



Gladman Developments Ltd

Land off Milltown Way, Leek

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

July 2016

FPCR Environment and Design Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been carried out for the proposed development by FPCR Environment and Design Ltd (FPCR). The purpose of this LVA study is to provide an assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The landscape and visual effects have been considered in relation to the proposals detailed in the submitted Development Framework Plan and Design and Access Statement (DAS).
- 1.2 FPCR are a multi-disciplinary environmental and design consultancy with over 50 years' experience of architecture, landscape, ecology, urban design, masterplanning and environmental impact assessment. The practice is a member of the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and are frequently called upon to provide expert evidence on landscape and visual issues at Public and Local Plan Inquiries.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared on behalf of Gladman Developments Ltd (GDL) to accompany an outline planning application for the residential development of land off Milltown Way, Leek.

Site Location

- 1.4 The site lies adjacent to Pickwood Recreation Ground on the south eastern side of Leek and comprises pasture land. The north eastern section of the site is more open although it becomes wooded at the western sloped edges. The south eastern boundary lies immediately adjacent to houses on Milltown Way which have an urbanising influence on the site's landscape character. Several isolated mature trees occur south of the driveway to Pickwood Hall. From the southern edge of the site there are attractive views of the adjacent Ballington Wood on the north-facing valley slope which orientates east/west towards Leek. The north western aspect of the site is orientated towards the town centre Conservation Area with its landmark buildings such as the Nicholson Institute.
- 1.5 Figures 1 and 2 show the location of the site.

Proposed Development

- 1.6 The built development proposals include a residential scheme of up to 40 dwellings, including up to 33% affordable housing with access via Milltown Way to the eastern site boundary. In addition, significant areas of green infrastructure are proposed, including an area for informal recreation and biodiversity enhancement serving as an extension to Pickwood Recreation Ground.
- 1.7 The proposals have been developed in conjunction with the team of experts including FPCRs ecologists and arboriculturalists to ensure that wildlife corridors and existing habitats are retained and enhanced including trees/hedgerows surrounding the site. Existing boundary hedgerows will be retained where possible and enhanced with additional landscape treatment to create a robust Green Infrastructure framework.
- 1.8 A significant area of public open space will be provided to the north of the site. This area will be managed in part for grazing whilst acting as a Community Park and extension to the existing Pickwood Recreation Ground to the east. Footpath links will be provided into the recreation ground to increase permeability and connections to the wider footpath network such as that to Wood Street and into Leek town centre.

- 1.9 To the south of the proposed residential development there will be an area of new woodland planting. This will add to the existing woodland corridor that currently wraps around the site's western boundary and thus provide an appropriate buffer between Pickwood Hall and the proposed and already existing residential development.
- 1.10 The site was subject to a previous application and appeal (APP/B3438/W/15/3005261) for 90 dwellings with built development covering a significantly larger proportion of the site (Appendix D). In particular, built development wrapped around the north western perimeter of Pickwood Recreation Ground and extended further south in the vicinity of the access to Pickwood Hall.
- 1.11 A Public Inquiry was held before Inspector Hetherington in 2015, and the Appeal was dismissed. The Inspector was concerned about a number of matters, which can be summarised as follows;
- A) Setting of Leek Conservation Area – Built development proposed between the Recreation Ground and the Conservation Area would block or curtail views towards the town centre and its landmark buildings, and the rural foreground in the view would be lost.
 - B) Setting of Pickwood Hall – Whilst the main aspect of the Grade II listed Hall is to the south, a projecting wing including the North Room does have a northerly aspect affording some views across to the site. The Inspector took the view that the proposed development would bring the urban edge much closer to the edge of the parkland setting of the Hall.
 - C) Landscape and Visual Impact –The Inspector was concerned about the effects of the development proposal on the landscape setting of Leek and the important views across the appeal site towards the town centre from the Recreation Ground.
- 1.12 The current application has taken careful note of the Inspector's concerns and has been specifically drafted to remove or mitigate sources of adverse impact on landscape character and visual resources. Appendix D includes annotated plans demonstrating the measures taken to address the Inspector's concerns. In summary, no built development is now proposed which would interrupt the relationship between the Recreation Ground and the town centre Conservation Area, and development has been removed largely from the southern parcel of land adjacent to properties on Milltown Way (No's 52 and 33) and development is therefore set further away from Pickwood Hall. Furthermore, the methodology employed by the LVA has been updated (as part of the normal periodic best practice review process utilised by FPCR) to explain clearly and transparently the reasoned judgements which formulate the assessment of effects.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 This LVA has been prepared based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3), published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, in 2013.

2.2 In summary the GLVIA3 states:

“Landscape and Visual impact assessment (LVIA), is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people’s views and visual amenity.”

2.3 There are two components of LVIA:

- Assessment of landscape effects; assessing effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right;
- Assessment of visual effects: assessing effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.

2.4 The components of this report include: baseline studies; description and details of the landscape proposals and mitigation measures to be adopted as part of the scheme; identification and description of likely effects arising from the proposed development; and an assessment of the significance of these effects.

2.5 In terms of baseline studies the assessment provides an understanding of the landscape in the area to be affected, its constituent elements, character, condition and value. For the visual baseline this includes an understanding of the area in which the development may be visible, the people who may experience views, and the nature of views.

Assessment of Landscape Effects

2.6 GLVIA3 states that *“An assessment of landscape effects deals with the effects of change and development on landscape as a resource”*. The baseline landscape is described by reference to existing landscape character assessments and by a description of the site and its context.

2.7 A range of landscape effects can arise through development. These can include:

- Change or loss of elements, features, aesthetic or perceptual aspects that contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the landscape;
- Addition of new elements that influence character and distinctiveness of the landscape; and
- Combined effects of these changes.

2.8 The characteristics of the existing landscape resource are considered in respect of the susceptibility of the landscape resource to the change arising from this development. The value of the existing landscape is also considered.

2.9 Each effect on landscape receptors is assessed in terms of size or scale, geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration and reversibility. In terms of size or scale, the judgement takes account of the extent of the existing landscape elements that will be lost or changed, and the degree to which the aesthetic or perceptual aspects or key characteristics of the landscape will be altered by removal or addition of new elements.

- 2.10 The overall landscape effect is determined by considering the sensitivity of the landscape receptors and the magnitude of effect on the landscape. Final conclusions on the overall landscape effects are drawn from the assessment components described.
- 2.11 This appraisal describes the nature of the landscape effects. The criteria used in the appraisal are set out in Appendix A.

Assessment of Visual Effects

- 2.12 An assessment of visual effects deals with the effects of change and development on the views available to people and their visual amenity.
- 2.13 The first stage in the assessment is to map approximate visibility. This can be done by a computer Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), or by manual methods, using map study and field evaluation. A series of viewpoints are included within the assessment that are representative of views towards the site from surrounding visual receptors. Other views of the site are included where it supports the description and understanding of the site's landscape and visual characteristics.
- 2.14 The views also typically represent what can be seen from a variety of distances from the development and different viewing experiences.
- 2.15 It is important to remember that visual receptors are all people. For each affected viewpoint the assessment considers both susceptibility to change in views and the value attached to views. The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include:
- residents at home
 - people engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape or particular views;
 - visitors to heritage assets or other attractions, where views of surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;
 - communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.
- 2.16 Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of susceptibility to change. Where travel involves recognised scenic routes awareness of views is likely to be particularly high.
- 2.17 Visual receptors likely to be less sensitive to change include:
- People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend upon appreciation of views of the landscape;
 - People at their place of work whose attention may be focused on their work or activity, not on their surroundings.
- 2.18 Each of the visual effects is evaluated in terms of its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced and its duration or reversibility.
- 2.19 In terms of size or scale, the magnitude of visual effects takes account of:
- The scale of the change in the view with respect to the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in its composition, including proportion of the view occupied by the proposed development;

- The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape with the existing or remaining landscape elements and characteristics in terms of form, scale and mass, line height, colour and texture;
- The nature of the view of the proposed development, in terms of the relative amount of time over which it will be experienced and whether views will be full, partial or glimpses.

2.20 The geographical extent of the visual effect in each viewpoint is likely to reflect:

- The angle of view in relation to the main activity of the receptor
- The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development
- The extent of the area over which the changes would be visible.

2.21 As with landscape effects, the duration of the effect could be short to long term or permanent and the same definitions apply. The criteria used in this appraisal are included at Appendix A.

Overall Landscape and Visual Effects

2.22 The final conclusions on effects, whether adverse or beneficial, are drawn from the separate judgements on the sensitivity of the receptors and the magnitude of the effects. This overall judgement involves a reasoned professional overview of the individual judgements against the criteria, to then make the overall judgement.

2.23 For this appraisal, the following descriptive thresholds have been used with regard to effects:-

- Major: An effect that will fundamentally change and be in direct contrast to the existing landscape or views;
- Moderate: An effect that will markedly change the existing landscape or views but may retain or incorporate some characteristics/ features currently present;
- Minor: An effect that will entail limited or localised change to the existing landscape/ views or will entail more noticeable localised change but including both adverse and beneficial effects and is likely to retain or incorporate some characteristics/ features currently present;
- Negligible: An effect that will be discernible yet of very limited change to the existing landscape or views.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012)¹

- 3.1 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart of the NPPF is the presumption in the favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 6 states:

"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development."

- 3.2 The three dimensions to delivering sustainable development are: economic, social and environmental.

- *"an environmental role- contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy." (para 7)*

- 3.3 The core planning principles include the following:

- *"always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings";*
- *take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it" (para 17)*

- 3.4 The NPPF supports good design to enhance the quality of the built and natural environment.

"The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better people" (para 56)

- 3.5 *"Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that development:*

- *Establishes a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- *Optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- *Respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation; and*
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping" (para 58).*

¹ National Planning Policy Framework, Communities & Local Government, March 2012

- 3.6 The NPPF seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment – protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, and affording great weight to the protection of areas of natural and scenic beauty, such as National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

“The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils” (para 109)

“Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for a development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.” (para 113)

Local planning authorities should:

- *“Set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;” (para 114)*

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG, 2014)²

- 3.7 The PPG came into force on the 6th March 2014 and is an online planning resource which provides guidance on the NPPF and the planning system. The NPPF continues to be the primary document for decision making.

Local Planning Policy

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Core Strategy Development Plan (Adopted 2014)

- 3.8 The policies within the Core Strategy Development Plan Document Adopted Version (26th March 2014) are relevant to the scheme. The following policies are relevant to the application proposals.

H1 New Housing Development

“New housing development should provide for a mix of housing sizes, types and tenure including a proportion of affordable housing as set out in policy H2, and where appropriate housing for special groups, to meet the needs and aspirations of the current and future population having regard to the Area Strategies in SS5 and SS6. All development will be assessed according to the extent to which it provides for high quality, sustainable housing and to which it meets identified local housing market needs and the strategy for the area having regard to the location of the development, the characteristics of the site and the economics of provision.”

SO8. To promote local distinctiveness by means of good design and the conservation, protection and enhancement of historic, environmental and cultural assets throughout the District.

SO9. To protect and improve the character and distinctiveness of the countryside and its landscape, biodiversity and geological resources.

DC1 - Design Considerations

² National Planning Practice Guidance, 27th March 2014

“All development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design SPD. In particular, new development should:

- be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area;*
- be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance;*
- create, where appropriate, attractive, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private) in accordance with policy C3, landscaping, public art, ‘designing out crime’ initiatives and the principles of active design;*
- incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the local and global impact of the development, and to adapt to climate change, in accordance with policy SD1;*
- protect the amenity of the area, including residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping;*
- promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and recreation of biodiversity and geological heritage, where appropriate, in accordance with policy NE1;*
- provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use;*
- ensure that existing drainage, waste water and sewerage infrastructure capacity is available, and where necessary enhanced, to enable the development to proceed;*
- ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community.”*

DC2 - The Historic Environment

“The Council will safeguard and, where possible, enhance the historic environment, areas of historic landscape character and interests of acknowledged importance, including in particular scheduled ancient monuments, significant buildings (both statutory listed and on a local register), the settings of designated assets, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens, registered battlefields and archaeological remains by 1. Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the special character and historic heritage of the District's towns and villages and those interests of acknowledged importance.”

DC3 - Landscape and Settlement Setting

“The Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

- 1. Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape or the setting of a settlement and important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;*

- 2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;*
- 3. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;*
- 4. Identifying through the Site Allocations DPD and protecting from inappropriate development, areas of visual open space where the intention will be to retain the land's open and undeveloped appearance. Where appropriate the Council 130 Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy - March 2014 Adopted Core Strategy will seek public access agreements with the land owners and seek proposals for the enhancement or improvement of these areas as part of the green infrastructure network in accordance with policy C3. In exceptional cases, limited development of areas of visual open space may be acceptable where this will bring about overriding improvements to the open space itself;*
- 5. Recognising and conserving the special quality of the landscape in the Peak District National Park, and ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the National Park."*

C1 - Creating Sustainable Communities

"In order to create sustainable communities at a local level the Council will:

- 1. Support proposals which protect, retain or enhance existing community facilities (including multi use and shared schemes) or provide new facilities. New facilities should preferably be located within defined built up areas where they are most accessible. In exceptional cases facilities may be located adjacent to these areas where it can be demonstrated that this is the only practical option and where a site is well related to the existing settlement.*
- 6. Require development proposals to incorporate high quality locally distinctive design features and layouts that will reduce crime and the fear of crime and support inclusive communities, particularly in terms of accessibility and functionality in line with the Council's Design SPD."*

C2 - Sport, Recreation and Open Space

"The Council will promote the provision of high quality recreational open space by implementing and supporting schemes that will protect and improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space and outdoor sports, leisure and children's play facilities throughout the district, in accordance with the adopted minimum standards set out in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation SPD."

C3 - Green Infrastructure

"The Council will, through partnership working with local communities, organisations, landowners and developers, develop an integrated network of high quality and multi-functional green infrastructure that will:

- Support and improve the provision of open space, sport and recreational facilities for local communities and enhance the settings of neighbourhoods;*
- Link existing and potential sites of nature conservation value and historic landscape features, create new wildlife habitats, increase biodiversity, and increase tree cover where it is appropriate to the landscape;*

- *Enhance the natural, man-made and cultural features that are crucial to the local landscape and create opportunities for the restoration of degraded landscapes and the enhancement of the urban fringe;*
- *Mitigate the negative effects of climate change and maximise potential climate change benefits including effective flood risk and waterways management;*
- *Create appropriate access for a wide range of users to enjoy the countryside, including improved linkages to and provision of formal and informal recreation opportunities and accessible woodland areas, encouraging walking, cycling and horse riding;*
- *Contribute to the diversification of the local economy and tourist development through the enhancement of existing, and provision of new facilities."*

SS5a - Leek Area Strategy

"4. Promote Leek's special character and heritage and strengthen its role as a visitor destination by:

- *Conserving and enhancing buildings, sites and areas of heritage and cultural importance, complemented by new distinctive, sensitively designed, high quality, sustainable buildings;*
- *Promoting environmental enhancements in and on the edges of the town centre, establishing the Market as a central feature, creating strong, high quality 'gateways' into the centre and improving sign posting;*
- *Protecting and improving the setting and historic character of the town and increasing access into the countryside by foot, cycling and horse riding."*

Former Special Landscape Area

3.9 The entire eastern edge of Leek lay within a blanket designated Special Landscape Area which is now superseded.

3.10 The Core Strategy Policy DC3 states that:

"The Staffordshire Moorland's natural environment is one of the District's greatest assets and the need for it to be protected is recognised within the Staffordshire Moorlands Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2020. The European Landscape Convention, which became binding on the UK in 2007; has the aim of encouraging public authorities to adopt policies and landscape protection and management measures so as to maintain/improve landscape quality across their Districts; further to this national guidance set out in the NPPF identifies the need for Council's to produce policies that maintain and enhance the value of the countryside.

There has been a move away in national Government guidance from 'blanket' local landscape designations in favour of locally based Landscape Character Assessments. The continued use of the current Special Landscape Area designation is therefore not considered sufficiently sensitive to local landscape characteristics and it is proposed to address local landscape impact through the use of a Landscape Character Assessment instead. The Council has undertaken a Landscape Character Assessment in order to identify character features in the District which should be used to inform planning decisions taking into account Staffordshire County Council's Historic Landscape Characterisation Study and earlier Planning for Landscape Change:

Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan, 1996 – 2011 (2000)."

- 3.11 The site falls within the scope of the Leek Landscape Settlement Character Assessment and should be considered appropriately. (A number of other policy designations can be found in the vicinity (Ref Figure 3).
- 3.12 Pickwood Hall is a Grade II listed building located directly beyond the southwest corner of the site beyond existing boundary trees.
- 3.13 Pickwood Recreation Ground is on the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Heritage Register. As such, it is acknowledged as a non-designated heritage asset that contributes to local distinctiveness. Its merits have been assessed against published selection criteria. However, it should be noted that the addition of the asset to the Local Register does not make it a designated heritage asset, as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework. A heritage report has been submitted as part of this planning application and should be referred to with regard to any potential impact upon local heritage assets.
- 3.14 The site lies within the Ladydale Local Wildlife Site (SBI). An Ecological appraisal has been included as part of this planning application and should be referred to with regard to potential ecological impact.

4.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Landscape Character

National Character

4.1 National Character Area (NCA) profiles have prepared by Natural England for the 159 NCA's defined across England. These NCA profiles include a description of the natural and cultural features that shape the landscape, how the landscape has changed over time, the current key drivers for ongoing change, and a broad analysis of each area's characteristics. Figure 4 illustrates the defined character types within the context of the site.

4.2 At this very broad landscape scale, the site lies within Natural England's National Character Area (NCA) 64 'The Potteries and Churnet Valley'. The adjacent South West Peak NCA 53 lies to the northeast of the NCA 64 and is considered sufficient distance away from the site not to be effected by the proposed development.

The Potteries and Churnet Valley NCA covers a large area and includes significant urban settlements including Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Biddulph and continues across more open areas southeast towards Uttoxeter. The NCA includes the following key characteristics which are relevant to this study:

- *"Dissected hills and small plateaux, cut by river valleys and steep ravines, contrast with the industrial and densely settled conurbation of the Potteries.*
- *The well-wooded character throughout the Churnet Valley contrasts strongly with the urban, sparsely wooded landscapes of the Potteries.*
- *Deep, fast-flowing rivers Churnet, Trent, Dove and their tributaries drain the area. Riffles, scour ponds, subsidence pools and numerous small ponds provide ecological connectivity.*
- *Hedgerow banks with hedgerow oaks confine small pastures in the Churnet Valley; in the north, hedgerows are gappy and hedgerow trees are few. At higher elevations, drystone walls replace hedgerows and fields are larger and rectilinear.*
- *There is a rich heritage associated with iron production, coal mining, silk production and, most notably, pottery; the area is characterised by industrial and residential development in the Potteries and waterpowered flint mills and foundries in the Churnet Valley, linked by historic trade routes."*

4.3 The NCA includes the following relevant Statements of Environmental Opportunity:

- *SEO 1: Manage, expand, link and buffer the characteristic semi-natural woodland and protect the ancient woodland, for example in the Churnet Valley, reducing habitat fragmentation to benefit landscape character, biodiversity, resource protection and regulation; and enhancing the recreational and experiential qualities of the NCA.*
- *SEO 3: Manage and expand areas of characteristic unimproved grassland pastures in the Churnet Valley and heathland and moorland of the Staffordshire Moorlands, reducing habitat fragmentation and restoring traditional boundary features to benefit landscape character, sense of place, biodiversity and resource protection while enhancing the recreational and experiential qualities of the NCA.*

- *SEO 4: Protect and manage historic landscape character and associated heritage assets that include the historic transport network and industrial heritage and improve the understanding of its intrinsic links with geodiversity; and find sustainable solutions to manage visitor pressure at popular attractions, for example Alton Towers and Trentham Gardens, thus supporting the tourist economy and maintaining a high level of public access to enjoy the wealth of recreational experience that the NCA offers.*

4.4 The NCA also includes the following relevant Landscape Opportunities:

- *“Ensure that the grouping and design of new developments should reflect the juxtaposition, scale and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of the area; manage small-scale extraction of local building stone to this end.*
- *Create new or extend public rights of way and permissive access to improve the connectivity between population centres and rural areas and core sites, for example SSSI, NNRs, Local Nature Reserves and Local Sites.”*

Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment of Staffordshire Moorlands, 2008.

4.5 This assessment provides further description and identification of landscape character types. The site lies within Landscape Character Type ‘Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys’. Several other Landscape Character Types lie in the vicinity of Leek of which all are considered of suitable distance from the proposed developments not be affected by the proposed development.

Dissected Sandstone Clough and Valleys

4.6 This character type abuts the south and eastern outskirts of Leek and extends south following the main valley of the River Churnet and its tributaries that run on a northwest- southeast axis through the centre of Staffordshire Moorlands.

Key Characteristics

- *Deeply incised wooded valleys with narrow winding watercourses*
- *Historic Parkland*
- *Stone buildings and walls*
- *Sheep and cattle farming with smallholdings*
- *Large broadleaf woodlands with newer conifer plantations*
- *Narrow sunken lanes with hedgebanks and tall hedges that limit views*
- *Dominant views to higher ground*
- *Lowland heathland*

4.7 The assessment highlights key planning and management issues within the landscape type and relevant guidelines are summarised below.

Landscape Planning Guidelines

- *“Hedge banks which are significant local feature should be protected and maintained.*

- *Field boundaries should be retained, maintained and, in places, replaced to maintain the scale of the landscape. Stone walls or native hedgerows should be used as a means of enclosure in order dependent upon local character. Replacement of hedges and drystone walls by fencing should be discouraged.*
- *The grouping and form of new buildings should reflect the juxtaposition, scale, form, enclosure and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of this area.*
- *New planting should take account of landform, landscape scale and field pattern.*
- *Both broadleaves and conifer species occur in this landscape and new plantings should reflect this mix. Care should be taken not to interrupt important views across the landscape.*
- *New broadleaved woodland planting could be used effectively to counteract the effects of fragmentation and isolation of ancient woodland.*
- *Any proposals for development or land use change which impacts upon the setting of a historic parkland must take account of the unique character of that designed landscape.*
- *Any proposals for development or land use change within an historic landscape should be informed by a detailed historic landscape appraisal.*
- *Consideration should be given to protecting, in particular, individual specimen and groups of trees that are significant historically or visually to this landscape or to local settlement.*
- *Care should be taken not to introduce unnecessary urban features into the rural scene (e.g. signage, urban road kerbs)."*

Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment, 2011

A further level of detailed study has been undertaken as part of the Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment within which the site falls into the Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys subdivision 1c – Cheddleton & Longsdon.

Dissected Sandstone Clough and Valleys 1c – Cheddleton & Longsdon

4.8 The Character Type Sub Area of Cheddleton & Longsdon has the following key characteristics:

- *Fewer deeply incised wooded valleys*
- *More smaller valley features*
- *More open and undulating cloughs*
- *Small scale rectilinear field pattern around Longsdon*
- *Settlements of Leek, Cheddleton and Longsdon*
- *Sheep and cattle farming with smallholdings*
- *Remnant historic parkland of Churnet Grange, Basford Hall and part of Ashcombe Park*
- *Extensive recreation facilities and historic features*
- *Industrial development*
- *Busy main roads*
- *Views from higher ground*

- *Cornhill (Key Opportunity Site)*

4.9 Landscape Planning Guidelines stated within the assessment include:

“b. The grouping and form of new buildings should reflect the juxtaposition, scale, form, enclosure and materials of traditional local buildings characteristic of this area.

c. New planting should take account of landform, landscape scale and field pattern. The character within this sub area has diminished and the landscape structure is weaker. Consideration should be given to small belts of woodland planting along valley sides linking with existing woodland belts. Consideration should be given to the spatial relationship between woodland blocks and open areas so that the rhythm of the landscape is not disrupted.

d. Both broadleaves and some conifer species occur in this landscape and where appropriate new plantings should generally reflect this and contain mixed woodland species. However woodland plantings should follow best practice advice provided by the Forestry Commission. Care should be taken not to interrupt important views across the landscape.

e. Any proposals for development or land use change which impacts upon the setting of the remnant historic parkland of Pickwood Hall,...must take account of the unique character of these designed landscapes.”

Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment of Staffordshire Moorlands (2008)

4.10 The Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment of Staffordshire Moorland (2008) provides a Character Assessment for the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council planning area. A settlement study of Leek Setting is included within the assessment (Ref: Figure 5) which provides a more in depth assessment identifying the distinctive qualities of Leek. The study description of Leek includes the following:

- *Leek is a large market and industrial town that lies within four character areas, the main areas being the Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys to the south and Gritstone Highland Fringe to the north.*
- *The town lies hidden within a valley basin north east of the River Churnet, bounded by watercourses on all sides except the northeast.*
- *The original settlement is compact and is contained by the conservation area. The traditional buildings are mainly of red brick with blue tiles, interspersed with some local gritstone buildings. There are several black and white structures but these have later designed additions. More recent developments are mainly of brick construction.*
- *The town has expanded with residential development. Industrial estates are largely concentrated around the edges of the town.*
- *Towards the edges of the town important open spaces break up the development e.g. allotments, recreation grounds, playing fields, cemetery.*
- *Important landscape settings to the south east extend up into the town as green wedges. Cheddleton Heath to the south is also part of the landscape setting. The landscape setting is important to the town, where more open landscapes north and west of the town contrast with the strong vegetation along field boundaries and streamlines to the south and east of Leek.*

- 4.11 The Leek Settlement Character Assessment includes a Leek Setting Plan which shows features such as significant public footpaths and also identifies important landscape setting to settlement, individual visual open spaces within the settlement boundary, strong edges to settlements, planting required to strengthen edge of settlement or for mitigation and significant views.
- 4.12 The proposed site lies within an area assessed as an 'Important landscape setting to settlement' and lies adjacent to an area to the west surrounding Pickwood Hall identified as 'Remnant historic landscape'. However, this latter designation does not include the application site itself. Pickwood Recreation Ground is recognised as a Visual Open Space. The plan incorrectly identifies public rights of way crossing the proposed site. These do not exist.

Topography

- 4.13 The following should be read in conjunction with Figure 7.

Context – Landform

- 4.14 The site lies on the northern slopes of a valley which follows a tributary stream of the River Churnet to the south. The highest area of the site at the eastern boundary sits at approximately 213m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). Further east, beyond the proposed site, the land continues to rise reaching a ridge at 255m AOD. The Staffordshire Moorland Walk follows this ridge.

Site - Landform

- 4.15 The land falls fairly steeply to the north western edges of the site to meet a stream on the site's western boundary at approximately 180m AOD. The southern section of the site proposed for biodiversity enhancement falls steeply to meet a second stream on the site boundary at approximately 180m AOD.

Site and Immediate Context

- 4.16 An assessment of landscape character of the site and its immediate context has been carried out, providing a finer level of assessment than the published studies.
- 4.17 The surrounding landscape character to the south is partly influenced by the Grade II listed Pickwood Hall. Mature woodland defines the northern perimeter of the Hall which is set well below the site. The principal open aspect of the Hall is to the south across the open valley.

Site Features

- 4.18 The area proposed for built development comprises two pastoral fields. The northern field is irregularly shaped with the western boundary following the course of a stream that flows southwards to the River Churnet. This boundary is heavily wooded where the landform is particularly steep. A hedgerow, with occasional mature trees divides the two fields. The southern field is predominantly level, but then falls away towards a second watercourse which flows west.

Landscape Value

- 4.19 In terms of "landscape value" it is appropriate to examine the role of the site and its immediate context in terms of the range of local factors set out in the GLVIA3 (Box 5.1, page 84), and

summarised in the methodology. This considers the landscape in terms of a range of factors as set out below. As a starting point, landscape designations have been considered.

- 4.20 Landscape Designations: The site itself is not subject to any national, or regional landscape designations. However, it does fall within an area defined in the Leek Character Assessment of being important to the setting of Leek. Other designations include the site being within the Ladydale Local Wildlife Site and the adjacent Pickwood Recreation Ground which is on the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Heritage Register.
- 4.21 Landscape Quality (Condition): The landscape context of the application site reflects features of the local character descriptions as it is well-wooded in part and characteristic of the steep topography relating to the River Churnet Valley. However, the area proposed for built development is restricted to two areas of pastoral field which are not of particular notable quality. There are no apparent signs of degradation or dereliction and the overall fabric of the landscape is considered to be intact giving a landscape condition of good overall quality.
- 4.22 Scenic Quality: The site is located directly adjacent to Leek where to the east modern housing development creates a distinct settlement edge scene. Views are available from the site across the western valley to Leek town centre and its Conservation Area. Attractive views are available from the recreation ground, primarily focused towards the town centre and its landmark buildings. The northern façade of Pickwood Hall is partly visible from the southern component of the site. In the context of Leek as a whole, the application site itself is not of particularly distinctive scenic quality.
- 4.23 Rarity and Representativeness: The site has features which are typical of the local landscape character type within which it is located. Positive features include the wooded areas, mature trees and hedgerows. There are no features of especial interest of rarity within the site and it is therefore considered to be representative of the local area.
- 4.24 Conservation Interest: There are limited features of biodiversity conservation interest within the site area proposed for built development but ecological interest exists with regard to the wider Ladydale Local Wildlife Site. Views are available across the northern portion of the site from the adjacent Pickwood Recreation Ground which is listed on the Local Heritage Register. The site is not identified as forming part of the parkland setting to Pickwood Hall as shown in the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (Figure 6).
- 4.25 Recreational Value: There is no public access into or across the site. The adjacent recreation ground is well used with paths running adjacent to the application site's boundary.
- 4.26 Perceptual Aspects: The site is located adjacent to the existing residential development to the east of Leek. The majority of the site has strong settlement edge context, and there is a direct relationship with the town centre and its landmarks in the northern component.
- 4.27 Associations: There is no suggesting that the site has any notable association with artists, writers or other people of interest, or with significant events in history.
- 4.28 In conclusion and having appraised the above factors it is judged that the site and the immediate landscape is of medium to high landscape value.

Visual Baseline

- 4.29 A visual appraisal has been undertaken for the site. This has explored the nature of the existing visual amenity of the area and sought to establish the approximate visibility of the site from surrounding locations and receptors. A series of photo viewpoints have been selected which support this analysis.
- 4.30 Photographs have been taken to illustrate a view from a specific vantage point, or to demonstrate a representative view for those receptors that are moving through the landscape, e.g. rights of way users. The photographs may demonstrate varying degrees of visibility and include both short and long range views. Photographs may also be used to demonstrate a particular effect or specific issue as described below. The photographs were taken on the 20th April 2016 and seasonal differences have been taken into account when determining the visual effects on these receptors.

Receptors

- 4.31 The following visual receptors have been identified as being those that would experience the effects of the proposed development (Ref: Figure 8):

Receptor A: Users of public footpath to Leek town (Ref: Viewpoints 1).

Receptor B: Users of Pickwood Recreation Ground (Ref: Viewpoints 2 & 3).

Receptor C: Residents of properties to northeast of site and the adjacent recreation ground (Ref: Viewpoint 3).

Receptor D: Residents of properties directly to east of site off Milltown Way (Ref: Viewpoints 3, 4 & 5).

Receptor E: Vehicular users of Milltown Way (Ref: Viewpoints 4 & 5).

Receptor F: Residents of Pickwood Hall.

Receptor G: Users of Public Right of Way; Footpath Leek Town 26 (Ref: Viewpoint 6).

Receptor H: Residents within properties to east of town centre including those off Wood Street, Moorfields, Southfields, Ballington Gardens and Fynney Street (Ref: Viewpoint 2 & 6).

Receptor I: Vehicular users of Ashbourne Road (A523) approaching Leek (Ref: Viewpoint 7).

Receptor J: Users of Mount Road: Staffordshire Moorland Walks Recreational route at Lowe Hill (Part of promoted walk: A Country Walk). (Ref Viewpoint 8)

Receptor K: Residents of Home Farm. (Ref Viewpoint 8)

- 4.32 Full detailed analysis of the potential effects on visual receptor can be found at Appendix C, The Visual Effects Table.

Photo Viewpoints

- 4.33 An assessment of the likely visual effects of the proposed built development upon surrounding receptors is detailed in the subsequent section. Figure 8 details the location of the Photo Viewpoints and Figures 9-13 illustrate the photo viewpoints. They are briefly described below.

Viewpoint 1

- 4.34 This is a view west from the footpath leading from Pickwood Recreation Ground to Leek Town adjacent the northern site boundary. The view looks into the northern extent of the field where there is currently open pastoral land on a northwest facing slope. Within the view is the mature hedgerow and trees to the northwestern edge of the Pickwood Recreation Ground that marks the site boundary. Beyond the open field of the site woodland trees located to the west of the site are visible. Further west views are available of the existing residential development within Leek town; properties along Wood Street.

Viewpoint 2

- 4.35 This view looks north-west from the footpath which runs along the edge of Pickwood Recreation Ground. The mature hedgerow that forms the boundary of the site is visible in the immediate foreground with the higher ground of the site's open portion of the northern field in the mid-ground. Also visible within the view is Leek town centre and includes many of the buildings that feature within the Leek Conservation Area.

Viewpoint 3

- 4.36 This view is taken from within the Pickwood Recreation Ground along the south eastern boundary adjacent to the existing residential development off Milltown Way. Views are available across the recreation ground north-west towards Leek town centre and its skyline. Also within the view are the existing residential properties located along Peak View and Monyash Drive. The view illustrates the visual relationship between the existing properties, Pickwood Recreation Ground and the northern extents of the proposed development site.

Viewpoint 4

- 4.37 This view looks west from Milltown Way towards the eastern portion of the site and the Pickwood Recreation Ground where the proposed main vehicular access point will be into the site. Within the view are the existing residential properties along this road.

Viewpoint 5

- 4.38 This viewpoint is located to the east of the site off Milltown Way and looks west across the southern portion of the site. The existing mature trees within the southern field are visible beyond the fenced site boundary and existing residential properties.

Viewpoint 6

- 4.39 This view looks east towards the site from the PRow that links Fynney Street and Cauldon Close (Footpath Leek Town 26). Within the view is the rear of property along Fynney Street. Beyond the garden there are views that include the woodland that covers the steep landform associated with the valley of the stream that runs between the site and Leek town. The site's northern field is partially visible beyond the existing woodland trees. Built development would not be visible in this view.

Viewpoint 7

- 4.40 This viewpoint is taken from the Ashbourne Road (A523) and looks northwest towards the site and existing development along Mulberry Way. The built form to the east of the site is

predominantly screened by the existing woodland and trees immediately to the south. The built development will not be significantly visible.

Viewpoint 8

- 4.41 This view looks northwest towards Leek from the track (Mount Road) that passes Home Farm and forms part of the Staffordshire Moorland Walks Recreational Route and 'A Country Walk' a loop route around Leek promoted by Staffordshire Moorland District Council. Properties along Mulberry Way are visible beyond the agricultural fields in the foreground. However, the application proposals will not be significantly visible.

Summary of Visual Baseline

- 4.42 The baseline analysis results in a number of reasoned conclusions which are summarised below:
- The site has a limited zone of visibility with views of the site restricted to receptors predominantly located adjacent or nearby the site itself. Primary receptors include those within residential properties adjacent to the site and users of Pickwood Recreation Ground.
 - Limited views into the site are available from the PRow Footpath Leek Town 26. Views from this route are restricted to the northern portion of the site.
 - The existing wooded landscape to the south and west of the site and residential development to the north and east screen the site from more distant views. Views into the site from the wider landscape are very limited and will be in the context of the existing urban development.
 - There is limited intervisibility between the site and Pickwood Hall which is primarily orientated towards the south.

5.0 LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS

Introduction

- 5.1 The development proposals are fully described in the Design and Access Statement and other information accompanying the planning application. The existing landscape resource and the visual receptors and amenity of the site have been considered by the planning and design process and have informed the resultant scheme. This approach has entailed collaboration between landscape, urban design, ecological and other professionals. The landscape components of the scheme are an important integral part of the proposals.

Landscape Design and Green Infrastructure Objectives

- 5.2 The key objectives of the landscape and Green Infrastructure proposals for the scheme are to:

- Retain views from Pickwood Recreation Ground towards Leek and its Conservation Area;
- Consider the proximity of development to Pickwood Hall, providing a robust buffer;
- Utilise the bulk of the northern field as an informal community parkland, linked to Pickwood Recreation Ground;
- Provide new links from the proposed development to the wider recreational features; and
- Retain and enhance existing ecological features of value including grassland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Landscape and Green Infrastructure (GI) Proposals

- 5.3 The landscape and GI and proposals for the scheme are detailed in the Design and Access Statement accompanying the planning application. In summary these proposals include:
- The provision of 4.75 hectares of land dedicated to GI, public open space, play and habitat related proposals – representing approximately 75% of the total site area;
 - The new community parkland will maintain the current openness within the northern extent of the site and preserve existing views from the recreation ground towards the Leek Conservation Area.
 - New woodland planting to supplement the existing screening to Pickwood Hall, serving as a visual buffer between the proposed and existing residential development off Milltown Way.
 - Additional footpath and cycle links will be provided to allow access to the adjacent recreational ground and existing footpath to the north of the site boundary that leads to Leek town centre.
- 5.4 The landscape and GI proposals will create an enhanced environment which will assimilate the proposed built development into the surrounding landscape. There will be a substantial net gain in terms of green infrastructure, biodiversity and recreational resources.

Landscape Management

- 5.5 All of the landscape areas and public open space features will be effectively managed and maintained. This would be achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive Landscape Management Plan (LMP), to ensure the successful establishment and long term viability of the landscape proposals.

6.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

- 6.1 The following section outlines the likely landscape and visual effects that would arise from proposed development on the site. It should be borne in mind that only a comparatively small component of the overall site is proposed for built development. Schedules detailing these likely landscape and visual effects for the receptors are included in Appendices B and C respectively. Please refer to these in conjunction with the following descriptions.

Landscape Effects

Construction

- 6.2 All construction works would be carried out in accordance with best practice procedures to minimise any adverse impact on landscape character. Appropriate methods will be adopted to protect retained trees and vegetation based upon BS 583728.
- 6.3 The landscape effects during construction is assessed as being of a transient nature and, given that the timescales involved will be relatively short, this is considered to be of limited significance overall. Inevitably there will be some disruption to the site landscape and its immediate environs during this phase of works however it will be localised and limited in extent, resulting in a **Moderate - Minor Adverse** landscape effect upon the site and immediate context during the construction phase, while effects upon the wider landscape are considered to be **Minor Adverse - Negligible**.

Operation (following Completion)

- 6.4 The site is not covered by any national or regional designation for landscape character or quality. It is not in or close to either a National Park or an AONB. Direct effects upon the landscape fabric of the site are considered to be of localised and limited significance. There are some landscape features of local merit within the site, the majority of which are retained as part of the proposals.

The Potteries and Churnet Valley NCA

- 6.5 The proposed residential development will result in direct impacts upon the landscape character of the site. However potential effects upon the wider landscape will be very limited. The new housing will occur within a very small area of 'The Potteries and Churnet Valley NCA' and will be directly adjacent to the existing Leek settlement edge. Although agricultural land and some limited lengths of hedgerow and two trees will be lost, the boundary trees to the southern and western portions of the site will be enhanced with substantial areas of woodland planting as part of the proposals. The development will have a relatively limited influence upon the surrounding landscape given the site's level of physical and visual containment afforded by the interaction of landform, intervening vegetation and the existing settlement edge. New landscaping will be incorporated to mitigate tree loss and to function as wildlife corridors. The resultant effect upon the NCA is assessed as **Negligible**.

Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys

- 6.6 The site and its immediate landscape is considered to be of Medium susceptibility to change and of Medium to High landscape value. It occupies a very small area of the 'Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys' local landscape character area. The site demonstrates some of the key

characteristics of the landscape type and being on the settlement edge is also strongly influenced by the surrounding urban form. The most notable change will be the loss of relatively low ecological value grassland and two trees located within the site. The new development is considered to result in a **Minor Adverse - Negligible** effect upon the '**Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys**' local landscape resource owing to the increase in built form within the landscape context. In terms of the site itself and its immediate context, the landscape effects will be similarly limited.

Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys Sub Type 1C – Cheddleton & Longsdon

- 6.7 The site is considered to be fairly typical of the landscape Sub Type **1C – Cheddleton & Longsdon**. Again, it is considered that the location of the site being close to the settlement edge of influences the character of the site and this area of the Sub Type. The new development is considered to result in a **Minor Adverse – Negligible** effect upon the Cheddleton & Longsdon Sub Type.
- 6.8 Inevitably there will be some initial disruption to the local landscape (as with any greenfield development) with the proposed development altering the predominant use of the land from farmland to residential use. The existing trees and woodland planting that surrounds the site will be retained and enhanced through provision of landscape buffers to the north western and south western perimeters of the development. To the south of the site new woodland planting will contribute to the local GI network. Overall, some 75% of the site area will be GI, providing long term benefits for biodiversity and recreation.

Leek Settlement Character Assessment

- 6.9 The site is located within an area highlighted within **the Leek Settlement Character Assessment** as 'important landscape setting to settlement'. However, the site area which has the most direct relationship with the town centre, lying between Pickwood Recreation Ground and the Conservation Area, will remain as open land to be utilised as a new community park. As such it is considered that there will be a **Negligible - Minor Adverse** effect on the 'important landscape setting to settlement' area.

Pickwood Recreation Ground

- 6.10 The adjacent recreation ground is well used. Views across the site towards the Leek skyline are available from the recreation ground. Five new homes are proposed to be located along the recreation ground's south western boundary which provides the opportunity for well-designed frontages that reflect the local character and increase natural surveillance of the adjacent open space. The northern portion of the site will be managed as a Community Park which will act as an extension of the recreation ground. With this area being proposed as open space the views across the site to the Leek town and skyline will be retained. Accessibility and connectivity will be enhanced to and from the ground.
- 6.11 The new development is considered to result in a **Moderate Adverse - Minor Adverse** effect upon Pickwood Recreation Ground.

Site and Immediate Context

- 6.12 Although the replacement of green fields with housing will have a notable effect on part of the site, the proposed open space, green corridors and new planting will help to balance the overall

change across the site landscape and offset any short term adverse effect. Green space will be retained to the north and south of the site.

- 6.13 Considering the above points it is judged that there will be a Medium magnitude of change, resulting in a **Moderate Adverse** landscape effect overall in the long term.

Landscape Features

- 6.14 **Landform:** The proposed development will result in only minor localised changes to the existing landform of the site where necessary to accommodate the proposals such as foundation work for the housing.
- 6.15 **Vegetation:** Minimal existing vegetation on the site will be removed including two trees (one of Fair Condition and Low Quality and one of Good condition and Moderate Quality as assessed within the application Arboricultural Assessment) within the southern field, short hedgerow lengths and some grassland. Significant new vegetation will be introduced through woodland planting, street trees and general landscaping within the housing development.
- 6.16 **Watercourses and Features:** Proposals will be sympathetic to the valley character of the north western extent of the site where an existing stream bounds the site. The stream will be retained and no development will take place adjacent to this feature. Public access will be enhanced.
- 6.17 **Land Use and Open Space:** The majority of the physical landscape resource lost will be agricultural land of low ecological value. The replacement of this land use with the new housing development and green infrastructure will not be significant in overall landscape terms. There will be significant gains in terms of accessible green infrastructure
- 6.18 **Public Rights of Way:** The site is not publicly accessible. However, as a result of the proposals, c.1km of new accessible routes will be provided.

Visual Effects

Zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV)

- 6.19 An approximate Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) has been prepared which has been generated through the baseline fieldwork (see Figure 8). The ZTV illustrates the potential area in which the Proposed Development is likely to be visible at the year of completion. Visibility of the Proposed Built Development *within* the ZTV will vary as a result of elements within it such as vegetation, landform and buildings that either individually or collectively provide localised screening and/or filtering of the view.
- 6.20 Further opportunities for views of the Proposed Built Development may potentially occur outside the ZTV, although it is considered the built form would be difficult to distinguish on account of intervening screening elements and overall distance which would reduce perceptibility. It is considered that these views, within the overall LVA process, would not give rise to any major change such that it would result in any marked adverse effects on these receptors.
- 6.21 The ZTV of the proposed development is mostly restricted to the site and immediate surrounding open space up to the extent of the Leek urban edge. The ZTV does extend to the southeast where views of the site will be available in the context of the open agricultural undulating land and existing development to the southeast of Leek.

Construction

- 6.22 All construction works would be carried out in full accordance with best practice procedures to protect and to minimise, as far as practicable, adverse impacts on visual amenity during the construction phases.
- 6.23 There will be some initial adverse effects on the local visual resource however this will be dependent on the visibility of the site by the visual receptors. Residents within close proximity of the site along Milltown Way and users of Pickwood Recreation Ground will also have views of construction features.
- 6.24 The development proposal is relatively small scale and the construction phase is likely to be of approximately 1-2 years. The construction effects are therefore likely to be short term but will be more severe for receptors in the immediate vicinity of the landscape. Effects are therefore considered to be range from **Major – Moderate Adverse** for sensitive receptors adjacent to the site and **Minor - Negligible** for receptors at greater distances to the site.

Operation (following Completion)

- 6.25 The following provides a summary of the visual effects assessment included at Appendix C.
- 6.26 The impact of the Proposed Development and the consequential effects on visual receptors has been assessed. On completion, it is judged the Proposed Development would result in a **Major – Moderate Adverse** effect on the immediate surroundings of the site, but a **Minor Adverse** impact on the wider landscape due to the effective screening provided by the existing housing, landform and mature woodland in the area.
- 6.27 Ten years after completion, the site would benefit from an established and maturing landscape of habitats to include structural planting, and grassland. Visual effects would again vary depending on the sensitivity and location of the receptors, resulting in a **Moderate – Minor Adverse** effect on the receptors in the immediate vicinity of the site and a **Minor – Negligible Adverse** effect on the wider landscape. In the longer term, these effects would continue to diminish.

Operation (following completion; full development in place)

- 6.28 The availability of open views into the application site are limited and broadly identified as being close to mid-range views from few sensitive receptors at specific points close to the site's perimeter. Localised topography, vegetation cover and built development restrict visibility of the site from the majority of the wider landscape.
- 6.29 The following provides a summary of the visual effects assessment included at Appendix C.

Residential Properties and Settlement

- 6.30 Visibility of the proposed development will be limited to a relatively small number of existing properties around the perimeter of the site together with a few in elevated positions further away; Milltown Way residents (Receptor D) immediately adjacent to the site are likely to experience ground and first floor level views of the new development, whereas views from development to the northeast of the recreation ground (Receptor C) and east of Leek town centre (Receptor H) are likely to be predominantly first floor level. Resultant visual effects are considered to be **Major**

Adverse to Moderate Adverse in the long term for properties immediately adjacent to the site and **Minor Adverse-Negligible** for properties further away.

- 6.31 There is limited intervisibility of the site and development upon it for the residents of dwellings at Pickwood Hall. The resultant visual effects are considered to be **Minor**, reducing to **Negligible** over time with the maturing of the substantial woodland planting along the southwestern site boundary.
- 6.32 Properties at Home Farm c.750m to the southeast of the site will have very limited partial views of the development in the context of the existing development along Mulberry Way. Visual effects are considered to be **Negligible** in the long term.

Pickwood Recreation Ground

- 6.33 Users of the adjacent Pickwood Recreation Ground will experience change to the south western boundary of the recreational area. Housing will be visible adjacent to this boundary and its mature hedgerow and trees. However, the existing views towards the Leek skyline are best experienced across the north western boundary and will not be affected by the proposals due to the northern portion of the site being retained as open space. The resultant visual effects are considered to be **Moderate Adverse** initially reducing to **Minor Adverse** overall in the long term.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and other Footpaths etc.

- 6.34 No PRoW pass through or run adjacent to the site itself. A footpath does run along part of the northern site boundary leading from the Recreation Ground towards Leek town centre. The proposed housing will be visible although the foreground views will be of the proposed open space that will form the Community Park. Resultant visual effects upon users of this footpath area considered to be **Moderate Adverse**, reducing to **Minor Adverse** in the long term.
- 6.35 Distant views are available from 'Footpath Leek Town 26' that connects Fynney Street and Cauldon Close. Views available are limited to those of the northern field within the site where no built development will take place. This area of the site will be retained as open space and as such the effect on views is considered to be **Negligible**.
- 6.36 Distant partial limited views will be available of the proposed development from the Staffordshire Moorlands Walks route at Mount Road. This route is also 'A Country Walk' promoted by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. Views of the upper extents of the proposed housing will just be visible in the context of the existing housing along Mulberry Way. Visual effects upon users of this route are considered to be **Negligible**.

Roads

- 6.37 Close range views of the proposed housing will be available to vehicular users of Milltown Way. Users of this route are predominantly residents of the housing along this road. Visual effects are considered to be **Minor Adverse** in the long term.
- 6.38 Users of the Ashbourne Road into Leek will have transient distant glimpse views of the proposed housing. The proposed housing will be viewed in the context of and as an extension to the existing development along Mulberry Way. The resultant visual effects are considered to be of **Negligible** significance.

Other Visual Receptors (i.e. Recreational Users/Designations)**Night Time Visual Effects**

- 6.39 The site is located at the edge of Leek with existing residential development located close by to the west, north and east. The baseline night time landscape therefore does include some light spill from the urban area. The development proposals will inevitably result in an extension to the existing light spill, due to the new housing being lit, together with the new internal road.
- 6.40 Built development will be limited to the flatter more central parts of the site being the more enclosed portion of the site. Landscaping will help to filter and soften the overall appearance of the built form and assist in reducing the visual effects of increased light sources upon the surrounding landscape once the development is operational.
- 6.41 From a distance, it is considered that whilst there is likely to be some illumination from the development proposals (as with any new development) it will be observed against the existing light spill and individual light sources visible within Leek. Proposed new landscape planting within the development will help limit, filter and screen views towards individual light sources such as new street lights, car head lights etc. whilst the specification, positioning and control of new light sources will help to ensure that the lighting does not contribute to light spill on the night sky.
- 6.42 The proposed development will follow latest best practice guidance to minimise and control light pollution upon the surrounding landscape in accordance with the Local Authority standards.
- 6.43 Overall, visual effects of the lighting are not considered to result in a significant harmful effect to night skies or surrounding receptors. Resultant effects will be localised and are considered to be **Minor Adverse** in the long term.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This LVA has assessed landscape character and visual resources, and the resulting landscape visual effects of the Proposed Development on the receiving landscape and visual resource. The landscape and visual effects have been considered in relation to the proposed land uses and the parameters that are defined on the application's Development Framework Plan.
- 7.2 The Development Framework plan has been sensitively designed with consideration given to the baseline information and findings of the LVA. The layout has been designed to ensure that the development is set within a substantial Green Infrastructure network which incorporates existing boundary vegetation and provides further perimeter boundary planting to the south western boundary and within the south portion of the site adjacent to Pickwood Hall. A substantial area of open space will be retained to the north of the site that will act as an informal extension to the adjacent Pickwood Recreation Ground whilst also retaining views currently available across the northern extent of the site to the Leek Conservation Area with its distinctive skyline. New footpath links will be created to allow access to the wider footpath network in particular the link to Leek town centre.
- 7.3 The site is located adjacent to the settlement edge of Leek town and is set within a local landscape character context with a medium-high landscape value and a medium susceptibility to change. However, there are no nationally designated landscape resources which would be affected by the proposed development. As such, the site has been assessed as being able to accommodate a well-designed and carefully considered development as defined by the Development Framework drawing.
- 7.4 The section of the site where built development will take place is assessed as being visually well contained in the wider landscape and is mostly screened from surrounding wider views by the neighbouring residential development and by the areas of woodland in the locality as well as landform and field boundaries. There will be a change to the south western aspect of Pickwood Recreation Ground due to new residential development. However, the principle vista towards the town centre and its landmarks will be preserved. Whilst there will be inevitable adverse impacts on the landscape and visual receptors during construction and after completion, visual effects are considered to be no more than moderately adverse in the long term. Impacts are therefore considered to be acceptable.