Longcross during the week and none at the weekend;
- There are several bowl barrows listed as scheduled monuments near Longcross, and two listed buildings at Longcross Church.
- There are a number of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, including woodland within the golf courses. The character area abuts the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area to the west;
- Human influence, including settlement is obvious in places, and tempers the sense of remoteness. This is however, generally a secluded landscape, with woodland providing tranquility.

2.4.5 The site's characteristics are similar to those described above in the county and district wide character assessment. A well-secluded landscape that is heavily wooded and falls towards the surrounding watercourses. There is a large degree of human influence across the site; in the form of a golf course, sports pitch and nurseries that degrade the rural sense of remoteness described in the district character assessment. The assessment highlights that land uses, such as golf courses, limit public access across areas of the landscape, which is the case for this site. The mature vegetation along the site's boundaries blocks views and prevents interaction with the site, so from the outside, the site looks very characteristic of the wider area.

2.5 Designations (*Plan HDA 1 & HDA 5*)

2.5.1 The whole site is designated as Green Belt and the Green Belt Boundary runs along the site's southern boundary. The impacts and significance of this designation are discussed later in this report.

2.5.2 A large area of Horsell Common, to the west of the site, is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), conserved for its wild birds. There is a 400m 'no development' buffer surrounding the SPA that runs along majority of the site's western boundary. The

same area is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), conserved for its wildlife and habitats. Horsell Common is designated common land and extends east beyond Chertsey Road adjacent to a section of the site's western boundary.

2.5.3 Areas within Horsell Common surrounding the designated SPA have been allocated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), including a small section in the south-western corner of the site. Another SNCI exists adjacent to the site's north-eastern boundary. Although SNCI's do not carry statutory protection, they are local designations for their wildlife importance and provide additional support to the protection of adjacent statutory protected areas.

2.5.4 There are a number of listed buildings within the local area, the closest being a Grade II listed house (Woodhambury & Woodbrow), located adjacent to the site's southern boundary along Woodham Lane. At the western end of Woodham Lane is the Woking War Memorial and Church Of All Saints, Grade II listed buildings, 0.4km west of the site. To the north of the site along Guildford Road is the Grade II listed Old Farmhouse, 0.3km from the site.

2.5.5 The local area has limited numbers of Public Rights Of Way (PROW) through the landscape, with areas to the north of the site having a concentration of PROW around the settlement edge of Ottershaw and the area of Stanners Hill. There are minimal PROW surrounding the immediate site and very few PROW's within the settlement of Woking to the south; though the network of streets allows ease of movement through the landscape. There are no PROW's through the site. Horsell Common immediately to the west of the site is an area of common land with numerous footpaths running through the woodland. These footpaths are generally located to the west of Chertsey Road with very few that cross the area of common land adjacent to the site.

2.5.6 The Environment Agency Flood Zones 2 and 3 have been marked on Plan HDA 5, which highlight areas of flood risk. The main areas of flood risk follow the local watercourses, namely The Bourne River. A small section of the site along the northern boundary encroaches into the flood zone.

3 GREEN BELT (Plan HDA 1 & HDA 5)

3.1 National Green Belt Policy

3.1.1 The whole site is within Green Belt, with the Green Belt boundary aligning along the site's southern boundary to the north of the excluded settlement of Woodham. *'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.'* (Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework – Ref 3)

- 3.1.2 Paragraph 80 of the NPPF lists the five purposes of the Green Belt. These are:
1. 'To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas';
 2. To prevent the coalescence of settlements;
 3. To help safeguard the countryside from encroachment;
 4. To 'preserve the setting and special character of historic towns'; and
 5. To encourage the recycling of derelict or other urban land, to assist in urban regeneration.

3.2 Local Green Belt Policy

- 3.2.1 Local Green Belt policy is set out within the Woking Core Strategy – adopted October 2012 (Ref 4). Within the Core Strategy, Policy CS6 addresses the Green Belt and the key relevant points are summarised below:

'To ensure the Green Belt continues to serve its fundamental aim and purpose, and maintains its essential characteristics, it will be protected from harmful development. Within its boundaries strict control will continue to apply over inappropriate development, as defined by Government policy currently outlined in the NPPF';

'Broadoaks, Parvis Road, West Byfleet and the Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works, Carters Lane, Old Woking are designated as Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt. This designation will allow limited infilling and redevelopment of the sites, without compromising the integrity of the Green Belt. The suitability of any scheme will be measured against the requirements of the NPPF and other Core Strategy policies. The policy is not intended to change the existing use of the sites';

'The Green Belt has been identified as a potential future direction of growth to meet housing need, in particular, the need for family homes between 2022 and 2027. A Green Belt boundary review will be carried out with the specific objective to identify land to meet the development requirements of the Core Strategy. The Council will ensure that any release of Green Belt land for development will not undermine its overall purpose and integrity. It will also ensure that it will not have any significant adverse effects on the SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites. A Habitats Regulations Assessment will be carried out as part of the review to determine whether there is a need for an Appropriate Assessment'.

3.3 Green Belt Review

- 3.3.1 In January 2014, Peter Brett Associates produced an independent Green Belt Review (Ref 5) on behalf of Woking Borough Council. The purpose of the study was to inform local policy within the borough of Woking, particularly with regard to the future Green Belt Boundary. The review included Parcel 2, the subject site of this assessment, as potential land for removal from the Green Belt.

- 3.3.2 The review was carried out in five stages, which are listed below:

1. **Sieve Mapping** – This stage identified the major environmental constraints such as the Thames Basin Heath SPA and flood zone areas. Land affected by these constraints were excluded from further consideration;
2. **Strategic Review of Land Parcels** – At this stage, a Green Belt assessment and a Sustainability assessment was carried out for each parcel. The Green Belt assessment considered the contribution (assessed as degrees of importance as

listed in paragraph 3.3.3) of a parcel against the five purposes of the Green Belt in the NPPF (paragraph 3.1.2), while the Sustainability assessment considered three key issues: strategic accessibility, environmental constraints and potential for integration with existing local communities. Following on from these assessments, the practical implications of development were explored including existing land uses and landscape capacity for change. At this stage only three parcels remained;

3. **Identifying Sites and Overall Potential** – This stage focused on the potential of specific sites to deliver the required level of housing;
4. **Gypsy and Traveller sites** – This stage sought to identify potential suitable sites for Gypsies and Travellers;
5. **Options for Development** – This stage explored different options on the remaining parcels to deliver the desired numbers of potential dwellings.

3.3.3 The methodology used in stage 2 to assess a parcel against the five purposes of the Green Belt used a scale of importance as listed below:

- *“Critical importance’ to Green Belt Purpose – where land is ‘Fundamental’ to the purpose, justifying its continued retention and protection within Green Belt.*
- *‘Major importance’ to Green Belt Purpose – where land is of ‘Major’ importance to the Green Belt purpose, and where development would conflict substantially with it.*
- *‘Moderate importance’ to Green Belt Purpose – where land is of ‘Moderate’ importance to the Green Belt purpose, and where development would conflict significantly with it.*
- *‘Slight/Negligible’ importance to Green Belt Purpose – where land is of ‘Minor/Negligible’ importance to the Green Belt purpose, and where development would have limited/negligible conflict with it.’*

3.3.4 This methodology of assessment for Green Belt parcels shall be used for assessment of Parcel A and Parcel B to show consistency with the 2014 Green Belt Review report.

3.3.5 Parcel 2, the subject site of this assessment, progressed through stage 1 as no major environmental constraints coincide with the site. At stage 2, the parcel was assessed against the first three purposes of Green Belt; it was labelled as having major importance to all purposes, giving the parcel a low overall suitability for development. The parcel was then evaluated against the sustainability assessment and was the second best on overall sustainability.

3.3.6 At the final section of stage 2, the parcel’s ‘character and sensitivity to change’ was assessed. It was deemed to have a low capacity for change and removed from the review at this stage. The description of low capacity in the review is:

*‘Land has **predominantly intact rural character** and is sensitive to change.*

- *Strategic level of development likely to have significant adverse impacts on landscape character and/or significant adverse impacts on landscape features that are considered to be important and may contribute to the setting of the town.*

- *Land may be poorly contained area (such as elevated open land) where changes could extend over a wide area and there may be limited potential to mitigate the adverse impacts of the changes.'*

3.3.7 The assessment of Parcel 2 in the Green Belt review (Table 3.12) with regard to its landscape capacity is:

'Golf course landscape with fairways divided by mature tree belts in southern part, all contained by extensive mature woodland. Finer grained landscape to north containing mature woodlands, nurseries (including tree nursery), and small pockets of pasture within strong landscape framework – much of this area subject to recently approved extension to McLaren campus (to remain in Green Belt). Former waste site, contained within woodland, allocated for waste-related development. Very little settlement. Overall, parcel has strong character with extensive woodland, which contributes to enclosure and defines northern setting of Woking. Limited capacity to accommodate further significant development without significant adverse effects on important landscape features and prevailing strong character.'

3.3.8 The Green Belt Review's description of Parcel 2 regarding its landscape capacity is a very accurate assessment of the site. Due to the established nature of the existing golf course, adverse changes to the landscape and its inherent character would need to occur to accommodate potential development. The site's existing character is strong with extensive woodland and heathland that has many similarities to the habitats within the Thames Heath Basin SPA.

3.3.9 The Green Belt Review in its summary of its assessment of stage 2 (paragraph 3.5.11 of Ref 5) and the parcels that were removed, refers to Parcel 2 as follows:

*'In terms of landscape sensitivity, **parcel 2** is considered to have a low capacity for change. The southern part of the parcel, adjacent to the urban area, is dominated by woodland and includes a golf course. This is considered to have a low capacity for change.'*

3.3.10 As stated above in paragraph 3.3.8, it is considered that the southern area of the site has low capacity for change due to its strong wooded character and the need for adverse change to accommodate potential development. The Green Belt Review goes on to state:

'The area to the north is a fine-grained landscape where it will be difficult to accommodate significant change without significant adverse effects on the landscape pattern and features; removal of any of this land would also leave an area of development unconnected to the urban area.'

3.3.11 The area to the north has a higher capacity to change compared to the southern area, with the potential for development to be located on the former sports pitches and tree nurseries. The area of recreation does not possess many of the features that are characteristic of the landscape area, so its loss to development would have no adverse

effects on the wider landscape. The tree nurseries are unmanaged and unnatural, forming landscape features that are not characteristic of the wider area. Removal of these plantations would change the character of the area, but would not have adverse effects on the wider landscape. It is agreed that development in this section of the site alone would leave an area of development unconnected to the urban area. The Green Belt Review goes on to state:

'The presence of the McLaren campus (both existing and proposed) to the north would mean that both parcels 1 and 2 would logically need to be removed from the Green Belt together, realigning the Green Belt boundary a significant distance from the edge of Woking urban area.'

3.3.12 Parcel 1 is the area of land of the existing McLaren site to the west of Parcel 2. Parcel 1, despite being developed has been left in the Green Belt thus, it seems logical to leave the proposed McLaren site also in the Green Belt, as together both sites with their parkland type landscape treatment, would act as a strong durable boundary for any potential development in Parcel 2. This is contrary to the Green Belt Review, which states:

'There are no clear well-defined features that may be used to secure an enduring alternative boundary.'

3.3.13 In addition, The Bourne River and its associated flood zone north of the site would also act as strong durable boundaries. Chertsey Road and Martyr's Lane and their associated woodland belts would act as durable boundaries to the west. The east side of the site would unfortunately not have a clear durable boundary. The Green Belt Review's conclusions on Parcel 2 state:

'Furthermore, this would make a significant incursion into the Green Belt, with only very limited impact on the Council's ability to deliver new housing. Parcel 2 is therefore not recommended for removal from the Green Belt.'

3.3.14 It is agreed that the site would make a significant incursion into the Green Belt, but it could potentially have an impact on the Council's ability to deliver new housing, if this could be accommodated without significant effect on valued landscape features.

3.3.15 The Green Belt Review did not recommend the site for removal from the Green Belt due to its low capacity for change and the potential incursion that development would make into the Green Belt. It is agreed that the site has low capacity for change, but that there is some potential for change using the existing features on the perimeter of the site to screen proposed development in the centres of Parcel A and B (*Plan HDA 6*).

3.4 Analysis of Parcels A and B

3.4.1 The site has been split into two parcels for potential development within the Green Belt, with the potential for either parcel to be developed separately or together. The northern

Parcel A extends to 25ha (with potential to accommodate 900 dwellings) and the southern Parcel B extends to 80ha (with potential to accommodate 2000 dwellings).

3.4.2 A outline planning permission submitted by McLaren on part of Parcel A has now been revoked (reference 2011/0823). This proposal was for a large extension of McLaren's operations on the fields of pasture and tree nurseries forming part of Parcel A. The revoked development included areas of landscaping and bunding towards the entrance of the site to screen the potential development from Chertsey Road. However, following revocation of this outline permission, McLaren's operations are now restricted to land west of the A320 Chertsey Road. Part of the agreement for the permission to extend on the western side of the A320 was that the outline permission within Parcel A would no longer be implemented.

3.4.3 With the removal of this outline permission, the whole of Parcel A could be considered for other potential future uses, but within the constraints of Green Belt designation. As a precedent for development in Parcel A has been set (albeit under exceptional circumstances), it may be possible that this parcel's capacity for future development would be restricted to the development footprint previously approved.

3.4.4 Parcel B contains an area of allocated land for a waste site (*Plan HDA 5*), as set out in the Woking Waste Plan 2008 (Ref 6). It incorporates the area of rough grassland, which was an area of old landfill. The assessment will take into consideration the effects that these proposed uses have on the potential for housing development in both parcels.

3.4.5 The site has been assessed regarding the contribution that each individual parcel makes to the purposes of the Green Belt. Each parcel has been examined using the methodology from the Peter Brett Associates Green Belt Review (Ref 5), and using the five purposes set out in the NPPF, which can be found at paragraph 3.1.2. The aim of examining the parcels against these criteria is to ascertain the importance and input each parcel has towards the purposes of the Green Belt, and whether the potential removal of these parcels from the Green Belt would be appropriate.

Parcel A

3.4.6 This parcel largely comprises tree nurseries, sports pitches, grassland and private gardens. The primary vegetation type in the parcel is deciduous and coniferous mixed woodland and mature tree and hedgerow belts. There is a large area of mature tree nursery planting in the eastern area of the parcel, which includes closely spaced and unnatural rows of a mix of deciduous and coniferous tree planting.

3.4.7 Access was gained to Woodham Sports Club, which comprises sports pitches no longer in regular use and derelict tennis courts. The sports pitches remain open in character as would be expected, and are heavily screened by the surrounding vegetation, which includes dense woodland and overgrown conifer hedgelines. The tree nurseries within the parcel were not accessed, but assessed from the adjacent Woodham Sports Club and aerial images. It appears that certain areas are no longer in production, allowing densely planted vegetation to over mature in unnatural forms. The agricultural land to the north-west of the parcel was not accessed, but assessed from Chertsey Road and aerial images. At the time of the survey, the land appeared to be made up of rough grassland in relatively good condition. The private gardens to the south west of the parcel were assessed from Woodham Sports Club. The land is a mixture of mown amenity grass and long grassland.

3.4.8 The vegetation throughout the parcel is mature and encloses the parcel physically and visually, limiting views to the immediate parcel boundaries. Any views of the site from the wider area are of the mature vegetation within the wider setting. Vegetation within the site also reduces intervisibility between areas of the parcel. There are no views of the tree nurseries or grassland from the sports pitches.

3.4.9 **1. Contribution towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

Criteria

- The degree to which the land prevents the irregular spread of the built-up area;
- The strength of the existing boundary and that which could be achieved should the boundary be amended.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a very strong contribution to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area;
- Although isolated from the built-up area of Woodham, the parcel does contribute to the separation of the built-up area of Woodham and developed areas to the north including the excluded settlements (from the Green Belt) of Ottershaw and Row Town. Development would act to reduce the separation, increasing the impression of sprawl;
- The whole parcel is detached and poorly related to any built-up development in the area, with the exception of the McLaren employment site that lies to the west of the parcel, which introduces an urbanising element to Martyr's Lane. Woodland on the perimeter of the parcel provides a strong sense of visual containment from the surrounding roads;
- The parcel forms a poorly related, distinct protrusion into the countryside;
- The parcel does display a strong connection to the wider countryside and Green Belt due to the large pockets of woodland and tree belts throughout. However, human influences in the landscape through the presence of sports pitches and tree nurseries does weaken its ruralness. The parcel is not highly visible from beyond the site (despite its undulating topography);

- The parcel is bound by a mix of features some of which provide durability, including Chertsey Road and Martyr's Lane to the west of the parcel, and The Bourne River to the north.

3.4.10 Parcel A has an important role in checking the sprawl of Woodham and the villages to the north of Woking. Potential development would be very isolated from any built-up area. The parcel is of **Critical importance** to this purpose.

3.4.11 **2. Contribution towards preventing neighbouring towns from merging**

Criteria

- The degree to which land prevents the coalescence of settlements, including consideration of ribbon development and existing sporadic development.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a moderate contribution to preventing settlements from merging;
- The parcel forms part of a separation between the excluded settlement of Woodham and excluded settlement of Ottershaw, which includes woodland, The Bourne River and sporadic developments along the A320 Guildford Road. The overall existing separation is approximately 1.9km, and if proposed development occurred in this parcel, the separation would reduce to 0.9km. The parcel itself includes sporadic development of Durnford Farm along Martyr's Lane;
- The site itself is highly enclosed in character (by vegetation as opposed to built form). Only perimeter woodland is highly visible from outside the site;
- Proposed development within this parcel would significantly reduce the actual distance between (or separation of) settlements, but would not significantly reduce the perceived distance between (or separation of) settlements.

3.4.12 Parcel A makes a moderate contribution to the separation of Woodham and Ottershaw. The depth of the Green Belt between these settlements is currently 1.9km. When driving between Woodham and Ottershaw along the A320 Guildford Road, the separation between these settlements is marginally eroded by sporadic development, however the degree of vegetation between the two settlements ensures they are read in the landscape as distinctly separate entities. Potential housing development in Parcel A would encroach into this 1.9km depth of Green Belt, reducing the separation between potential development and Ottershaw to 0.9km. However, this reduced width of separation should be seen in the context of the current depth of Green Belt between Woodham and Row Town (along Woodham Park Road) which is 0.7km (*Plan HDA 1*). The parcel is of **Moderate importance** to this purpose.

3.4.13 **3. Contribution towards assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

Criteria

- The strength of the existing countryside character, including consideration of sporadic development and other urbanising influences;

- The strength of the existing boundary and that which can be achieved should the boundary be amended.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a very strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- The parcel displays a moderate rural character comprising tree nurseries and a recreation ground. Whilst not in a countryside use, such facilities could be expected in a countryside setting, but have elements more akin with an urban fringe setting. A small number of residential properties are located within the parcel. They are large detached properties with large private gardens, which are not unexpected in the local setting;
- The parcel is not highly visible from beyond the parcel's perimeters, but due to its isolated rural location within the wider countryside, the parcel does provide a strong connection to the wider countryside and Green Belt.

3.4.14 Parcel A makes a very strong contribution to the rural character of the wider countryside. The human influences do somewhat temper the sense of remoteness, but all the facilities within the parcel are associated with a rural setting. Even though the actual parcel contains no long distance views in or out of the parcel, the vegetation throughout contributes largely to the wider setting. The parcel is of **Critical importance** to this purpose.

3.4.15 **4. Contribution toward preserving the setting and special qualities of historic towns**

Criteria

- The degree to which land contributes to the setting of a historic place.

Assessment

- The parcel does not contribute to preserving the setting or special qualities of a historic place;
- The parcel does not adjoin or provide direct views of an identified historic settlement. Whilst the landscape retains some characteristics of the nearby Horsell Common Common Land, for example, mature trees, the degree of contribution are on balance, not considered relevant to the assessment of the Green Belt purpose.

3.4.16 Parcel A does not contribute to any historic setting, physically or visually, with the exception to the woodland setting of Horsell Common. The parcel is of **Slight/Negligible importance** to this purpose.

3.4.17 **5. Contribution towards assisting in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**

Criteria

- Proximity to regeneration initiative supported in the adopted development plan policies.

Assessment

- The parcel is in proximity to a regeneration project supported in existing development plan policy.

3.4.18 The parcel is of **Slight/Negligible importance** to this purpose.

Parcel B

3.4.19 The parcel largely comprises a private 18-hole golf course, with a large area of rough grassland and scrub in the northern part of the parcel.

3.4.20 Access was not possible to this parcel, so could only be assessed from Martyr's Lane, Woodham Lane and aerial images. The primary vegetation type throughout the golf course is a diverse mix of deciduous and coniferous woodland at varying degrees of maturity. This woodland forms dense, broad (up to 90m wide) belts of vegetation around the perimeter of the parcel and internally between the open, grassed fairways. The belts of dense vegetation contain the parcel physically and visually from the outside of the parcel and significantly reduces intervisibility across the parcel. The only exception is where the golf course crosses a short section of Martyr's Lane, allowing visibility into the parcel. The woodland has not been closely examined but appears to be very characteristic of the Thames Basin Heath, with margins of heathland to the fairways.

3.4.21 The area of unmanaged grassland and scrub within the northern part of the parcel was a former landfill facility (7.42ha). The area is currently allocated (in the Surrey Waste Plan 2008 (Ref 6)) as either a Civic Amenity Site (Policy WD1), (which may replace the existing facilities to the west of the allocated waste site), or as a recycling, storage, transfer, materials recovery and processing facility (excluding thermal treatment) (Policy WD2), or as a Thermal Treatment Facility (Policy WD5).

3.4.22 **1. Contribution towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

Criteria

- The degree to which the land prevents the irregular spread of the built-up area.
- The strength of the existing boundary and that which could be achieved should the boundary be amended.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a very strong contribution to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area;
- The parcel contributes to the separation of the built-up area of Woodham and developed areas to the north including the excluded settlements of Ottershaw and Row Town. Proposed development of housing would create incursions onto this parcel, increasing the impression of sprawl;
- The site is contiguous along the whole of its southern boundary with the built-up area of Woodham, and though physically well related to the built up area along this edge, the site is visually detached from Woodham by a wide belt of trees. The

built-up area does not enclose the site, being contiguous along one side of the parcel only. In addition to its connectivity with Woodham to the south, the McLaren employment site lies to the west of the site introducing urbanising elements to Martyr's Lane. Woodland on the perimeter of the site provides a sense of visual containment from the surrounding roads;

- The parcel forms a poorly related, distinct protrusion into the countryside;
- The parcel does display a strong connection to the wider countryside and Green Belt due to the large pockets of woodland and tree belts throughout. However, urbanised management of the land through the introduction of an 18-hole golf course does weaken the connection. The parcel is not highly visible from beyond the site (despite its flat topography);
- The parcel is bound by a mix of features some of which provide durability, including Martyr's Lane to the west of the parcel, and Woodham Lane to the south of the parcel. The existing Green Belt boundary runs along the southern boundary of the parcel, which consists of the well-defined Woodham Lane. This busy road creates a visible and physical barrier between town and countryside.

3.4.23 Parcel B has an important role in checking the sprawl of Woodham and the villages to the north of Woking. The parcel is physically connected to the settlement edge of Woodham, but dense belts of vegetation makes it visually detached. The parcel is of **Critical importance** to this purpose.

3.4.24 **2. Contribution towards preventing neighbouring towns from merging**

Criteria

- The degree to which land prevents the coalescence of settlements, including consideration of ribbon development and existing sporadic development.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a very strong contribution to preventing settlements from merging;
- The parcel contributes to a separation between the excluded settlement of Woodham and excluded settlement of Ottershaw, which includes woodland, The Bourne River and sporadic developments along the A320 Guildford Road. The overall existing separation is approximately 1.9km, and if proposed development occurred in this parcel, the separation would reduce to 1.1km. The parcel itself includes sporadic development;
- The site itself is enclosed in character (by vegetation as opposed to built form). The site is not highly visible from outside the site;
- Development would significantly reduce the actual distance between (or separation of) settlements, but not significantly reduce the perceived distance between (or separation of) settlements.

3.4.25 Parcel B strongly contributes to the actual separation of Woodham and Ottershaw due to the size of the area, but the perceived separation of Woodham and Ottershaw is eroded by sporadic development along Guildford Road. Vegetation within and around the site visually contains the parcel. The depth of the Green Belt between these settlements is currently 1.9km. Potential housing development in Parcel B would reduce this separation by 0.8km to Ottershaw. However, this reduced width of separation should be

seen in the context of the current depth of Green Belt between Woodham and Row Town (along Woodham Park Road) which is 0.7km (*Plan HDA 1*). The parcel is of **Critical importance** to this purpose.

3.4.26 **3. Contribution towards assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

Criteria

- The strength of the existing countryside character, including consideration of sporadic development and other urbanising influences;
- The strength of the existing boundary and that which can be achieved should the boundary be amended.

Assessment

- The parcel makes a very strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- The parcel displays a strong rural character comprising an 18-hole golf course in a wooded setting. Whilst not in a countryside use, such facilities could be expected in a countryside setting, but have elements more akin with an urban fringe setting. The residential properties of Nos 462, 464, 490, 496, 500 Woodham Lane and High Trees and Pinewood House are located within the parcel along the northern side of Woodham Lane. They are large detached properties with large private gardens, which is expected in the local setting;
- The parcel is not highly visible from beyond its perimeters, but due to the strong vegetation belts along Woodham Lane, it does disconnect the parcel from the built-up area of Woodham, providing a stronger connection to the wider countryside and Green Belt than to the existing built-up area.

3.4.27 Parcel B makes a very strong contribution to the rural character of the wider countryside. The golf course contributes high levels of human influence, which does degrade the sense of remoteness, but vegetation along Woodham Lane disconnects the parcel from the built-up area adding to the overall sense of remoteness. Vegetation within the parcel's boundary adds to the wider countryside setting. The parcel is of **Critical importance** to this purpose.

3.4.28 **4. Contribution toward preserving the setting and special qualities of historic towns**

Criteria

- The degree to which land contributes to the setting of a historic place.

Assessment

- The parcel has a marginal contribution to preserving the setting or special qualities of a listed building along Woodham Lane, it being set amongst other dwellings;
- The parcel does not adjoin or provide direct views of an identified historic settlement. Whilst the landscape retains some characteristics of the nearby Horsell Common common land, for example, mature trees, the degree of contribution are on balance, not considered relevant to the assessment of the Green Belt purpose.

3.4.29 The boundary vegetation of Parcel B along Woodham Lane contributes to the setting of a listed building along Woodham Lane. The remainder of the site has no relation with the listed building. Parcel B is of **Slight/Negligible importance** to this purpose.

3.4.30 **5. Contribution towards assisting in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**

Criteria

- Proximity to regeneration initiative supported in the adopted development plan policies.

Assessment

- Reuse of golf course –Though not derelict it can be considered an urbanising land use that supports this purpose;
- The northern part of the parcel was a former landfill and is now allocated as a proposed waste facility. It is suggested that development proposals for this site should include plans for the restoration of the eastern end of the site, including details for the creation of a nature/conservation area, public access and long term management.

3.4.31 Parcel B is of **Slight/Negligible importance** to this purpose.

3.5 Parcel Comparison (Table 1)

3.5.1 Both parcels have a very strong contribution towards checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, whereas Parcel A has a moderate contribution to the prevention of neighbouring towns merging and Parcel B has a strong contribution towards the prevention of towns merging. This is due to the potential of development to reduce the perceived separation, though this could be strengthened using durable boundaries north of the parcels i.e. The Bourne River and its associated flood zone.

3.5.2 Both parcels have a very strong contribution towards safeguarding the countryside. Human influences are apparent across the parcels, but are seen in a rural setting. Dense vegetation across the parcels contribute strongly to the character of the parcels and to the surrounding area.

3.5.3 Neither parcel provides a significant contribution towards preserving the setting of historic towns as neither is close to a historic place and thus does not make a contribution to this purpose of the Green Belt. Parcel B contains allocated land for a waste site, but overall does not provide a significant contribution towards the purpose of urban regeneration.

Green Belt Purpose (NPPF)	Green Belt Parcel: Importance	
	A	B
1. Contribution towards checking sprawl	Critical importance	Critical importance
2. Contribution towards preventing merging	Moderate	Critical importance
3. Contribution towards safeguarding the countryside	Critical importance	Critical importance
4. Contribution toward preserving setting	Slight/Negligible	Slight/Negligible
5. Contribution toward urban regeneration	Slight/Negligible	Slight/Negligible

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Both parcels are critically important in their contribution towards the purposes of the Green Belt in question. Parcel A provides less of a contribution towards the prevention of neighbouring towns merging, but this is due to its highly isolated nature, detached from any development. Below is a summary of the assessment:

- Parcel A is very isolated from the main built-up area of Woodham, while Parcel B has a direct physical connection along Woodham Lane. Vegetation along Woodham Lane does separate Parcel B from the built-up area however, creating a disconnected parcel from the built-up area;
- Parcel A contains a large area of land that had approval for outline planning permission for a commercial development, though this has now been revoked. This permission has set a precedent for potential development of this area;
- The waste allocation site would isolate potential development to its north in Parcel A;
- The site has elements of durable features, most notably the local road network reinforced by tree belts. The Bourne River provides a strong durable boundary to the north of the site due to the development constraints associated with flood risk area and dense linear vegetation associated with this water course;
- Views into the site from the outside are minimal, confined to viewpoints along small sections on the immediate site boundaries along Martyr's Lane;
- Both parcels contribute to the separation between settlements. Parcel B contributes more due to its size. However, the excluded settlement of Woodham to the immediate east of the site is 1.4km distant from the settlement of Ottershaw, thus only 0.3km wider than the separation between Woodham and Ottershaw for Parcel B (if developed);
- Proposed development within Parcel B would significantly reduce the actual separation between settlements, but due to both parcel's high containment, the perception of separation would be greater;
- The site does not contain any public rights of way, with the golf course and sports club limiting general public access to the site, reducing the opportunities for views across and out of the site;
- The site contains facilities that are not exclusively restricted to countryside use and do reduce the sense of remoteness, but overall they have more features which are associated with the wider countryside setting than the urban setting of Woodham;

- Large belts of wooded vegetation provide a strong screen between the built-up area of Woodham and the site, which also creates a sense of isolation from the wider countryside and Green Belt;
- The site provides opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, with potential to contribute long term to 'openness' purposes that should be maintained in the Green Belt;
- Given the heavily vegetated nature of both parcels, their contribution to the essential character of 'openness' of the Green Belt could be considered to be low as they are currently visually contained;
- The facilities on site provide a low contribution to the Green Belt's essential characteristic of 'Permanence' as defined in paragraph 79 of the NPPF. The site is reliant on the commercial viability of the golf course, sports club and nurseries. It is already apparent that some of the nurseries have become derelict and unmanaged;
- The site is characteristic of the wider landscape as defined in the local character assessment. Yet, the relationship between the site and its surrounding landscape is low due to the site's high containment.

4.2 Potential development of the site would need to be of the entire site or Parcel B alone. Parcel A, even with the proposed McLaren extension revoked, would be too isolated to be a standalone development, whereas the inclusion of Parcel B would create that link between Parcel A and the existing settlement of Woodham. However, the potential development of the waste site in the centre of the site (Parcel B) would further isolate Parcel A, making the linking of Parcel A and B very difficult.

4.3 The site does have a critical importance to the Green Belt with regard to urban sprawl and the prevention of towns merging, but The Bourne River and associated flood zone to the north of the site acts as a very strong durable boundary in preventing encroachment beyond that point. Due to the site's high containment, the perception of urban sprawl and settlements merging would be minimal. The McLaren site and associated road network around the McLaren entrance to the north-east of the site has an urban character, already giving a sense of urban sprawl in that location.

4.4 The site is highly contained by dense belts of perimeter vegetation. Potential development would have minimal visual impact on the landscape setting if the majority of the boundary vegetation was retained and enhanced, along with the intact tree belts and hedgerows across the site. Potential development would lead to substantial loss of vegetation from the centre of the site. Further assessment of this existing vegetation is needed to ascertain its quality and its similarities in landscape features to the Thames Basin Heath SPA. Potential development would significantly change the character of the site, but the highly contained setting of the site would minimise the effect this change of character would have visually on the wider landscape.

4.5 This site could not be put forward for inclusion in the Woking Borough Council's Site Allocations Development Plan (DPD) without further survey work of Parcel B. The further survey work would need to ascertain the quality and contribution of the internal vegetation of Parcel B that is shown for potential removal in Plan HDA 6. It would determine whether the potential removal of the internal vegetation can be justified to accommodate possible development, or if the quality of habitat features are similar to the Thames Basin Heath SPA thus inappropriate to remove. The site is of critical importance to the purpose of the Green Belt, with its important contributions to the purpose of preventing urban sprawl and the safeguarding of the countryside. The site is also of critical importance to the landscape character of the wider area. A Significant change to the character of the site, as well as substantial vegetation losses would need to occur in order to accommodate the dwelling numbers currently envisaged to meet Woking's assessed housing need.

REFERENCES

- Ref 1 -** Natural England (July 2013), '*NCA Profile 129. Thames Basin Heaths*'
- Ref 2 -** Surrey County Council (April 2015), '*Surrey Landscape Character Assessment*'
- Ref 3 -** Department for Communities and Local Government (March 2012), '*National Planning Policy Framework*'
- Ref 4 -** Woking Borough Council (2012), '*Woking Local Development Document – Woking Core Strategy*'
- Ref 5 -** Peter Brett Associates (pba) on behalf of Woking Borough Council (Jan 2014), '*Woking Green Belt Review*'
- Ref 6 -** Surrey County Council (2008), '*Surrey Waste Plan 2008*'