

Land at Chipping Ongar

Landscape and Visual Appraisal
December 2016

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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2008.

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o.o Summary

L & Q New Homes are promoting a site on the eastern edge of Chipping Ongar for residential development. Despite being considered a potential location for growth in the Issues and Options stage of the emerging Local Plan, in July 2012, The Site has not been included as a proposed residential site allocation in the Consultation Draft Local Plan (October 2016). The explanation for the omission of The Site as a proposed site allocation within the Consultation Draft Local Plan indicates that this option would “*significantly harm the Green Belt, compromise the historic setting of Ongar, and ... [is] more sensitive in landscape terms. Expansion to the east of the settlement could also harm the Scheduled Monument Ongar Castle*”.

Green Belt matters are dealt with in a separate report. However, this landscape and visual appraisal concludes that residential development within The Site could be accommodated, with an appropriate landscape strategy and layout, without undue harm to the character and appearance of the countryside east of Chipping Ongar for the following reasons:

- Historically, Chipping Ongar was deliberately located in a visually prominent location at the end of a ridgeline, above the confluence of the River Roding and Cripsey Brook. The existing settlement pattern descends down the valley slopes to around the 45m contour, which could be reflected in the development. This would also ensure development was outside the Flood Zone.
- The sensitivity attributed to The Site and the surrounding landscape east of Chipping Ongar within the Epping Forest Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (EFSELSS) is questionable. The EFSELESS has a number of shortcomings in its method and application. Whilst The Site is visually prominent in some views from the east, proposed planting associated with the river corridor, including blocks of woodland, would help to visually screen the proposed development, tying it to its landscape context and reinforcing the river corridor as the boundary to the settlement.
- The development provides an opportunity to restore Ongar Castle and re-emphasise its significance at the centre of the town’s historic core, setting the Castle within an area of public open space.
- Emanating from Ongar Castle, the hedgerow alignments (both existing and historic) could form green corridors that connect open space around Ongar Castle with the river corridor. These green corridors would provide the structuring elements to proposed development areas and form the interface between people, wildlife and the town’s natural features. They would also act as view corridors to the castle, highlighting its importance at the centre of the town.
- A landscape led masterplan could also help to soften those parts of the eastern edge of Chipping Ongar that are currently hard and visible from surrounding areas.
- The existing rights of way network could be retained and enhanced as part of the proposed development.
- The Site could deliver a potential strategic relief road, with access gained at its northern and southern boundaries.

The two small parcels of land north of the A414 but within The Site have been identified as able to accommodate residential development due to their containment by vegetation and road corridors and their association with other housing along High Ongar Road.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1. Appointment and Brief

LDA Design were appointed by L & Q New Homes in December 2016 to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) in relation to a potential residential development on land to the east of Chipping Ongar ('The Site'). The purpose of this appraisal is to identify the landscape and visual issues associated with The Site, in order to inform a landscape strategy for The Site and its future development. This appraisal does not consider the issue of Green Belt as this is the subject of a separate report for the same Site.

1.2. Methodology

This study comprises the following:

- A desktop review of current statutory and non-statutory documents
- A landscape and visual appraisal of The Site
- A survey and analysis of key landscape features within The Site
- A landscape strategy to inform the development concept and illustrate how appropriate mitigation can be built into the masterplan.

The Site and surrounding area were visited during November 2016 to undertake The Site survey and landscape and visual appraisal, following earlier work undertaken for the same site earlier in 2016.

The LVA has been prepared, so far as appropriate to a preliminary appraisal of this nature, in accordance with the approaches identified in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition, 2013).

1.3. The Site

The Site is located immediately to the east of the Chipping Ongar town centre (see drawing 4823 100). The Site slopes from west to east, falling approximately 20m in elevation. It forms part of the wider rolling landscape that surrounds Chipping Ongar. The Site descends down towards the River Roding and its tributaries, which define much of the western and southern Site boundaries. The Site comprises a combination of larger arable fields, smaller fields of grassland and areas of woodland. In the vicinity of The Site, fields vary in size, with arable fields generally being large and smaller pastoral fields, and are irregular in shape. Field boundaries are formed by tree belts and hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Woodland cover is prevalent within The Site and the wider area surrounding Chipping Ongar, particularly along watercourses. Chelmsford Road, (A414) is located immediately north of The Site. The Site includes Chipping Ongar Castle, a remnant motte and bailey castle that is now largely wooded. There are two small parcels of land that form part of The Site that are located north of the A414.

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2.0 Planning Context

2.1. Introduction

This section addresses the relevant planning context. The Site lies within the administrative boundary of Epping Forest District Council; drawing 4823_101 shows the relevant planning constraints that are applicable to The Site and the surrounding area.

The following sections give an overview of the main planning documents applicable to The Site with policies directly relevant to the landscape and visual appraisal discussed below.

2.2. Local Planning Policy

2.2.1. Epping Forest District Council – Combined Local Plan (1998) & Local Plan Alteration (2006) – published 2008

The Epping Forest District Council Local Plan was first adopted in 1998 and subsequently altered in 2006 to update some policy areas in line with revised Government guidance. The combined policy document, dated 2008, sets out a framework of policies to enable the Council to control most forms of development. It is intended that this will be replaced by the emerging 'new' Epping Forest Local Plan. The majority of policies have been 'saved' until they are superseded by the new Local Plan.

The policies that are of particular relevance to this landscape and visual appraisal are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Policy GB7A – Conspicuous Development states that the Council will refuse planning permission for development conspicuous from within or beyond the Green Belt which would have an excessive adverse impact upon the openness, rural character or visual amenities of the Green Belt.

Policy HC2- Ancient Landscapes states that the Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect the nature and physical appearance of ancient landscapes.

The Site does not contain nor is it located in close proximity to an ancient landscape.

Policy HC3- Registered Parkland states that the Council will not grant planning permission for development which could adversely affect the areas of registered parkland.

The nearest Registered Parkland is located approximately 1.6 km north west of The Site and there is no intervisibility between the parkland and The Site.

Policy HC6- Character, Appearance and Setting of Conservation Areas states that within or adjacent to a conservation area, the Council will not grant planning permission for any development, or give listed building consent or consent for works to trees, which could be detrimental to the character, appearance or setting of the conservation area.

The Site contains Chipping Ongar Conservation Area. Also within the vicinity of The Site are Conservation Areas at Great Stony Park to the north west and High Ongar village to the east.

Policy RST2- Enhance Rights Of Way Network states that, in determining planning applications, the Council may seek:

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- (i) the appropriate expansion and enhancement of the rights of way network; and
- (ii) to secure public access onto privately-owned land for informal leisure purposes.

Policy DBE4- Design In The Green Belt states that within the Green Belt, new buildings will be required to ensure that:

- (i) their location respects the wider landscape setting of The Site; and
- (ii) they are of a design which respects local character in terms of traditional plan form and detailing.

The Site is currently located within the Green Belt, although a process of reviewing Green belt boundaries within the District is underway.

Policy LL1- Rural Landscape states that the Council will continue to act to:

- (i) conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the countryside; and
- (ii) encourage the considerate use and enjoyment of the countryside by the public.

Subject to specific circumstances, particular attention will be paid to:

- (a) the needs of agriculture, woodland planting and management, and other habitat and wildlife conservation;
- (b) the provision of facilities for public access and informal recreation and to enable quiet enjoyment;
- (c) the protection of historic features and their settings; and
- (d) the achievement and conservation of visually attractive landscapes.

Policy LL2- Inappropriate Rural Development states that the Council will not grant planning permission for development in the countryside unless it is satisfied that the proposal will:

- (i) respect the character of the landscape; and/or
- (ii) enhance the appearance of the landscape; and
- (iii) where appropriate, involve the management of part or all of the remainder of The Site to enhance its contribution to the landscape.

Policy LL3- Edge of Settlement states that the Council will require proposals for development on the edges of settlements to show a sensitive appreciation of their effect upon the landscape by:

- (i) extensive landscaping; and/or
- (ii) reduced development densities; and/or
- (iii) the use of subdued materials and colours; and/or
- (iv) other techniques aimed at softening or improving their impact.

Policy LL10- Adequacy of Provision for Landscape Retention states that the Council will refuse to grant planning permission for any development which it considers makes inadequate provision for the retention of:

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- (i) trees; or
- (ii) natural features, particularly wildlife habitats such as woodlands, hedgerows, ponds and watercourses; or
- (iii) man-made features of historical, archaeological or landscape significance.

Policy LL11- Landscaping Schemes states that the Council will:

- (i) refuse planning permission for any development which makes inadequate provision for landscaping;
- (ii) not approve landscaping schemes which:
 - (a) are inappropriate because they fail to take account of the setting or intended use of the development; or
 - (b) are ineffective because they would be unlikely to retain trees and other existing landscape features or to establish new long-term planting

2.2.2. Epping Forest District Council – Draft Local Plan Consultation 2016 – published 2008

Epping Forest District Council is currently consulting on its Draft Local Plan (between 31st October and 12th December 2016) which will guide the future growth of the district to 2033. The Draft Local Plan sets out strategic policies and identifies sites that the District Council have deemed the most suitable and sustainable for development and regeneration.

The draft policies that are of particular relevance to this landscape and visual appraisal are:

SP4 – Place Shaping

SP5 – Green Belt and District Open Land

SP6 – Natural Environment, Landscape Character and Green Infrastructure

DM1 – Habitat protection and improving biodiversity

DM 2 – Landscape Character and Ancient Landscapes

DM 5 – Green Infrastructure: Design of Development

DM 7 – Heritage Assets

DM 9 – High quality design

DM 17 – Protecting and enhancing watercourses and flood defences

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2.3. Other Planning and Guidance Documents

Epping Forest District Council has published other planning and guidance documents that are of relevance to this Landscape and Visual Appraisal. These documents are addressed in greater detail later in this document and are as follows:

- Epping Forest Landscape Studies - Landscape Character Assessment (January 2010)
- Epping Forest Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (January 2010)

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3.0 Landscape Context

3.1. Introduction

This section considers the context within which The Site is located and provides guidance on how this context may influence the development potential of The Site.

3.2. Landscape Character

3.2.1. Topography

The topography of The Site and the surrounding area is shown on drawing 4823_102. The Site forms part of the wider rolling landscape that surrounds Chipping Ongar. The topography is heavily influenced by the River Roding and its tributaries, with the main watercourses located within a broad valley floor and a series of ridges and valleys created by the tributaries joining the main valley. The older areas of Chipping Ongar lie at the end of the ridgeline between the valleys of River Roding and Cripsey Brook, with development over time having spread north along the ridgeline and south on the opposite side of the Cripsey Brook valley.

The western edge of The Site, adjacent to the existing settlement edge, lies on the ridgeline and is relatively flat. The majority of The Site descends eastwards down the valley slopes, from the ridgeline towards the River Roding. On the opposite side of the valley lies the village of High Ongar. The topography gradually rises to heights of up to 100m further to the east and west of the village which form the horizon in a rolling wooded landscape.

3.2.2. Vegetation

The rural landscape around Chipping Ongar is well vegetated, with many areas of woodland, strong hedgerows and numerous hedgerow trees. There is significant woodland cover associated with the valley floor, as well as with some of the older areas of Chipping Ongar and on the valley slopes further south of The Site. This woodland generally limits visibility of the lower valley slopes, with Chipping Ongar seen on the skyline above the woodland. Local roads and A-roads are generally lined by hedgerows and trees, which substantially reduce views of the wider landscape for road users.

Within The Site, two hedgerows containing numerous mature trees descend the slope eastwards, dividing up the main body of The Site. Towards the southern boundary there is a break in the woodland cover, though several mature riparian trees line Cripsey Brook. Several mature field Oak trees are dispersed throughout the southern field.

3.2.3. Settlement Pattern

Generally, the settlement of Chipping Ongar is positioned on the ridgeline above the valleys of Cripsey Brook and the River Roding. The historic core of the town is located towards the southern end of the ridgeline, overlooking the confluence of both valleys. Settlement has historically been linear, running north south along the A128. More recent developments have expanded the town at the northern and southern ends and descending the valley sides of the Cripsey Brook valley.

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The wider landscape is relatively sparsely settled, with smaller villages often found in similar locations to Chipping Ongar, at the end of a ridgeline overlooking a valley. High Ongar provides a further example of a settlement having straddled a valley, all be it a smaller tributary of the River Roding, and being located at the end of a ridgeline.

3.2.4. Historic Environment

The historic core of Chipping Ongar is located at the centre of the town and is defined by its Conservation Area (see drawing 4823_101), which includes the Castle (remnant motte and bailey) and the southern end of the High Street. The footprint of the motte and bailey defines the western edge of The Site, but is now overgrown and has no public access. There are numerous listed buildings along the High Street as well as along the small lanes that lead to the Castle.

Beyond the settlement edge, the historic setting to the town and its castle has been eroded over time. The Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Project recognises the majority of The Site as historic fields but with boundaries lost, although there remain remnants of 18th-19th Century enclosure adjacent to Ongar Castle and to the south east of The Site along part of the River Roding. Woodland within the Roding valley, at least in so far as it relates to The Site, is not ancient.

Further afield to the north west of The Site is Great Stony Park Conservation Area and High Ongar village Conservation Area to the east.

3.3. Landscape Character Assessments

3.3.1. National / Regional Landscape Character

The Site lies within the Northern Thames Basin (NCA 111), as identified in the Character of England Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map (2005). This national character area provides the context for understanding the landscape around Chipping Ongar. It is described as a “*diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys*”.

The East of England Regional character assessment identifies four Landscape Character Types within the 3km of The Site, which include Valley Settled Farmlands, Valley Meadowlands, Woodland Hills and Ridges and Woodland Plateau Claylands. The Site is located within Lowland Settled Claylands Landscape Type. The boundaries of these character types do not directly reflect those of the character types and areas identified in the District LCA, although there are similarities in the locations of different character types. This is an indication that there is a gradual transition between the character types in most cases and that the boundaries are not clearly defined on the ground.

3.3.2. Local Landscape Character

Epping Forest Landscape Studies - Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

The Site is situated in the Middle Roding (B3) character area, as identified in the Epping Forest Landscape Studies - Landscape Character Assessment, which is described as a patchwork of grassland and arable fields adjacent to the river corridor, with long belts of sinuous woodland creating an intermittent sense of enclosure, along with other smaller pockets of deciduous woodland.

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The key characteristics are described as:

- *“A patchwork of large, predominantly arable fields are situated within the wide valley floor of the middle section of the Roding Valley;*
- *Long belts of sinuous deciduous woodland provide a sense of enclosure on river banks;*
- *The noise and movement associated with the road corridor disturbs overall sense of tranquillity;*
- *Field pattern is delineated by a network of mature hedgerows, which contain deciduous trees in places and are gappy in others;*
- *Narrow road corridors which are lined with trees and mature hedgerows;*
- *Woodland patches contribute to the sense of that this a ‘wooded’ landscape as you move through it;*
- *Settlement pattern comprises a series of scattered farmsteads and the small, nucleated village of High Ongar in the south of the area...”*

The following are also listed in relation to the visual character of the area:

- *“Views to moving traffic on the M25 road corridor from the south-western edge of the area;*
- *In the south-western corner of the area, views to the settlement edges of Chipping Ongar are a feature;*
- *Views across farmland are often limited by patches and belts of mature deciduous woodland that create a sense of enclosure;*
- *Views to electricity pylons which cross the river valley and are dominant vertical elements within certain views across this area.”*

The landscape character assessment identifies potential encroachment of urban development into the valley east of Chipping Ongar as a key planning issue and suggests that any new development on the valley sides should be small-scale and respond to historic settlement pattern. The character assessment also indicates that the Middle Roding character area is considered to *“have moderate to high sensitivity to change”*, due to the sense of remoteness and tranquillity created by being located away from the M25 road corridor potentially being affected by the introduction of new development.

3.3.3. **Capacity Studies**

Epping Forest Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (EFSELSS), 2010

The Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study provides an analysis of sensitive landscape and environmental features around the edges of the twenty-two principal settlements within the District. The Study assesses how areas of similar landscape character and environmental features around the settlements contribute to their structure, character and setting.

Chipping Ongar is one of the settlements for which the fringes of the town have been assessed. This EFSELSS was intended to inform the appraisal of land allocations in the emerging Local Development Framework (now superseded by the emerging new Local Plan). It also outlines the extent to which these areas of landscape contribute towards the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, although the element of the study has been largely superseded by more recent Green Belt review work undertaken by Epping Forest DC.

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The study identifies six broad Landscape Setting Areas (LSAs) around Chipping Ongar. The Site falls within LSA 3, which stretches from Boarded Barns Farm in the north to the A128 in the south and from the eastern edge of Chipping Ongar to Mill Lane, High Ongar and Three Forests Way to the west (see Appendix 1 for extract from study). The study evaluates LSA3 as having a **high sensitivity** to change, meaning the LSA is considered desirable to safeguard in landscape terms and has a significant role in contributing to the structure, character and setting of the settlement.

The EFSELSS is discussed further in Section 4.2.

3.4. Access & Movement

Drawing 4823_100 identifies major and local roads within the area, as well as Public Rights of Way

3.4.1. Local Road Network

The Site is well served by a number of major roads, in particular the A414 to the north, which acts as the main route between Harlow and Chelmsford; and which connects The Site to London and the M25 via the M11. The Site also abuts Chipping Ongar High Street to the west, although this is unlikely to be used as a vehicular access, and Stondon Road, a local road on The Site's south eastern edge that connects the Chipping Ongar to the neighbouring villages of Stondon Massey and Doddinghurst.

3.4.2. Public Rights of Way and Recreational Routes

The Public Rights of Way (PROW) network is relatively extensive within the area surrounding The Site, providing a good level of connectivity to the wider countryside and the centre of Chipping Ongar.

Several public footpaths, also serving as the routes of the Three Forest Way, Essex Way and St Peter's Way Long Distance Recreation Routes, run through The Site from the centre of the town. The Three Forest Way, a route that runs through Hatfield Forest, the Hainault Forest and Epping Forest, runs along the High St, before turning east through the northern part of The Site, heading towards High Ongar.

The Essex Way approaches Chipping Ongar from the west crossing Cripsey Brook and the High St, before entering The Site via Castle St. This route then runs north over the A414 towards Fyfield village. The St Peter's Way long distance footpath originates on Castle St at Chipping Ongar, heading east through The Site towards High Ongar.

To the south of The Site, a series of footpaths run from the edge of Chipping Ongar and along the valley bottom of the River Roding. The fields south of Cripsey Brook, as far as Stondon Road, also have informal public access throughout them. Access to the river corridor does not currently continue along the eastern boundary of The Site.

3.5. Visual Environment of the Existing Site

As shown on drawing 4823_103, The Site consists of a number of fields which are predominantly arable but which also include grassland, woodland and the wooded grounds of the remnant motte and bailey castle. The Site is approximately 74.8Ha in size. The main body of The Site is divided by hedgerows that run east west across The Site, between the

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Castle and the River Roding. The Site boundaries are generally defined by hedgerows to the west and the River Roding and woodland blocks to the east.

The Site is generally not visible from the High Street of Chipping Ongar due to intervening buildings. However, there are direct views into The Site from some locations on the western edge of High Ongar, particularly properties along Longfields to the south west and along parts of Mayflower Way, Roding View and Onslow Gardens to the north west. These locations have almost no vegetation along the settlement edge, allowing views towards The Site but also creating a settlement edge that is very visible from the surrounding landscape.

The sloping valleys sides are more visible from the wider landscape due to their topography, particularly from the valley to the south and some of the surrounding ridgelines to the east. While the woodland blocks and hedgerows restrict visibility into The Site from parts of the immediate surroundings, the topography allows views over this vegetation in more open areas of lower ground or from areas of higher ground.

The two smaller parcels of land north of the A414 are generally well contained by vegetation, with the exception of views into the eastern most parcel from Chelmsford Road where there is currently no vegetation. Although there are residential properties north of Chelmsford Road, almost none of these have any views into the smaller parcels. Views from the A414 are also extremely limited.

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4.0 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

4.1. Visual Appraisal

The extent of visibility within The Site and from the surrounding landscape has been established using a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study and field based observations and is documented from a number of viewpoint locations.

4.1.1. Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Study

The ZTV study was generated using a notional layout, indicating areas of potential visibility for the highest parts of The Site, on the assumption that the proposed housing would be up to 10m above ground level (the equivalent of 2.5 storeys). The model does not include hedgerows or individual and small groups of trees, which in reality provide a considerable degree of screening. Areas shown as having potential visibility may have visibility of the development screened by local features such as trees, hedgerows, embankments or buildings.

Extent of Theoretical Visibility

As can be seen from drawing 4823_104, in broad terms the terrain of The Site is theoretically visible across a broad extent of the study area, although screened from view by the existing settlement to the north west and south west of Chipping Ongar. The ZTV shows that the landform of The Site and any potential development on it would be visible from the majority of locations within 1km of The Site. Between 1 and 2km areas of visibility begin to fragment due to intervening built form, topography and large areas of woodland, with woodland particularly becoming a factor to the north east and south east of The Site.

The ZTV continues to fragment between 2 and 3km from The Site though it remains largely intact up to 3kms to the east, where the landform is elevated. To the west, the ZTV still shows areas of visibility up to 3km though this is increasingly broken up by woodland blocks and landform.

Extent of Actual Visibility

As noted above, areas shown as having theoretical visibility may have visibility of the development screened by local features such as trees, hedgerows, embankments or buildings. The anticipated main area of visibility, based on site observations, is much reduced in reality compared to that shown on drawing 4823_104.

Site observations confirm that views of The Site at ground level would not be possible from the west of Chipping Ongar through a combination of intervening built form and woodland. Where potential development might be visible it would be seen in the context of existing built form as shown by viewpoint 6.

Views from locations to the north would be very limited beyond the A414, due to a combination of intervening hedgerows lining roadsides and woodland in the River Roding valley. Visibility to the south would be likely to extend up to 1km, as far as Church Wood and Langford Bridge, as shown by viewpoint 7. The greatest extent of visibility is likely to be to the east of The Site, as far as Kings St. The upper valley sides within The Site are likely to be visible, though the layering effect of numerous hedgerows and trees would reduce the availability of views to a few elevated locations.

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4.1.2. Local Views

Views of The Site are predominantly experienced by residents in adjoining settlement areas and High Ongar. Occasional views are available for road users in close proximity to The Site, such as on Stondon Road to the south, while glimpsed views are possible from the A414 as well as Mill Lane and The Street in High Ongar. The clearest views are available from locations on the Public Rights of Way network local to The Site., in particular from the Public Rights of Way south of Cripsey Brook and the Long Distance Recreational Routes that pass through The Site.

Viewpoint 1 shows the view experienced from the public right of way south of the A414 as it enters The Site. This shows the screening effect of the woodland blocks and hedgerows to the north of The Site.

Viewpoint 2 shows the view experienced by users on the Three Forests Way looking west from High Ongar. Here the view looks over the River Roding valley towards the edge of Chipping Ongar. The Site forms the sloping land to the centre of the view, with Ongar Castle visible on the skyline.

Viewpoint 3 represents the view experienced from the Essex Way as it passes northwards through The Site. From here the western edge of High Ongar is clearly visible, though partially screened by woodland on the valley floor. Views to the north and south are largely screened by hedgerows and trees, even in winter views.

Viewpoint 4 is also from the Essex Way and St Peter's Way as they enter The Site from Castle St, looking south eastward over the valley. The southern edge of High Ongar is visible above the intervening vegetation while the industrial buildings on Stondon Road are also notable.

Viewpoint 5 shows the view experienced from the public right of way that runs south of The Site between Stondon Road and Bushy Lea. From this location the sloping landform within The Site can be clearly seen rising from the river up to the eastern edge of the town. The wooded Castle mound is notable on the horizon. Several veteran oak trees can be seen within the arable field, which demark the location of former field boundaries.

Viewpoint 6 looks west towards Chipping Ongar from the Essex Way, east of Greensted Hall. This view shows how far settlement on the western edge of Chipping Ongar descends the valley side. Residential areas such as at Bowes Drive and Meadow View can be seen on the lower valley sides, while housing on Mayflower Way and at Great Stoney Park can be seen occupying the ridgeline. Ongar Castle becomes barely distinguishable amongst other vegetation in the town.

Viewpoint 7 looks north west towards Chipping Ongar from a high point along Stondon Road. The majority of The Site is not visible due to intervening landform and woodland. Chipping Ongar is visible on the skyline, with the castle mound a feature of the view. Although Chipping Ongar appears well wooded, housing is present in the view, along much of the skyline, notably at Great Stony Park to the north and Stondon Road to the south of Chipping Ongar, as well as intermittent locations between.

Viewpoint 8 shows one of the smaller parcels north of the A414.

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4.2. Landscape Character and Sensitivity Appraisal

As discussed in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3, The Site lies within the Middle Roding character area which is given a moderate to high sensitivity to change, and Landscape Setting Area (LSA) 3 which is given a high sensitivity to change. The assessment of LSA 3 undertaken in the EFSELSS provides the more detailed assessment intended to inform the appraisal of land allocations in the emerging Local Development Framework which is of direct relevance to this report, and is discussed below.

4.2.1. EFSELSS Method

Section 1.5 of the EFSELSS describes how the assessment comprises desk-based analysis of landscape character, historic landscape character and designated environmental constraints before identifying preliminary LSAs, followed by field survey analysis where the LSA boundaries were refined and the overall landscape sensitivity of each LSA defined. The EFSELSS based its method on Topic Paper 6 (TOPIC PAPER 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Countryside Agency).

The EFSELSS states that overall landscape sensitivity is a function of landscape character sensitivity and visual sensitivity and is defined as follows:

‘The inherent sensitivity of the landscape itself, irrespective of the type of change that may be under consideration. It considers the sensitivity of the landscape resource, its stability of character, the degree to which that character is robust enough to be able to recuperate from loss or damage.’

Landscape character sensitivity is defined as ‘the degree to which a particular area of landscape is vulnerable to change with potentially adverse effects on its character’, and visual sensitivity as ‘the degree to which a particular view or visual experience is vulnerable to change with potentially adverse effects on character’.

The EFSELSS based its landscape character sensitivity on the extent to which each LSA reflects local landscape character (i.e. the character of the wider landscape character it sits within), giving judgements of either Positive, Moderate or Limited as follows:

Positive

The structure of the landscape is apparent and the character of the setting area has many features that are representative of local landscape character (as defined within the Epping Forest District Landscape Character Assessment).

Moderate

The character of the setting area contains some features representative of the local landscape character. There are, however, some incongruous elements but these do not detract from the overall setting of the settlement.

Limited

The character of the setting area contains few features that are representative of the local landscape character and incongruous elements detract from the setting of the settlement.’

The EFSELESS undertakes a similar exercise in relation to the number of natural, cultural and historic features, identifying whether the LSA has Many, Some or Few intact sensitive landscape and historic landscape features.

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Visual sensitivity for each LSA was determined by an assessment of its intervisibility (*‘the visibility of this area from other landscape setting areas or when viewed against a backdrop of adjacent landscape setting areas from key viewpoints’*), and its visual prominence (*‘the extent to which an area is visually dominant within views from surrounding areas, resulting from its topographical prominence and overlying pattern of landscape elements’*).

A matrix setting out the judgements of landscape character sensitivity, visual sensitivity and overall sensitivity of each LSA was then prepared.

4.2.2. The results of the EFSELESS at Chipping Ongar with particular reference to LSA 3

Landscape sensitivity

The EFSELESS summarises the visual character, historic character and designated environmental constraints of the landscape around Chipping Ongar before presenting an overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to change. The resulting assessment for the SLA that The Site lies within is:

LSA	Landscape Character Sensitivity									Visual Sensitivity						Overall Sensitivity to change			
	Represent'n of typical character			Number of sensitive natural, cultural and historic features			Overall Landscape Character Sensitivity			Inter-visibility		Visual Prominence			Overall Visual Sensitivity				
	Positive	Moderate	Limited	Many	Some	Few	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low	
LSA 3																			High

The visual character of Chipping Ongar is summarised in twelve bullet points and a plan. LSA 3, which extends along the entire landscape east of the settlement up to the edge of High Ongar, and around part of the northern and southern edges of Chipping Ongar, is shown has having:

- a soft green urban edge with short sections of hard urban edge;
- several areas of urban greenspace within the fringes of Chipping Ongar (one of these comprising playing fields adjoins The Site);
- urban gateways [on roads] to the town (none of these lie within or adjoin The Site);
- The Site of Ongar Castle is raised upon a mound and provides panoramic views of the surrounding land (this lies on the eastern edge adjoining SLA 3 and within The Site. However, there is no public access to the castle mound at present);
- several Public Rights of Way (including a number which cross The Site);

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- recreational paths comprising the Essex Way, the Three Forests Way and St Peter's Way (which all cross or run along the edge of The Site);
- key short distance views of Chipping Ongar and High Ongar from the recreational paths between the settlements, including views across The Site;
- medium sized strips of woodland scattered around both settlements which limit views towards the settlement edges (including woodlands along the River Roding on the eastern edge of The Site); and
- Figure 12.1 shows 'visually significant slopes' to the east of Chipping Ongar and the west of High Ongar (the slope to the east of Chipping Ongar runs through the western edge of The Site). Visually significant slopes also occur in LSAs 2 and 6 to the north and west of the settlement.

This leads to the conclusion within the EFSELESS that SLA 3 has 'High' intervisibility and 'High' visual prominence, and a 'High' overall visual sensitivity.

The EFSELESS then describes the historic character of Chipping Ongar in seven bullet points and a plan. LSA 3 is shown as having:

- a scattering of pre 18th Century fields (which occur on all sides of the settlement and in all SLAs but none lie within The Site);
- two small areas of 18th to 19th Century enclosure which lie partly within The Site;
- many areas of medium to large sized historic fields which have suffered post 1950's boundary loss (this comprises the majority of The Site);
- two Conservation areas including one partly within The Site; and
- Veteran trees scattered throughout the landscape (with a very small number within The Site).

The EFSELESS then describes analysis of the critical and less critical environmental designations within Chipping Ongar fringes related to nature conservation, the historic environment, landscape and other aspects. It lists six 'Critical' constraints (statutory designations) and one 'Less / Moderate Critical' constraint (non-statutory). LSA 3 is shown as having:

- one Scheduled Monument in the fringes of Chipping Ongar (Ongar Castle) (this lies within the western edge of The Site);
- floodplains associated with Cripsey Brook and the River Roding (which both fall partly within The Site); and
- Conservation Areas within Chipping Ongar.

The EFSELESS then summarises the key sensitive landscape/environmental features that are considered desirable to safeguard within the fringes of Chipping Ongar in six bullet points. Those that relate to SLA 3 comprise:

- patches of sensitive historic landscape within the fringes of Chipping Ongar and High Ongar, including the two small 18th to 19th Century enclosure areas within SLA 3 and partly within The Site;

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- areas of urban greenspace character (including the playing fields to the west of SLA 3 and The Site);
- the scattered veteran trees (a few of which lie within The Site);
- the interconnected network of public footpaths (some of which cross The Site); and
- areas of floodplain (two areas that lie partly within The Site).

This leads to the conclusion within the EFSELESS that SLA 3 has a 'Positive' representation of typical character, 'Few' sensitive natural, cultural and historic features, and that it is of 'Moderate' overall landscape sensitivity.

Sensitivity of LSA 3

Considering the High overall visual sensitivity and the Moderate overall landscape character sensitivity, the EFSELESS gives LSA 3 a rating of High overall sensitivity to change, stating that LSAs with high or moderate overall sensitivity are considered desirable to safeguard in landscape terms and are considered to have a significant role in contributing to the structure, character and setting of the settlement. This is caveated with the following sentence:

'Further assessment work would, however, be needed to examine site-specific landscape and visual sensitivities.'

4.2.3. Commentary on the EFSELESS sensitivity assessment

The EFSELESS has a number of shortcomings in its method and application, and the judgements and conclusions given for the whole LSA do not all apply to the detail of The Site itself. The Site is less sensitive than the judgement given for the whole LSA, and does have capacity for the proposed development.

The assessment of sensitivity to change in the EFSELESS is made '*irrespective of the type of change that may be under consideration*'. It does not differentiate between the sensitivity of an area of landscape to developments of different types; for example, between residential development and other potential development such as commercial, industrial, energy or infrastructure. The residential development proposed within The Site would be an extension to the existing residential areas on the edge of Chipping Ongar, and the land is not of 'High' overall sensitivity to this type of development, whereas it would be more sensitive to other types of development that do not respond positively and sensitively to the local urban and rural context (such as large scale industry).

The Site contains limited '*key sensitive landscape/environmental features that are considered desirable to safeguard within the fringes of Chipping Ongar*' listed in the EFSELESS and summarised above, and none that would preclude development of the type proposed. They can all be retained and incorporated into a sensitively designed urban extension within The Site, supporting the judgement that the land is not of 'High' overall sensitivity to residential development where it is designed to respect and respond to local landscape character and features.

The EFSELESS based its landscape character sensitivity on the extent to which each LSA reflects local landscape character, but did not consider the urbanising influence on character of the existing urban context of Chipping Ongar. For example, residential development on the eastern edge of the town, particularly south of Cripsey Brook and north west of The Site,

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is clearly visible from The Site and countryside adjacent to The Site, and this has an urbanising influence on the character of the 'rural' landscape which reduces its sensitivity to further residential development. This is not mentioned or considered in the EFSELSS assessment of SLA 3. Chipping Ongar was also clearly intended to be located in a prominent position in the landscape, at the end of the ridgeline and overlooking the confluence of two river valleys. In addition, the two smaller parcels of land north of the A414 are much more enclosed than is typical and could easily accommodate built development with very little effect beyond their own boundaries.

The degree to which a LSA reflects local landscape character as undertaken in the EFSELSS is not a robust and comprehensive way of assessing landscape sensitivity. Just because a LSA reflects the character of a wider landscape character area does not necessarily lead to the LSA being of high sensitivity. LSA 3 lies within the Middle Rodding character area, which is given a moderate to high sensitivity to change. However, the factors identified in the Epping Forest Landscape Studies - Landscape Character Assessment as resulting in this degree of sensitivity, where present in the vicinity of The Site, could all be retained as part of a well design development. The influence of Chipping Ongar on the landscape within parts of The Site means that it is not fully representative of the wider character area in this key aspect, and has a lower sensitivity to the character area as a whole and to the wider SLA; this is not mentioned or considered in the EFSELSS.

4.2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, EFSELESS has a number of shortcomings in its method and application, and the judgements reached in relation to SLA 3 are questionable and not all applicable to The Site. The Site can accommodate sensitively designed residential development while retaining key sensitive landscape/environmental features that are considered desirable to safeguard. The proposed residential development is appropriate to the character of this urban edge setting.

4.3. Site Analysis (Landscape Survey)

Drawing 4823_105 identifies features within and in the vicinity of The Site. These features include:

- The terrain of The Site falls approximately 20m from higher, more level terrain on the western boundary to the River Rodding along The Site's eastern boundary (at approximately 40m AOD). Chipping Ongar is located in a prominent position on the end of the ridgeline between the broad valleys of the River Rodding and Cripsey Brook.
- Two watercourses, the River Rodding and Cripsey Brook, contain the northern, more historic part of the settlement of Chipping Ongar. The Flood Zones associated with these watercourses generally define the limits of the town, where built development is located above the 45m contour.
- The River Rodding corridor is well treed and forms a strong boundary along The Site's eastern edge, serving to partially screen the lower slopes of the valley. Nevertheless, the upper slopes of The Site are visible in views from the east.

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- Located on the high ground of the town, and also within The Site boundary, is the Ongar Castle Scheduled Monument, the grounds of which also form part of Chipping Ongar Conservation Area.
- Within and along The Site boundaries there are several hedgerows that define existing field boundaries and provide a strong landscape framework. These boundaries form part of a historic field pattern that would have connected the large, isolated trees in the southern land parcel to the broader hedgerow network.
- Several Public Rights of Way pass through The Site, connecting the landholding to the town and the wider countryside. Three Long Distance Recreation Routes pass through The Site, aligned with the rights of way, namely St Peter's Way, Three Forests Way and Essex Way.
- The Site is located immediately adjacent to the eastern edge of Chipping Ongar. The Mayflower Way/Roding View/Onslow Garden development, at The Site's north western corner, is highly visible from the surrounding area and has some influence on the character of The Site. Similarly, the houses to the south west of The Site, located along Longfields, are also widely visible due to a lack of soften urban edge.

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5.0 Landscape Strategy

5.1. Strategic Growth of Chipping Ongar

Drawing 4822_106 illustrates the potential direction of growth for Chipping Ongar, at its eastern edge, guided by three key landscape constraints: the terrain, the River Rodding, and the A414 (Chelmsford Road). In combination, these constraints provide strong, defensible features that would contain Chipping Ongar, and prevent future expansion east.

As described in section 3.2.3, the settlement pattern of the town is largely defined by the River Rodding to the east and Cripsey Brook to the west. To the west, development descends the valley side of Cripsey Brook, into the valley corridor. Development generally keeps out of the valley floor and above the 45m contour, which marks the extent of the floodplain. Locating development at a similar elevation between the eastern edge of the town and the River Rodding would be in keeping with the settlement pattern of the area, ensuring the river forms a strong, defensible boundary that contains the town to the east and south. To the north, the A414 provides a clear boundary and would form the access point to The Site.

Development of the two small parcels of land north of the A414 would not be considered strategic growth, but could be clearly contained by the vegetation along the boundaries of these areas, with clear boundaries provided by the A414 and High Ongar Road.

5.2. Site Landscape Strategy

The Landscape Strategy for The Site, as illustrated in drawing 4822_107, identifies a set of principles for any proposed development of The Site, derived from the landscape and visual appraisal. The landscape strategy demonstrates how The Site would function within the area of strategic growth described in section 5.1, and shows how, as an integral parcel of land, it can accommodate development without undue effects on the receiving landscape and be in keeping with policies of the Local Plan, both emerging and current.

5.2.1. Key Principles

- Ensure development is located above the 45m contour, outside of the Flood Zone. The Rodding River corridor should be safeguarded and enhanced through the provision of structural riparian planting, in keeping with the existing characteristics of the river, forming a green edge to the town.
- Proposed planting associated with the river corridor, including blocks of woodland, would help to visually screen the proposed development, tying it to its landscape context and reinforcing the river corridor as the boundary to the settlement.
- There is an opportunity to restore Ongar Castle and re-emphasise its significance at the centre of the town's historic core. Setting the Castle within an area of public open space, which connects to the adjacent recreation ground, would provide a substantial public amenity at the centre of the town, based on the Chipping Ongar's primary heritage asset.
- Emanating from Ongar Castle, the hedgerow alignments (both existing and historic) and the Public Rights of Way that pass through The Site could form green corridors that connect the open space around Ongar Castle with the river corridor. These green

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corridors would provide the structuring elements to proposed development areas and form the interface between people, wildlife and the town's natural features. They would also act as view corridors to the castle, highlighting its importance at the centre of the town.

- Maintaining connections to the existing rights of way network, and providing additional connections to the public footpaths at The Site's southern boundary and along the River Roding, would ensure comprehensive pedestrian access to the town and countryside.
- Vehicular access would be gained to The Site, as part of a potential strategic relief road, at its northern and southern boundaries. The alignment of the road could pass through the core of the development or within the river corridor (subject to mitigating effects on the flood zone)

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6.0 Conclusion

The Site is located within the Middle Roding landscape character area, as identified in the Epping Forest Landscape Studies - Landscape Character Assessment (2010). It is a patchwork of grassland and arable fields adjacent to the river corridor, with long belts of sinuous woodland creating an intermittent sense of enclosure, along with other smaller pockets of deciduous woodland. The Site is broadly representative of this character area, but is also strongly related to the settlement of Chipping Ongar. Development of the town has extended from its original location at the end of the ridgeline between the valleys of the River Roding and Cripsey Brook.

This appraisal considers that the sensitivity attributed to The Site and the surrounding landscape east of Chipping Ongar within the Epping Forest Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study (EFSELSS) is questionable. The EFSELSS has a number of shortcomings in its method and application, and the judgements reached in relation to SLA 3 are not all applicable to The Site, given the visible presence of existing residential development on the eastern edge of Chipping Ongar and the historic prominent placing of the settlement on high, visible ground within the landscape. This reduces its sensitivity to change and increases its capacity to accommodate development.

Planning policies DBE4, LL1 and LL2 all relate to the prevention of inappropriate development in rural locations and respecting the character of the landscape. This appraisal demonstrates that not only is the rural character of The Site already influenced by the presence of Chipping Ongar to the west, but the layout of the development could be designed to respond to the underlying character in respecting topography, vegetation and historic field patterns. Existing development patterns within Chipping Ongar, such as staying above the 45m contour, can be reflected within any proposed layout for The Site.

Planning policies LL10 and LL11 encourage the retention of existing landscape features and the provision of new long-term planting. This appraisal demonstrates how The Site could be developed to retain the important existing boundary features and enhance them with additional planting as necessary to create a strong landscape structure to the proposals.

In visual terms, the combination of topography and vegetation cover means that the actual visibility of any proposed development with The Site would begin to break up beyond approximately 1km from The Site. Visibility of any proposed development from more distant views on higher ground to the north and east would be seen in the context of the existing settlement of Chipping Ongar and become increasingly filtered by intervening vegetation.

Planning policies GB7A and LL3 discourage conspicuous development and encourage the softening of development on the edge of settlements. This appraisal identifies that the existing eastern edge of Chipping Ongar is visually prominent in places, with little vegetation to soften it. It also demonstrates that any proposed development could be designed to be softened by a landscape led masterplan that responds to the existing landscape pattern.

The two small parcels of land north of the A414 but within The Site have been identified as able to accommodate residential development due to their containment by vegetation and road corridors and their association with other housing along High Ongar Road.

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In light of the above assessment it is considered that residential development within The Site could be accommodated, with an appropriate landscape strategy and layout, without undue harm to the character and appearance of the countryside east of Chipping Ongar.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Chipping Ongar Landscape Sensitivity extract

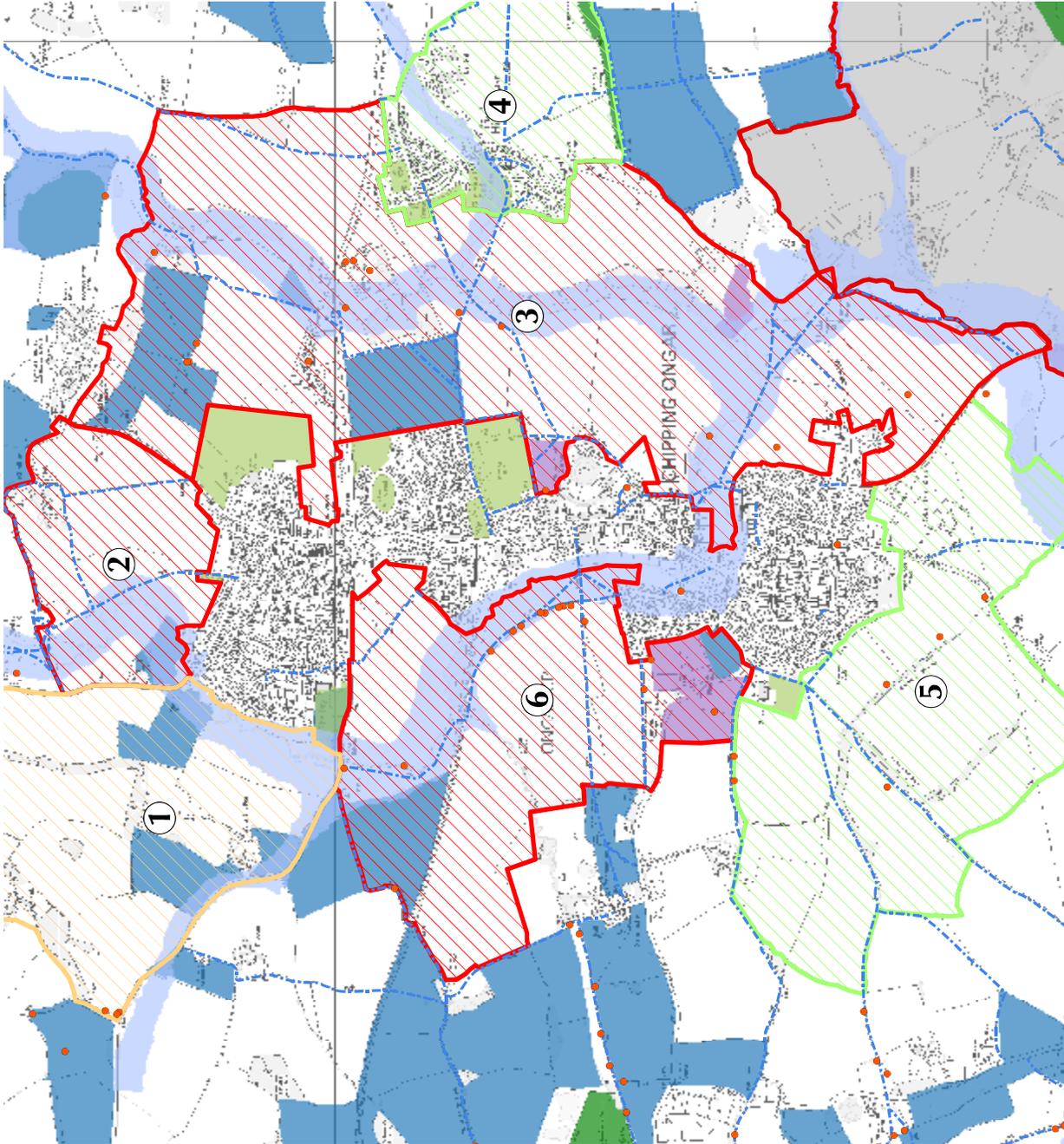


KEY

- Sensitive Historic Landscape: Pre 18th Century Fields
- Sensitive Historic Landscape: 18th - 19th Century Enclosure
- Sensitive Woodland Area
- Sensitive Recreational Route
- Veteran trees
- Floodplain
- Urban Greenspace Character

Sensitivity
(See Section 12.5 of the Report)

- High Sensitivity
- Low Sensitivity
- Landscape Setting Area
- Study Area



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Figure 12.4
Chipping Ongar/High Ongar -
Landscape Sensitivity