

Appendix 3
DHA Landscape Assessment





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PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

of

**Land North of Stonards Hill, Epping,
(EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL Ref EPP- B)
Epping,
Essex**

on behalf of

**Croudace Strategic Ltd
Croudace House,
Caterham,
Surrey,
CR3 6XQ**

March 2013

Date of Issue 7 June 2013
Status/Revision: Final
File ref: 669/reports / 669 Preliminary Landscape and Visual
Assessment

Checked : Approved: DL/DH

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Chris Blandford Associates Jan 2010

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1 Introduction and background

- 1.1 David Huskisson Associates (DHA) is a firm of Chartered Landscape Architects, established in 1987 and registered since then with the Landscape Institute. DHA has been a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment since 1992. The practice is Quality Assured to BS ISO 9001:2008. All directors of the practice are Chartered Members of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 The practice has undertaken a wide range of landscape and visual assessment work for many clients including public bodies, private companies and individuals and has experience on infrastructure, industrial, healthcare, residential and recreational projects.
- 1.3 The practice was retained on the instruction of Ms Alison Walker BA (Hons) PG Dip MRTPI, Planning Manager of Croudace Strategic Limited, in March 2013. The project is to undertake a preliminary landscape and visual assessment of land north of Stonards Hill, Epping, Essex. This is with a view to making representations to Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) in advance of its publication of the Preferred Options for the allocation for residential development in the District, anticipated in the autumn of 2013. The assessment does not purport to be a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
- 1.4 EFDC refer to the site that is the subject of this report as EPP-B.
- 1.5 The scope of this preliminary report is to consider in landscape and visual terms the context of the site so as to determine the likely range of landscape and visual issues that would arise from the development proposal. The following matters are addressed:
- Landscape character;
 - Landscape quality;
 - Landscape value;
 - The relationship of the site to the existing urban area of Epping;
 - The landscape capacity of the site;
 - The visual envelope;
 - The principal public views of the site;
 - The significance of the potential change to landscape character and visual matters on the site as a result of its development with housing;
 - The significant landscape features on the site, and
 - The potential effect on existing features as a result of future development.

- 1.6 The appraisal has involved both desk and site based work. A site visit was carried out on 20 March 2013 in conditions of poor visibility. Photographs are reproduced on **Photosheets 1, 2 and 3**. Broadleaved vegetation was fully defoliated, thus visibility would be reduced in the summer months. The visit involved walking over the site and the adjacent Queen Elizabeth II Field Stonards Hill Recreation Ground, viewing the site and gaining an appreciation of the local context from the adjacent public highway at the southwestern boundary and from public rights of way in the area.
- 1.7 The appraisal has sought to determine the local landscape and visual context of the site, to identify the key landscape features and visual attributes and describe the site and the baseline landscape so as to be able to outline the likely landscape and visual issues that would arise were the site to come forward for development. By this means the need for any landscape and visual mitigation can be informed in a way that would help minimise or avoid adverse effects on the wider landscape and visual amenity.
- 1.8 The appraisal does not consider the relative attributes of other potential housing sites other than where any site is directly relevant to the context and setting of site EPP-B. In this case, this is considered to apply to EPP-A which lies on the south side of Stonards Hill, opposite the subject site.
- 1.9 The following documents are considered to be the primary ones of relevance to the landscape and visual context of the site and its immediately surrounding area:
- National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012;
 - The Countryside Character Volume 7, South East and London, published by the Countryside Agency 1999;
 - MAGIC website;
 - English Heritage website;
 - Historic Ordnance Survey mapping reviewed online and Google Map Aerial mapping;
 - EFDC Combined Policies of EFD Local Plan (1998) and Alterations (2006) Published 2008 and Insert Maps 4 and 4A;
 - EFDC - Epping Forest Landscape Studies, Landscape Character Assessment, Chris Blandford Associates Jan 2010;
 - EFDC - Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study, Chris Blandford Associates Jan 2010;
 - EFDC Local Wildlife Sites Review May 2010; and
 - Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, (GLVIA2) by the

Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2nd Edition, 2002.* (* A revised version of the guidelines-GLVIA3- was published in April 2013 but this was unavailable at the time of preparing this preliminary assessment.)

2 Location and context

- 2.1 The site's location relative to the wider area is shown on **DHA1**. The site lies on the eastern edge of Epping, at a level of about 105m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and on the north side of Stonards Hill, a road that links east from Epping to Coopersale Street and Fiddlers Hamlet.
- 2.2 The settlement of Epping developed its present largely linear form most notably in the 19th Century when the High Street had over twenty coaching inns, reflecting the town's location on a route to East Anglia. The route took advantage of the drier higher land above the heavier wet clay vales, the town's location being provided with numerous springs outcropping at the interface where the permeable sand and gravel capping meets the impermeable underlying clay.
- 2.3 The history of the forest itself is of relevance to the character of the locality and is the result of many years of management, including as a royal hunting ground. Today Epping Forest is in the care of the City of London Corporation who act as Conservators. This has not only ensured continuity of management but the Corporation is actively encouraging access, with waymarked trails, and enhancing biodiversity with the conservation of selected veteran pollarded trees and other initiatives.
- 2.4 The settlement lies between two areas of the forest, by far the largest portion of which stretches south west from the town towards Chingford and forms that part that is commonly called Epping Forest. To the north east of the settlement, another area of woodland stretches to the east and includes Epping Plain, The Lower Forest and, to the east of Coopersale, Gernon Bushes which extends east to the M11 motorway. Beyond here further woodland continues to the east and south on the high ground, skirting Gaynes Park, including Hawkhill Wood, Birching Coppice, Forty Acres, High Warren and Beachet Wood.

The site

- 2.5 The site is roughly triangular in shape and extends to just over 10 Ha. It comprises undulating land, formerly in use as pasture, and two areas of woodland, the pasture land, being in the form of an "n" shaped parcel, wrapping round one of the woodlands. For ease of reference in this report the names for the woods used in the Epping Forest District Local Wildlife Sites Review May 2010 have been used, Ash Wood and High Wood, although these names are not shown on the Ordnance Survey

(OS) base maps. Reference to the EFDC Local Plan Map Insert 4 shows the site to lie just outside the limits of built development which essentially virtually abuts part of the site's northern boundary. Here recent housing development fringes the site in the vicinity of the larger woodland, High Wood. It also shows the site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and that High Wood is designated a County Wildlife Site.

Boundaries

- 2.6 The majority of the southwestern boundary is formed by a poor quality thorn hedgerow and trees, mainly sycamore, flanking Stonards Hill over a length of about 250m. This feature is augmented by a strong belt of trees and understorey on the south side of the road (on EPP-A) which thus has an enclosed character at the site frontage. At the northern end of the site boundary with Stonards Hill, the boundary sets back from the road by approximately 50m to skirt around Old Pastures, a large chalet style property which occupies a rectangular plot at the western corner of the site.
- 2.7 The south eastern boundary is formed by the line of the Epping Ongar Railway. This was once part of the London Underground system but currently appears disused. It passes the site in a series of tree lined cuttings alternating with sections on embankment above the undulating site. The line passes under Stonards Hill, the bridge lying at the southern corner of the site. Overall this boundary is in the order of 475m long. East of the railway the undulating land, which is in arable use, falls away to the east and southeast and is characterised by some established hedgerows and individual hedgerow trees.
- 2.8 The eastern boundary of the site is only about 60m in length and is marked by the end of the High Wood, the adjacent land being a field of grassland that appears to be mainly used for informal recreation such as dog walking.
- 2.9 From here the northern boundary of the site follows the northern edge of High Wood westwards for a distance of about 300m with new development offset a short distance to the north. At this point the boundary is formed by an intermittent fence and a thin and locally gappy woodland shaw along the southern side of the recreation ground, over a distance of about 200m. Here it joins the Old Pastures plot. An overgrown pond is set in this belt of planting at a point where there is a slight dog leg in the boundary line.

Landform

- 2.10 An appreciation of the topography of the site and its immediate surroundings is important in relation to both the site's landscape and visual context. The main feature is the encircling backdrop formed by the crest of high ground, for the purpose of this report referred to as the Epping Forest Ridge. The approximate crest of the flat topped ridge has been shown in a heavy black broken line on **DHA1**. It will be seen that Epping straddles this crest and, to the north east of the town, it curves to the east and south to enclose a bowl shaped area through which the M11 climbs, cutting through the wooded ridge east of Gernon Bushes. Coopersale Street, Fiddlers Hamlet and Stewards Green lie fairly centrally in this bowl at levels of between about 45m and 64m AOD whilst the crest of the Epping Forest Ridge encircles them at between about 100m and 112m AOD.
- 2.11 To the north west of the site, the flat topped ridge is immediately evident, the land rising only very slightly across the width of the Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. Here football pitches and hard courts have been laid out seemingly at pre-existing levels, avoiding any cut and fill.
- 2.12 Once off the plateau-like ridge top, the landform in the locality is quite complex and irregular, the flanks of this bowl shaped area being subdivided by side spurs so that the flank of the ridge is strongly undulating, almost rippled in profile, this resulting at least in part from the springs and small streams just below the crest. Some of these smaller side spurs are indicated in the thinner black lines on **DHA1**. It will be noted that Stonards Hill follows the line of one of these spurs. This undulating landform of side spurs give a good degree of local enclosure and visual interest and is thus important to the landscape and visual characteristics of the flank of the Epping Forest Ridge.
- 2.13 On the site itself, the landform is no less important. The northern boundary, commencing adjacent to Old Pastures, is fairly level along its interface with the Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. East from here the levels start to fall more noticeably. South east from the northern boundary, the landform falls across the site and becomes ever more dished, the "n" shaped pasture land sweeping around Ash Wood so that at the boundary with the railway line, which can be assumed to be nearly level, the site varies between being about 4m below the railway and up to about 5m above it. The rippled effect carries through into the two woodland areas. Along the site's south western boundary with Stonards Hill, the site is similarly slightly raised above the road near the railway bridge and then falls away from the roadside

boundary mid way along before becoming level with the road adjacent to Old Pastures.

- 2.14 South of Stonards Hill the "rippled" landform on site EPP-A is more pronounced than at the site and there are two deep irregular folds running across the land up to the exposed urban edge where the town houses on Theydon Grove are skylined.
- 2.15 It is understood that a topographic survey is being prepared. In the absence of this and based on the contour information on the OS Explorer mapping, it is estimated that levels across the site vary by up to about 20m or more. The rippled landform creates a locally interesting and attractive landform and one that would need careful consideration in terms of a development layout.

Water courses

- 2.16 Water courses indicated on the online review of early OS maps appear to have been piped across the site following the base of the folded landform to outfall into small streams and ditches in the woodland. A spring wells up close to the boundary with Old Pastures and what appears to be a buried manhole chamber was noted south of the pond in the northern site boundary planting and there are two ponds in High Wood. All these features would require investigation and incorporation into any development layout.

Local Built Context

- 2.17 Despite the proximity of the site to the centre of Epping, built form in the immediate vicinity of the site is of only rather ordinary quality. Three storey town houses flank the southern frontage of Stonards Hill east of the site, these being shown on the 1969 edition OS mapping which also shows Old Pastures for the first time (together with a rectangular shaped yard or building and access onto the site). On the Stonards Hill Recreation Ground, the Jack Silley Pavilion looks rather forlorn, not assisted by the rather run down appearance of the immediate surroundings and the mast lighting. New development to the north west has more fully enclosed the recreation ground but this does not appear to be other than of rather plain appearance. The Kings Wood Park development gives a locally harsh edge to the urban area near High Wood, raised above the adjacent footpath and visible through the northern hedgerow on the approach on the footpath from Coopersale.

- 2.18 To the east, the built context is more interesting, varied, and of higher visual appeal with the buildings at Coopersale Street forming an attractive focus. The cluster of buildings on Houblon's Hill of Ansons Barn, the church of St Alban and the Old Rectory also form an attractive and locally prominent group. Occasional glimpsed views to Coopersale House reveal an imposing facade.

On site vegetation

- 2.19 There is a substantial amount of vegetation of landscape and visual significance on the site. In the main this is comprised of Ash Wood and High Wood but the tree lined hedgerow flanking Stonards Hill, which the earliest epoch OS map shows to have been more substantial mid-way along this boundary, and the northern boundary tree cover are also notable features.
- 2.20 Whilst neither Ash Wood nor High Wood are indicated as Ancient Woodland on DEFRA's Magic website, they are shown on the edition of the OS mapping referred to above and thus were well established by 1872. Ash Wood lies mid way along the south eastern boundary. It appears to have been partly cut through by the railway as the early mapping shows a small remnant on the south of the railway that is recorded as being removed on the subsequent editions.
- 2.21 The larger woodland, High Wood, essentially occupies the east and north eastern part of the site and is roughly triangular in shape, tapering to the west to terminate in a narrow band of trees along the northern boundary. It is a County Wildlife site.
- 2.22 Both woodlands contain substantial amounts of hornbeam, largely coppiced in High Wood but with more standards in Ash Wood. Hornbeam is one of the species for which Epping Forest is noted. The coppice stools are overmature and both the coppice and standards have suffered wind throw. Ash Wood has a significant element of sycamore present and at least one horse chestnut was noted. Holly is also present in both woodlands and there is a significant proportion of birch. Some oak standards are also present. Elder occurs at the woodland edge and a thicket of blackthorn was noted at the edge of High Wood.
- 2.23 There is surprisingly little ground flora but heavy leaf litter. Dogs mercury, bluebell and sedge were noted sporadically, these being Ancient Woodland indicator species. Mahonia aquifolium was noted in Ash Wood, probably a garden escape.

- 2.24 Both woodlands have small water courses running through them and High Wood has two small ponds in it at the north west corner. Both woodlands show signs of having banks and ditches at their perimeters and both show signs of heavy illicit recreational usage with well beaten paths through them.
- 2.25 Both woodlands are in need of some sensitive woodland management.
- 2.26 It is estimated that Ash Wood and High Wood extend to about 40% of the overall site area.
- 2.27 West of High Wood, a linear belt of trees and understorey extends along the south side of the footpath and recreation ground, giving some screening to the northern boundary. This is comprised of similar species to High Wood and includes hazel. It has been frequently breached by people gaining access to the site. In places these gaps have been stopped up by fencing. It would benefit from reinforcement planting should the site be developed. A heavily overgrown and shaded pond is located at the western end of this belt of vegetation.
- 2.28 South of Old Pastures, the boundary vegetation to Stonards Hill is locally thicker, mainly comprising sycamore trees. Here it appears that a pond, indicated on early OS mapping up to 1936 but missing on the 1969 edition, has been backfilled and mounded up. Concrete footings are visible.

Offsite vegetation

- 2.29 The wooded setting of the site is augmented in the immediate locality by the trees and understorey on the cutting and embankment side slopes of the adjacent railway and the belt of woodland on the south side of Stonards Hill, this being within site EPP-A. Along the railway line there are many mature oaks as well as some ash and birch. The vegetation along the railway line "closes the gaps" that would otherwise exist to either side of Ash Wood.
- 2.30 With regard to the tree cover south of Stonards Hill on EPP-A, reference to the early OS maps show that this strong wooded boundary once formed part of Theydon Grove, the house of which has long since disappeared and which lay to the west, set back into the grounds from the High Street. This belt of planting follows a natural ridge terminating by the railway at what is indicated on the current OS Explorer Map 174 as Mill Mound, presumably marking the site of a former windmill. The earlier OS maps show that a pathway ran from the main house down to Mill Mound along the

south side of the tree belt, with a link to Stonards Hill now marked by a dilapidated iron gateway at the roadside, mid way in the tree belt. Other pathways are shown elsewhere across the Theydon Grove site.

- 2.31 In addition to the planting flanking Stonards Hill there are other substantial swathes of tree planting in EPP-A containing some non native exotics and individual specimens, all of which still give the perception of a parkland character. The belts of planting and individual trees are subject to a Tree Preservation Order, TPO 16/86.
- 2.32 The boundaries of Old Pastures at the site's western corner have been recently fenced giving this property a degree of containment whilst allowing views over the site.
- 2.33 Save for the tree belts on Theydon Grove and the linear feature of the tree cover along the railway line, the principal vegetation cover of landscape and visual significance is formed by the extensive sweep of forest cover on the Epping Forest Ridge to the north and east including Epping Plain, The Lower Forest, Gernon Bushes, Birching Coppice, Mount Quarter and Beachet Wood.
- 2.34 While Epping Forest is typically dominated by oak, beech and hornbeam, many other species of trees grow here: wild service, birch, ash, field maple, sycamore, crab apple, cherry, crack and goat willow, aspen, poplar, pear, rowan, sweet chestnut, hazel, alder, holm oak, London plane, and elm.

Public Rights of Way

- 2.35 There is a limited network of public rights of way in the area. Of most relevance to the site is the footpath that runs parallel to the site's northern boundary crossing Stonards Hill Recreation Ground eastwards, passing immediately adjacent to the midpoint of the site. It continues east along the edge of High Wood, with several informal accesses into the woodland near the ponds. The corridor is rather squeezed to pass the recent residential development on King Wood Park to the north where ground levels have been raised close to the woodland edge to form a drainage attenuation pond. (This work appears to be in conflict with good practice in that the Root Protection Areas of trees in High Wood could have been impacted.) Near here it is joined by a footpath south from the B181 Epping Road. The footpath continues east, crossing a bridge over the railway line to link to Vicarage Road at Coopersale.

2.36 The Essex Way regional recreational route leaves Epping from near Epping railway station, south of the site, and heads south east to Stewards Green where it turns north along Stewards Green Lane to Coopersale Street, at the foot of Stonards Hill. The route then turns briefly east before heading north to run parallel with the M11 to Coopersale and Gernon Bushes, east of Houblon's Hill. This regional route is set low in the landscape at Coopersale Street and on its route north, as it climbs towards Gernon Bushes, it allows only limited views out to the west where the vegetation and landform along Houblon's Hill prevents views of the Epping Forest Ridge in the vicinity of the site. The amenity of this section of the Essex Way is heavily impacted by the M11.

2.37 The network of PROWs is shown on **DHA1**.

Designations

Listed Buildings

2.38 A search of English Heritage's web based heritage database shows numerous listed buildings in the area, albeit they tend to be clustered in association with the historic core of Epping along the High Street, west of both the site and Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. None of these listed buildings have any intervisibility with the site.

2.39 Outside Epping, to the east of the site, Coopersale House is Grade II listed and there are other listed buildings at Coopersale Street. These are all set lower than the site and at distances in excess of 300m from the site and have no open intervisibility with the site because of intervening vegetation. However, in the heavily filtered views from the southern edge of the site, through the vegetation along the railway line, Coopersale House and something of the properties at the western end of Coopersale Street are just discernible in winter.

2.40 Three buildings centred on and including the church at Coopersale are also listed, as are several features at Gaynes Park, east of the M11. This last location is in the order of 1200m from the site.

2.41 Selected listed buildings in the locality of the site have been indicted on **DHA1**.

2.42 It is considered that the site falls beyond what might reasonably be considered the immediate setting of any of these listed buildings.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- 2.43 A search of English Heritage's web based heritage database shows there are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the local area that would be relevant to the site.

Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens

- 2.44 The EFDC Local Plan records the presence of three Conservation Areas in the locality. These are indicated on **DHA1**. One covers the core of Epping and is centred on the High Street which, at its closest point, is about 275m distant from the nearest boundary of the site and separated by the Stonards Hill Recreation Ground.
- 2.45 The second covers Coopersale Street and is centred on the line of Stonards Hill - Coopersale Street at their junction with Houbblons Hill. At its closest point this Conservation Area is over 500m distant from the nearest boundary of the site. The third covers Bell Common at the southern end of the town, over 1200m from the site.
- 2.46 In terms of historic parks and gardens, the EFDC Local Plan does not record any in the vicinity. However, the garden at Coopersale House is registered Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, its date of registration in December 2000 post dating the Local Plan and contrasting with the 1949 date of the listing of the house. The register entry notes it as:

"C18 villa with landscape work of the early to mid C18 by Adam Holt; Lancelot Brown was consulted c 1774 but the extent of his involvement is not clear."

- 2.47 At its closest point, this historic park and garden are over 300m distant from the nearest boundary of the site.

Open Access Land, Countryside Parks, etc.

- 2.48 The nearest Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) Open Access Land is at Gernon Bushes, 500m to the east of the site. There is no clear intervisibility between this land and the site.
- 2.49 Most notably, over 2725 Ha of Epping Forest forms London's largest open space, the largest part of the forest lying to the south of the town and stretching south west to near Manor Park. There is no intervisibility between Epping Forest and the site.
- 2.50 More locally to the site, immediately adjacent to the part of the northern boundary of the site lies the Queen Elizabeth II Field Stonards Hill Recreation Ground.

Biodiversity

- 2.51 Extensive swathes of Epping Forest to north and south of the town are of national and international conservation importance being designated as a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Epping Forest management team maintains the natural habitats developed over more than 1,000 years for use by people and their grazing animals. These traditional uses have created a diverse landscape that includes areas of historic wood-pasture, green lanes, ancient pollarded trees and grassy plains. The forest is still largely a "natural" landscape, rich in wildlife and history and is internationally renowned for its ancient pollarded trees - primarily oak, beech and hornbeam. These pollards can be hundreds of years old and support a wealth of insects and fungi including many quite rare and vulnerable species.
- 2.52 Gernon Bushes is also an SSSI and is managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.
- 2.53 The nearest part of any SSSI is about 375m from the site.
- 2.54 There are no National or Local Nature Reserves designated in the vicinity of the site.
- 2.55 Other parts of the forest cover, outlying woodlands and other features are locally designated as County Wildlife Sites, including High Wood on the site.

Visibility

- 2.56 Although the site visit was carried out in weather conditions that limited clear visibility, it is considered that sufficient understanding was gained to enable the likely visibility of the site to be reasonably accurately assessed for this preliminary stage. A primary visual envelope based on winter visibility is indicated on **DHA1**.
- 2.57 Essentially, the site is considered to be well contained from views in the wider landscape. The main views in which the site is clearly visible are largely short range, local ones.
- 2.58 As would be expected, much of the south western side of the site is in view over the length of its Stonards Hill road frontage, views only being lightly filtered in the winter months by the roadside vegetation. Parts of the site are however screened by the

combination of landform and Ash Wood. Should the site be developed, access from Stonards Hill would require the removal of some of the frontage vegetation both for access itself and sightline requirements and possibly for the provision of a footway.

- 2.59 From Stonards Hill road northwest of the site, there are no views of the site available due to the flanking vegetation cover and because the adjacent recreation ground is set slightly above the road level. There would be oblique easterly views from the three storey townhouses fronting the southern side of the road, opposite the recreation ground. Although these views would be filtered by the roadside vegetation and the vegetation on the northern site boundary, augmented by the falling level on the site, roofs of any two storey development near the northern boundary would likely to be seen.
- 2.60 East of the site, Stonards Hill road falls quite steeply from the railway bridge down to Coopersale Street. Views north from the road corridor are contained by the roadside hedge and the side spur of rising ground running parallel with the road. However, it is considered that there would be potential for a very narrowly confined view along the road corridor on the westbound approach to the site in which any development at the southern corner of the site would be glimpsed in winter through the tree cover flanking the railway line. A similar glimpsed view may be possible from the westernmost properties at Coopersale Street. If necessary, these limited views could be readily mitigated as noted subsequently.
- 2.61 Other than for views from the Stonards Hill road corridor, from the northwest in the recreation ground, whilst the site is not in open view, there are currently some gaps in the boundary. First floor and roof lines would be visible from the recreation ground and the footpath across it. This would further enclose the recreation ground which currently has a more open easterly aspect along this boundary. However the effects of development would be likely to be muted by comparison with other development already seen from the recreation ground as the levels on the site are lower and the established boundary screening could be enhanced. The generally suburban character already noted in the recreation ground would not be materially altered.
- 2.62 East of the recreation ground, north of High Wood, glimpsed views would be likely to be possible though the Wood in winter, both from the footpath and Kings Wood Park.
- 2.63 From the footpath east of Kings Wood Park, it is considered unlikely that any view of development on the site would be easily discernible where it crosses the field, west of the railway line.

- 2.64 To the east of the site, north of Coopersale Street, several properties on Houblon's Hill have views west to the wooded ridge formed by the tree cover along the railway line, augmented by both Ash Wood and High Wood. From these locations in winter it is considered that development on the site could be just discernible to either side of Ash Wood, where screening currently relies on the tree cover along the railway line. In summer it is unlikely that any development on the site would be seen. The properties that may be exposed to these heavily filtered winter views include The Old Rectory, Houblon's House, The Dairy, Coopersale Farm, Holly Lodge and Coopersale House.
- 2.65 A view from Houblon's Hill itself, just north of Houblon's House, is also possible, looking west across the intervening arable land to the wooded ridge formed by the vegetation along the railway line.
- 2.66 At the time of the visit it was just possible to look east from the site boundary and this shows that the visibility extends further east beyond Houblon's Hill, across the Essex Way PROW and the M11 motorway, visible in three short sections where it is raised on embankment as it climbs to pass east of Gernon Bushes. The visibility extends up to the wooded eastern horizon formed by Beachet Wood. Gaynes Park is discernible.
- 2.67 Given the retention of the vegetation along the railway line, it is considered unlikely that development on the site would be readily discernible to the potential vantage points east of Houblon's Hill and, as discussed above, the Essex Way is screened from view by intervening landform and vegetation along the line of Houblon's Hill.
- 2.68 Some viewing opportunities from further south east would be theoretically possible but are over such a distance as to be likely to be immaterial in the context of the site being considered. Some of the more distant potential view points from the east will be impaired by the motorway which is lit south of the bridge at Gaynes Park.
- 2.69 Briefly turning to consider Site EPP-A, this has a rather different visual envelope. This adjacent site is set south of the spur at Stonards Hill and this, combined with the planting extending to Mill Mount gives screening from the east. However the site is very prominent from properties at Theydon Grove at its north western boundary and would be seen from numerous properties to the southwest on the lower lying flanks of the Epping Forest Ridge as well as potentially in some longer views from the south.

2.70 Thus this preliminary consideration suggests that there would be no cumulative visual effects arising from development of EPP-A and EPP-B other than for the local changes to Stonards Hill itself, assuming this is where access would be taken from.

3 Policy context

National

3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

3.2 The environmental role is stated as *"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"* (paragraph 7).

3.3 The NPPF sets out the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play which are described in 12 principles that should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking (paragraph 17). Amongst these, the following are relevant to the landscape and visual assessment;

- *always seek 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 characters of different areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.....;*
- *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment;*
- *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.....*

3.4 In section 7 the NPPF deals with good design. Paragraph 58 notes that development should:

- *add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- *establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- *.....create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments)....;*
- *respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*

- *be visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping;*
- *.....seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.*

3.5 Paragraph 64 states that *"permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions."*

3.6 In section 9 the NPPF deals with protecting Green Belt land, paragraph 79 noting that their essential characteristics *"are their openness and their permanence"*. Importantly at paragraph 81 it notes that local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial uses of the Green Belt, such as looking...." *to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity"* .

3.7 In section 11 the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment noting at paragraph 109 that the planning system should contribute to, and enhance, the natural and local environment by *"protecting and enhancing valued landscapes"*.

Local Planning Policy

3.8 Under the Combined Policies of Epping Forest District Local Plan (1998) and Alterations (2006) Published February 2008, the site is currently subject to several policies of relevance to landscape and visual issues.

3.9 Core Policy CP2 states that the quality of the rural and built environment will be maintained, conserved and improved by a range of identified measures which include:

(iv) safeguarding and enhancing the setting, character and townscape of the urban environment; and

(v) preserving and enhancing the biodiversity and networks of natural habitats of the area, including river and wildlife corridors and other green chains.

3.10 New development is required to meet several criteria set out in CP3. Criteria (v) requires that the scale and nature of development is consistent with the principles of sustainability and respects the character and environment of the locality.

3.11 Core Policy CP6 addresses achieving sustainable urban development patterns and seeks:

(viii) appropriate recreational provision including access to the countryside.

- 3.12 Green Belt is addressed at Policies GB1 - GB19 inclusive. Policy GB2A covers the general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Policy GB7A addresses conspicuous development in the Green Belt stating that: *"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 will be refused planning permission."*
- 3.13 In terms of Heritage, Policy HC2 is concerned with ancient landscapes and states that planning permission will not be granted for development that: *"could adversely affect the nature and physical appearance of ancient landscapes (identified as such on the Proposals Map)."* The site is not shown as an ancient landscape on the Proposals Map although the open field is shown as a Pre 18th Century field on Figure 2.2 in the Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study referred to subsequently.
- 3.14 Policy HC3 addresses Registered Parkland in similar terms to HC2. In this instance, although not indicated on the Proposals Map, any effects of development of the site on Coopersale House and Garden would need to be considered under this policy.
- 3.15 Policy HC5 relates to Epping Forest and states that planning permission will not be granted for: *"any development or use which could prejudice its historic nature and wildlife value or its function as an open space for the purposes of public enjoyment."*
- 3.16 Policy HC6 addresses the character, appearance and setting of Conservation Areas. Development which could be detrimental to the setting of a Conservation Area will not be permitted.
- 3.17 Policy HC7 requires that development would not adversely affect the setting of a listed building.
- 3.18 In terms of Nature Conservation, Policy NC2 relates to County Wildlife Sites. This policy is thus of direct relevance in relation to High Wood. The policy states that: *"development or land use change which could directly or indirectly destroy or have an adverse effect upon a County Wildlife Site would be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the reasons for the proposal clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site or feature."*

- 3.19 Policy NC4 requires the protection of established habitat. This can be considered to apply to Ash Wood.
- 3.20 Policy NC5 encourages schemes to promote nature conservation by:
(ii) re-introducing traditional management techniques for existing wildlife habitats.
- 3.21 Design and the Built Environment is covered in a range of policies including Policy DBE4 - Design in the Green Belt. This requires that 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.
- 3.22 Landscape policies include Policy LL3 - Edge of Settlement. This 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.
- 3.23 Policy LL10 - Adequacy of Provision for Landscape Retention requires that adequate provision is made for the retention of:
(i) trees; or
(ii) natural features, particularly wildlife habitats such as woodland, hedgerows, ponds and watercourses; or
(iii) man-made features of historical, archaeological or landscape significance.
- 3.24 The Epping to Ongar Railway is addressed at Policy ST8. This policy resists proposals that would: *"prevent the reinstatement and future operation of the branch line but that in the event that the track is dismantled, the Council would support interim public access to the route for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders."*

4 Landscape Character

4.1 Regional, county and local landscape character areas are referenced below.

Regional Countryside Character Area

4.2 At the regional level the site lies in the regional landscape character area "Northern Thames Basin", Character Area 111 in the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) Countryside Character, Volume 7: South East & London. The area is now referenced as Joint Character Area 111. This character area consists of four sub-character areas, the site lying in the "Essex Wooded Hills and Ridges" sub-character area.

4.3 Amongst the key characteristics noted for the "Essex Wooded Hills and Ridges" is:

"Well wooded and prominent hills and ridges on a belt of sand often referred to as the 'Bagshot Hills' stretching through Essex from Epping Forest to Tiptree. Wooded commons with ancient and some secondary woodland defined in many places by peripheral wood banks. Also notable medieval and later historic homes and their parks."

4.4 The above descriptions can be considered to apply to the general setting of the site and its local context.

Local Landscape Character Areas and Settlement Edge

4.5 At the district level, EFDC commissioned two landscape studies. One study was a district wide landscape character study, Epping Forest Landscape Studies, Landscape Character Assessment, Chris Blandford Associates, Jan 2010. This drew on the Mid Essex Landscape Character Study and other work and identifies seven landscape character types, each comprised of several local landscape character areas. It should be noted that the assessment is relatively broad brush, so it is possible that within these character areas, pockets with different characteristics may be found. Extracts are contained in **Appendix 1**.

4.6 The other study, also by Chris Blandford Associates, draws on the above Landscape Character Assessment and is a Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study

(SELSS) and is at a slightly more detailed scale. The relevant part of this study is reproduced at **Appendix 2**.

4.7 The Landscape Character Assessment shows the site to lie in Local Character Area D1 - Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge, this being one of two local character areas forming the "Wooded Ridges" landscape character type, area D2 lying to the south of Epping and covering the larger part of Epping Forest.

4.8 Area D1 is very roughly crescent shaped and follows the crest of high land from the north east of Epping at Stonards Hill, and bordered by the line of the Epping Ongar Railway, before curving round the north of Coopersale, washing over the M11 and extending south east to Beachet Wood, north of Hill Hall. The site thus lies at the south western extremity of this character area.

4.9 The key characteristics of Local Character Area D1 are stated as being:

*"several areas of mixed woodland, situated on a ridge of higher land overlooking surrounding areas of gently undulating farmland;
the high proportion of tree cover contributes to the sense that this is a wooded ridge, forming a landmark within views to the area from surrounding Landscape Character Areas and from the M1 corridor;
outside the woodland small pockets of arable farmland are located on the slopes of the ridge;
relatively strong sense of tranquillity within parts of the area at distance from the M11 road corridor;
ancient hornbeam pollards are key historic and landscape features."*

4.10 Its overall character is described as:

"Set on a ridge of higher land that overlooks surrounding farmland, this area is predominantly covered by mixed woodland, the majority of which is categorised as ancient and semi natural. Distinctive ancient hornbeam pollards are located within part of the woodland, providing unusual historic landscape features. Coppicing is a feature of some areas of the woodland. There is a strong sense of enclosure within woodland and along the Epping Road corridor, which runs through the centre, however from roads at the edges (such as the B1393), open views across adjacent farmland contribute to a recognisable sense of place. The corridor of the M11 cuts through the centre of the area, introducing a source of noise and movement and disturbing the overall sense of tranquillity. At distance

from this, however, there is relatively strong sense of tranquillity within the woodland; and a predominantly rural character. This ridge of woodland forms the backdrop to views from the M11 corridor. The western edge of the woodland in this area meets the settlement edge of Epping."

- 4.11 The visual character of Area D1, Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge, is described as:

"Woodland provides a strong sense of enclosure and limits views across the area;

This wooded ridge forms a recognisable feature and backdrop to views from adjacent Landscape Character Areas and from the M11 road corridor;

Open views across adjacent lower, gently undulating farmland from the edges of the woodland."

- 4.12 Overall the EFDC Landscape Character Assessment notes that Area D1 is regarded as having a high sensitivity to change as *"the area has a strong sense of historic integrity and provides a key visual backdrop to several other Landscape Character Areas within the District."* Whilst this summary is essentially fair for the extensive character area as a whole, site EEP-B lies on the Epping side of the railway, beyond the visual backdrop this character area provides for the wider countryside to the east.

- 4.13 By contrast, EPP-A is shown to lie in Local Character Area G1 - Coopersale, this being one of the local character areas forming the "Wooded Ridges and Valleys" landscape character type.

- 4.14 The key characteristics of Local Character Area G1 are stated as being:

"a small scale - settlement pattern of dispersed linear settlements;

patchwork of medium-sized arable fields delineated by a network of mature hedgerows, often containing hedgerow trees;

sense of tranquillity is disturbed by noise and movement associated with the M11 motorway corridor;

patches of irregular, historic fields are visible within the current landscape pattern;

large houses with areas of associated designed parkland are key built elements within this area."

- 4.15 Its overall character is described as:

DAVID HUSKISSON ASSOCIATES LTD
PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT
LAND NORTH OF STONARDS HILL, EPPING, ESSEX (EFDC SITE REF EPP-B)

"This undulating area is predominantly covered by small to medium sized arable fields with visible hedgerow-treed boundaries. Relicts of informal Medieval Parkland, later redesigned as landscape parks, and ancient woodland are also visible in the area. The tranquillity of this area is greatly disturbed in proximity to the M11 and M25 motorways. The historic dispersed linear settlement of Coopersale Street is a distinctive feature in the centre of the character area, separating the two parks at Coopersale House and Gaynes Park."

4.16 The visual character of Area G1, Coopersale, is described as:

*"Open views to the urban edge of Epping to the west;
Strong sense of enclosure provided by adjacent wooded ridge within views northwards;
Framed views across the network of arable fields are characteristic of the area."*

4.17 Overall the EFDC Landscape Character Assessment notes that Area G1 is regarded as having a moderate to high sensitivity to change on account of several factors including: *"framed views across this area are visually sensitive to new development, particularly large scale of tall vertical elements."*

4.18 Turning to the second study, SELSS (**Appendix 2**) notes at paragraph 1.5.3 that the *"evaluation involved a strong degree of professional judgement in distilling out the landscape character and visual qualities that are sensitive to change"*. The methodology adopted for the study is set out as are the definitions, some of which are not wholly compatible with those adopted in this report.

4.19 SELSS Figure 2.1 shows the site to lie in what is termed Landscape Setting Area 3, Epping / Coopersale Common. This is quite a large area that extends east from the urban edge of Epping reaching nearly to the line of the M11.

4.20 SELSS Figure 2.1 deals with visual character. It identifies diagrammatically the visually significant slope of the Epping Forest Ridge. The site lies on the urban / western side of this slope. Figure 2.1 also identifies major woodland blocks, with both Ash Wood and High Wood indicated. The well vegetated railway line east of the site is not referenced. From the work carried out for this preliminary assessment, this can be considered to be a locally important component in defining the visual character of the ridge in the views towards Epping from the east. It is notable that the

harsh urban edge formed by the locally skylined development on Theydon Grove is indicated on Figure 2.1 as "Soft Green Urban Edge".

- 4.21 Figure 2.1 also marks key short distance views, although none are indicated in Landscape Setting Area 3. "Urban Gateways" are marked on all roads entering Epping so one is shown on Stonards Hill near the site.
- 4.22 The visual issues are drawn together in the matrix at Section 2.5 of SELSS. This shows that Landscape Setting Area 3 has been ranked as having "Moderate" intervisibility and "High" visual prominence leading overall to a "Moderate" visual sensitivity.
- 4.23 SELSS Figure 2.2 deals with historic landscape. It shows the open land on the site together with adjacent EPP-A and other land to be Pre 18th century fields.
- 4.24 SELSS Figure 2.3 shows designated environmental constraints. It confirms the site to be unencumbered by any major environmental designation but records the presence of the Local Wildlife Site of High Wood under the heading of "Less Critical / Moderate Constraints".
- 4.25 The landscape issues are drawn together in the matrix at Section 2.5 of SELSS. This shows that Landscape Setting Area 3 has been ranked as "Positive" in terms of its "representation of typical character" and ranked "High" in terms of the "number of sensitive natural cultural and historic features". Overall the landscape character sensitivity has been ranked as "High".
- 4.26 The SELSS matrix combines the Visual Sensitivity and Landscape Character Sensitivity to give a ranking for the Overall Sensitivity to Change" for Landscape Setting Area 3 as "High".
- 4.27 At the scale that SELSS has been undertaken, this may be an appropriate precautionary finding. However, it clearly does not allow for the individual characteristics relevant to discrete sites within Landscape Setting Area 3, some of which are patently more sensitive than others. In the case of site EPP-B, other than for the Pre 18th century field notation, which is not unique to the site, the presence of the "moderate" constraint of the Local Wildlife site and the "woodland blocks", no other key attributes identified in SELSS appear to be directly relevant.

5 Assessment

5.1 The following matters are now addressed:

- Landscape character;
- Landscape quality;
- Landscape value;
- The landscape capacity of the site;
- The relationship of the site to the existing urban area of Epping;
- The visual envelope;
- The principal public views of the site;
- The significance of the potential change to landscape character and visual matters on the site as a result of its development with housing;
- The significant landscape features on the site, and
- The potential effect on existing features as a result of future development.

Landscape Character

5.2 Landscape Character is defined in the GLVIA2 glossary as being:

“The distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape, and how this is perceived by people. It reflects particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land uses and human settlement. It creates the particular sense of place of different areas of the landscape.”

5.3 The general characteristics of the site broadly concur with those of D1, The Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge local landscape character area whilst it also shares some attributes with G1. The site lies at the western extremity of the D1 character area where a narrow limb extends along the corridor between the urban edge of Epping and the railway line to include the site and the adjacent Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. The character area abuts character area G1 to the south west and south east. It is considered likely that in the absence of the railway line, the site and the recreation ground would have been included in character Area G1, as the sweeping landform and arable field pattern noted in G1 would not have been truncated.

- 5.4 The wooded character is well represented by the presence of Ash Wood and High Wood, which both comprise swathes of the locally characteristic hornbeam, albeit neither has been recognised as historic ancient woodland, a major contributing factor to the balance of the D1 character area. However, these two woodlands, when allied to the tree cover along the railway line, serve to provide a wooded ridge top in this location, enclosing Epping from wider views, providing a strong sense of enclosure and limiting views across the area.

Landscape Quality

- 5.5 Landscape Quality (or Landscape Condition) is defined in the GLVIA2 glossary as being:

“based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.”

- 5.6 Given the findings of the local character areas assessments and the insight gained from the site visit, it is considered that the landscape quality of the countryside surrounding the site is fair to good. The designation of much of Epping Forest as SSSI and SAC and its management by the Conservators and, at Gernon Bushes, by the Essex Wildlife Trust, have no doubt assisted in this regard. However, in terms of the site, it is clear that the woodlands are in need of some sensitive management works. The illicit and uncontrolled use for informal recreation is also having a deleterious effect. Despite this, reference to the early OS mapping show the landcover of the site is essentially largely intact, save for the railway line and the loss of one pond. For this reason the Landscape Quality of the site is regarded as Fair.

Landscape Value

- 5.7 Landscape Value (or Landscape Importance) is defined in the GLVIA2 glossary as:

“The relative value or importance attached to a landscape (often as a basis for designation or recognition), which expresses national or local consensus, because of its special qualities including perceptual aspects such as scenic beauty, tranquillity or wildness, cultural associations or other conservation issues.”

- 5.8 The landscape of the site and the area immediately adjacent to it is undesignated at either the national or local level which might suggest a landscape of low value. However, Epping Forest is a well known area of woodland with numerous cultural associations, both historic and more recent, albeit these have not been referenced in this preliminary report.
- 5.9 Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the site is likely to be highly valued at the local level by residents who live near it and by those who make recreational use of it, albeit illicitly.
- 5.10 Adopting the thresholds set out in Table 1, it is considered that the landscape value of the site can probably be ranked as Medium.

TABLE 1 *Thresholds- Landscape Receptor Value*

LANDSCAPE / TOWNSCAPE RECEPTOR VALUE	RANK
EG: important components or particularly distinctive positive character and may be susceptible to relatively small changes. Usually all National Parks / AONB's and some areas with County / District notations and some Conservation Areas and settings of some Listed Buildings. Probably limited minor detracting features. Landscape components may be nationally rare whilst locally abundant or locally rare but nationally abundant. Landscape condition likely to be fair to good.	<p style="text-align: center;">Exceptional</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↕</p> <p style="text-align: center;">High Value</p>
EG: an area of moderately positive characteristics and possibly reasonably tolerant of changes, occasionally parts of AONB's, Conservation Areas and settings of some Listed Buildings, usually County / District notations, and with few detracting features. Landscape components not rare either nationally or locally. Landscape condition likely to be fair.	<p style="text-align: center;">↕</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Medium (Good) Value</p>
EG: A relatively unimportant area, weak landscape structure or character, the nature of which is potentially tolerant of substantial change and probably has frequent detracting features. Landscape components common nationally and locally. Landscape condition likely to be fair to poor.	<p style="text-align: center;">↕</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Low (Ordinary) Value</p>
EG: A degraded landscape structure, characteristic landscape patterns and combinations of landform and landcover are masked by land use. Landscape components common nationally and locally. Landscape condition likely to be poor.	<p style="text-align: center;">↕</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Poor Value</p>

Landscape Capacity

- 5.11 Landscape Capacity (or Landscape Sensitivity) is defined in the GLVIA2 glossary as:

“The degree to which a particular landscape character type or area is able to accommodate change without unacceptable adverse effects on its character. Capacity is likely to vary according to the type and nature of the change being proposed.”

5.12 The degree to which a particular landscape can accommodate change will vary with a range of attributes including the pattern, scale and value of the landscape, visual enclosure / openness, and form compatibility, location of visual receptors and the scope or appropriateness of mitigation. As will be appreciated from the definition given above, capacity is considered in relation to the development proposed, the details of which are not known other than as broadly assumed below.

5.13 In terms of landscape capacity, the following evaluation criteria have been adopted:

TABLE 2 *Capacity of the Landscape to Accept Change*

Evaluation Criteria	Capacity
A landscape, including topographic form, that would be unlikely to tolerate the change(s) envisaged which would be out of scale and out of character. Effective, in character, mitigation would be difficult to achieve, would be unlikely to enhance. Often highly valued.	Low
A landscape, including topographic form, that would be reasonably tolerant of the change(s) envisaged which themselves would not be wholly out of character and effective, in character, mitigation would be possible, but results may take time to be effective and could give rise to an element of enhancement. Usually moderately valued.	Medium
A landscape, including topographic form, that would be likely to be tolerant of the change(s) envisaged which would be in scale and, if required, effective, in character, mitigation would be readily achievable and might enhance. Often of ordinary value.	High

5.14 For the purposes of considering capacity it has been assumed that the site would be developed with two storey dwellings located on the open former pasture land with access being taken from Stonards Hill Road near Old Pastures, where levels are most favourable.

5.15 Ash Wood, High Wood and the boundary woodland shaw and hedgerow along the northern boundary would be retained, strengthened, protected and managed for the long term. It has also been assumed that the off site tree cover along the railway line would remain and be reinforced by on site planting.

5.16 Having regard to the form of the balance of the site, the topography and the drainage pattern are landscape constraints to development, discounting at this stage that a

detailed layout may be able to use these to design advantage. The site has containment to the south east, east and north by virtue of the existing vegetation pattern. Importantly, the site levels are lower than the Epping Forest Ridge crest to the west so that some advantage of the land form could be taken to set development lower than other development flanking the recreation ground.

- 5.17 For these reasons, for precautionary purposes, the landscape capacity is regarded as Low / Medium.

The relationship of the site to the existing urban area of Epping;

- 5.18 It is considered that the site has a good landscape relationship to the existing urban area. It is set adjacent to the well used Stonards Hill Recreation Ground, just off the crest of the ridge along which Epping has developed so that, if developed, it would avoid direct impacts on existing residential amenities other than for Old Pastures. It is also only a short distance (275m) to the conservation area that covers the historic core of the settlement. The site is essentially cut off from the wider open countryside to the east by the railway line augmented by the strong enclosing pattern of line side vegetation. Development of the site as envisaged would not alter the perception of Epping as being a ridge top settlement in an enclosed woodland setting.

The visual envelope and the principal public views of the site

- 5.19 As already noted, the site visit augmented by desk study has enabled an approximate primary visual envelope of the site to be determined. This is shown in an orange line on **DHA1**. It represents an indication of those parts of the surrounding area from where it is considered that winter views of the proposed development are most likely to be possible. Importantly, other than from the Stonards Hill frontage and parts of the recreation ground, all views would be heavily filtered by existing vegetation.
- 5.20 As discussed above, there are other locations outside the primary visual envelope to the east that have views towards the site but development on the site would be unlikely to be readily discernible in winter.
- 5.21 The primary visual envelope is influenced by both landform and the extensive woodland cover which in this instance is such a strong defining feature in the overall landscape character of the area. It is likely that the envelope would be significantly reduced in the summer, probably being drawn inwards to the line of the railway.

- 5.22 No buildings have been accessed as part of the visibility appraisal.
- 5.23 The principal public views of the site are considered to be the fragmented views available from Stonards Hill at the site frontage, and the potential for views over the northern boundary planting to the upper parts of development that would be available from the adjacent Stonards Hill Recreation Ground. Neither of these potential vantage points is considered to be of any particular sensitivity or importance at other than the local level. The effects likely to be noted from these locations could be largely mitigated by planting that would be in character with the enclosed and wooded nature of the area.

The significance of the potential change on landscape character and visual matters on the site as a result of its development with housing

- 5.24 In the light of the above findings, and adopting the development assumptions and constraints outlined under the consideration of landscape capacity, whilst there would be a clear change arising from the development of the site, that change would only be noted very locally to the site. The retention of Ash Wood and High Wood and their responsible management, together with other vegetation on site, and with the preservation of the offsite vegetation along the railway line, would mean that there would be no change noted in the wooded landscape character from the east.
- 5.25 The landscape and visual changes are likely to be considered to be minor and not of other than very local significance.

The significant landscape features on the site

- 5.26 The most significant landscape features on the site are considered to be High Wood and Ash Wood. Both of these features would be retained and should be treated in a broadly similar manner as if they were ancient woodland.
- 5.27 The drainage pattern on the site is an important landscape feature, both in terms of the issues and springs and the ponds. These features should be regarded as intrinsically linked to the health of the woodland. Development should be planned in such a way as to ensure that the drainage pattern is not impeded and that ponds, streams and ditches provide opportunities for habitat enrichment and diversity.
- 5.28 The topography of the site is a striking features and one that may be difficult to fully respect in terms of the disposition of built form. The layout needs to be carefully

considered in concert with the drainage pattern to minimise disruption to both the flow of landform and the drainage.

- 5.29 The closely confined Stonards Hill road corridor adds to the local landscape character and, as noted above, this could be augmented by appropriate in character mitigation planting.
- 5.30 Development of the site should be guided by a parameters plan and a protocol for aftercare should be put in place in the form of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan secured by a legal agreement. This would assist in safeguarding the main landscape features of significance for the longer term.

The potential effect on existing features as a result of future development

- 5.31 There could be increased pressure on High Wood and Ash Wood though uncontrolled recreational use for dog walking, bike riding and illicit dumping of garden rubbish, lighting bonfires and the like. Without careful management the landscape and biodiversity resource represented by the woodlands could be further eroded.
- 5.32 Changes to the drainage pattern could have unintended consequences on the woodlands by altering discharge rates and the hydrology of the woodlands. Illegal discharging of waste into watercourses or other contamination could occur. Wetland / aquatic habitat could be reduced or removed.
- 5.33 Some disruption to and loss of some of the interesting and attractive landform of the site should be anticipated.
- 5.34 The site access would alter the closely confined Stonards Hill road corridor and the associated formation of sight lines, and possibly a footway and street lighting, would be likely to impact adversely on this quite significantly.

6 Summary and Conclusion

- 6.1 The report sets out a preliminary landscape and visual assessment of land north of Stonards Hill, Epping, Essex (site EPP-B). This is with a view to making representations to Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) in advance of its publication of the Preferred Options for the allocation for residential development in the District, anticipated in the autumn of 2013. It does not purport to be a full LVIA.
- 6.2 The report does not consider other possible sites other than an adjacent site so as to provide local context. This is land south of Stonards Hill, referenced as site EPP-A. Both sites lie in the open countryside, outside the limits of built development and within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 6.3 EPP-B lies adjacent to Queen Elizabeth II Field Stonards Hill Recreation Ground whilst EPP-A lies adjacent to housing at Theydon Grove and other housing to the south west.
- 6.4 Site EPP-B lies in local landscape character area D1 whilst site EPP-A lies in G1. D1 is an enclosed and wooded character area, regarded in the EFDC Landscape Character Assessment as being of overall high sensitivity. Area G1 is more open in general character and has some visual sensitivity but is regarded overall as moderate to high sensitivity in the Council's assessment.
- 6.5 Reference has also been made to the EFDC Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study which indicates an overall high sensitivity to change in the Landscape Setting Area 3 in which the site is considered to lie.
- 6.6 However, both of these EFDC studies are relatively broad brush. It is possible that within the areas considered, discrete pockets with different characteristics may be found where, on more detailed examination, development may be found to be acceptable.
- 6.7 The main attributes of EPP-B are considered to be the woodland cover, represented by Ash Wood and High Wood, and the interesting, almost rippled, landform and the springs and ponds.
- 6.8 Further important attributes are the facts that site EPP-B is both very well related to the existing urban form of Epping and that is physically and visually cut off from the

wider open countryside to the east by the Epping Ongar Railway. The railway passes the site in a series of tree lined cuttings and embankments which, together with the onsite woodland, provides a wooded backdrop for views from the east, a defining characteristic of Character Area D1, enclosing the ridge top setting of Epping, and the site, from view.

- 6.9 High Wood is a County Wildlife Site and together with Ash Wood, they contain a large proportion of hornbeam with some streams, ditches and woodland banks. Two small ponds occur in High Wood and another pond lies close to the boundary with the recreation ground.
- 6.10 EPP-A is more undulating than EPP-B and, whilst it contains less woodland cover, it has extensive parkland tree belts and individual parkland trees, all of which are subject to a Tree Protection Order.
- 6.11 Preliminary consideration has been given to a range of issues.
- 6.12 In terms of landscape character, site EPP-B broadly conforms to D1 in the "Wooded Ridges" character type, this categorisation possibly reflecting the added containment given by the tree cover along the railway line which closes slight gaps to either side of Ash Wood. In the absence of this, the site might have been included in G1 in the "Wooded Ridges and Valleys" character type which abuts the site to the south west and south east.
- 6.13 The Landscape Quality of the site is regarded as Fair and the landscape value of the site is ranked as Medium.
- 6.14 In the absence of a parameters plan or a development scheme to consider, assumptions about the form of development have been made. The landscape capacity has therefore been ranked on a precautionary basis as Low / Medium.
- 6.15 The site is considered to have a good landscape relationship to the existing urban area and is visually well contained. The primary visual envelope in winter is small. In views from the open countryside to the east of the railway, only from very few properties and locations on Houblon's Hill and Coopersale Street is it expected that development might just be discernible through the existing containing pattern of vegetation. Whilst there are a range of longer distance views from further east and south east to the wooded ridge on which the site lies, these view lines cross the

intervening M11 motorway. It is considered unlikely that there would be any visual effects noted from these more distant locations.

- 6.16 The main public views points would be from Stonards Hill at the site frontage, and from the adjacent Stonards Hill Recreation Ground and footpath, although in these last locations, views would largely only be of upper parts of the development.
- 6.17 Should the site be developed in the form set out in general terms in this report, it is considered that the landscape and visual changes would be likely to be minor and not of other than only very localised significance.
- 6.18 The most significant landscape features on the site are considered to be the two woodlands and the hedgerow to the north. Should the site be allocated for development these features, together with the drainage pattern and ponds should be protected and appropriately managed for the long term. This should be achieved by protocols set out in a Landscape and Ecological Masterplan secured by a legal agreement.

Appendix 1

**Extracts of EFDC Epping Forest Landscape Studies, Landscape Character
Assessment, Chris Blandford Associates, Jan 2010**

Epping Forest District Council
Epping Forest Landscape Studies
Landscape Character Assessment





Epping Forest District Council
Epping Forest Landscape Studies
Landscape Character Assessment

Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Watkins', enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval.

Dominic Watkins

Position

Director

Date

21st January 2010

Revision

Final Report

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- 2.7 National Landscape Typology
- 2.8 County Landscape Character Types and Areas
- 3.1 Epping Forest Landscape Character Types and Areas

Preface

In April 2009, Epping Forest District Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of the District.

The Study provides a baseline inventory of the landscape character of the District. It also sets out recommendations for the application of the Study for consideration and action as appropriate by the Council. The need to protect and enhance landscape character is recognised by Government planning policy on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. To ensure that full account is given to landscape character in planning decisions, this report is recommended to the Council for use as an evidence base for informing the preparation of the Local Development Framework.

We are grateful for the advice and guidance provided by the Steering Group, namely:

- Chris Neilan – Landscape Officer and Arboriculturist, Epping Forest District Council,
- Ian White – Forward Planning Manager
- Paul Hewitt - Countryside Manager

The Consultant team comprised:

- Dominic Watkins
- Emma Clarke
- Sarah De Vos

Chris Blandford Associates
January 2010

3.5 Wooded Ridges and Hills: Landscape Character Type D

Location and Boundaries

3.5.1 The Wooded Ridges and Hills Landscape Character Type occurs in two locations within the study area, to the northeast and southwest of Epping. To the northeast, this Landscape Character Type abuts the Ridges and Valleys (F), Wooded Ridges and Valleys (G) and Farmland Plateau (C) Landscape Character Types. To the southeast, it abuts the northern settlement edge of Loughton and the Ridges and Valleys (F) and Wooded Ridges and Valleys (G) Landscape Character Types.

Key Characteristics

3.5.2 The key characteristics of this Landscape Character Type are:

- Distinctive, broad ridge landform or series of pronounced hills, rising above the surrounding lower landform;
- Strongly wooded character, which often results in a strong sense of enclosure;
- Expanses of semi-natural and ancient woodland are a key feature;
- The raised landform facilitates long distance views across surrounding landscape, particularly from the edges of the ridges or hills;
- A series of narrow roads and lanes cross the landscape, which are often lined with mature trees, hedgerows and species-rich verges.
- The Wooded Ridges and Hills often provide the backdrop to views from surrounding, lower Landscape Character Types.

Landscape Character Areas

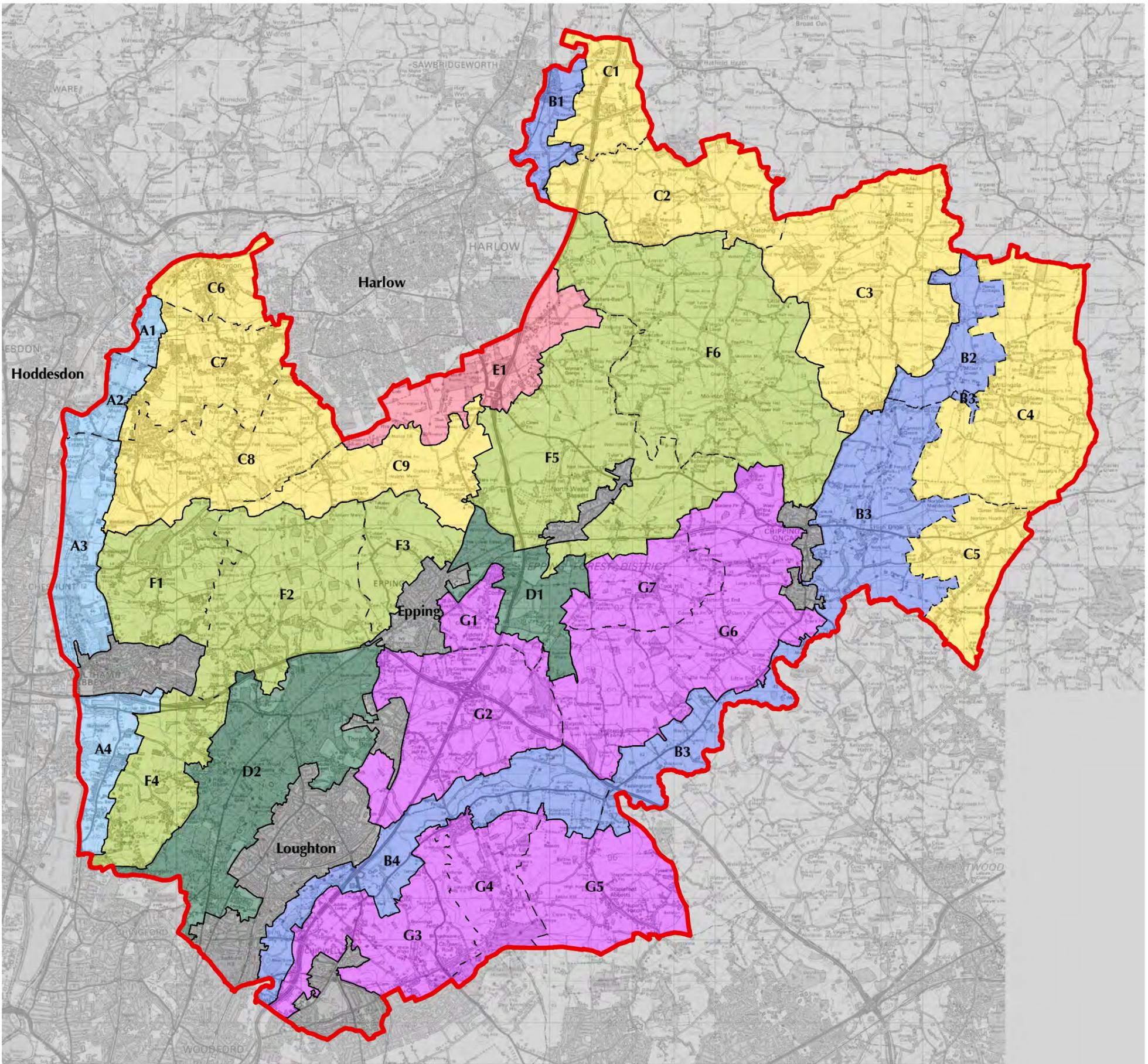
3.5.3 This Landscape Character Type contains the following Character Areas:

D1: Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge

D2: Epping Forest Ridge

Proposed Landscape Strategy Objectives

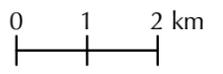
3.5.4 The proposed strategy objective for this Landscape Character Type and its constituent Landscape Character Areas is:



KEY

Epping Forest Landscape Character Types and Areas

- A River Valley Floodplain:
Flooded Gravel Pits and Marshes
A1 Rye Meads
A2 Nazeing Mead
A3 Lea Valley Marshes
A4 Rammey Marsh
- B River Valley
B1 River Stort
B2 Upper Roding
B3 Middle Roding
B4 Lower Roding
- C Farmland Plateau
C1 Sheering
C2 Matching
C3 Abbess
C4 Willingale
C5 Nine Ashes
C6 Roydon
C7 Roydon Hamlet
C8 Bumble's Green
C9 Epping Green
- D Wooded Ridges
D1 Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge
D2 Epping Forest Ridge
- E Farmland Ridges
E1 Jack's Hatch to Church Langley
- F Ridges and Valleys
F1 Holyfield
F2 Upshire
F3 Cobbin's Bridge
F4 Lippitts and Daws Hills
F5 North Weald
F6 Magdalen Laver and Moreton
- G Wooded Ridges and Valleys
G1 Coopersale
G2 Theydon Garnon
G3 Chigwell
G4 Lambourne
G5 Stapleford Abbots
G6 Stapleford Tawney and Stanford Rivers
G7 Toot Hill
- Urban
- Study Area



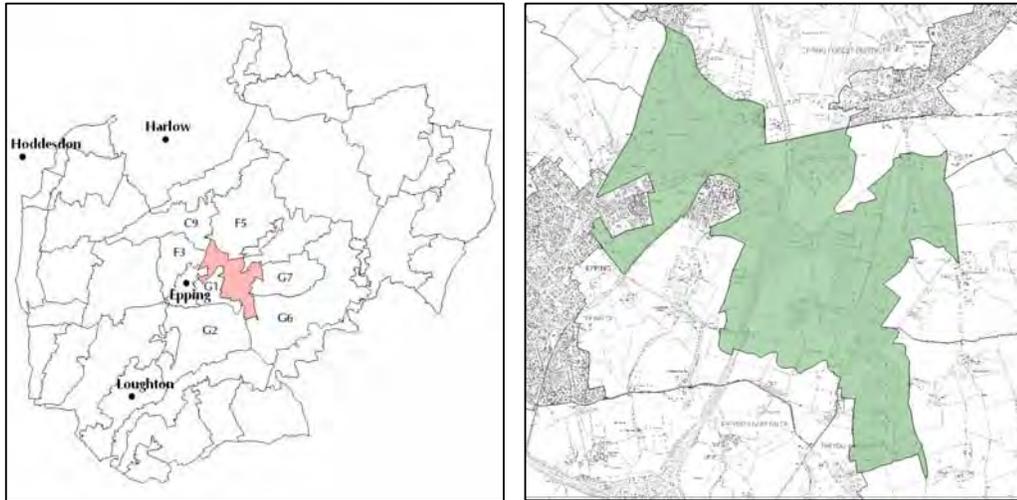
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Figure 3.1
 Epping Forest Landscape Character Types and Areas

- 3.5.5 **Conserve** - seek to protect and enhance positive features (as set out within the 'sensitivities to change' sections for each Landscape Character Area below) that are essential in contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place through effective planning and positive land management measures.
- 3.5.6 Suggested landscape guidelines for planning and management of each Landscape Character Area, within the context of the above strategy objectives, are set out in the following section.

D1: LOWER FOREST TO BEACHET WOOD RIDGE

Location and Boundaries



3.5.7 The Lower Forest to Beachet Wood Ridge Landscape Character Area is located towards the centre of the District and partly abuts the northern edge of Epping settlement. To the south, this area is adjacent to several Landscape Character Areas within the Wooded Ridges and Valleys Landscape Character Type (G), including Coopersale (G1), Theydon Garnon (G2), Stapleford Tawney and Stanford Rivers (G6) and Toot Hill (G7). To the north, it abuts Epping Green

Farmland Plateau (C9), Cobbin's Bridge Ridges and Valleys (F3) and North Weald Ridges and Valleys (F5) Landscape Character Areas.

Key Characteristics

- Several areas of mixed woodland, situated on a ridge of higher land overlooking surrounding areas of gently undulating farmland;
- The high proportion of tree cover contributes to the sense that this is a wooded ridge, forming a landmark within views to the area from surrounding Landscape Character Areas and from the M11 road corridor;
- Outside the woodland small pockets of arable farmland are located on the slopes of the ridge;
- Relatively strong sense of tranquillity within parts of the area at distance from the M11 road corridor;
- Ancient hornbeam pollards are key historic and landscape features,

Overall Character

3.5.8 Set on a ridge of higher land that overlooks surrounding undulating farmland, this area is predominantly covered by mixed woodland, the majority of which is categorised as ancient and semi-natural. Distinctive ancient hornbeam pollards are located within part of the woodland, providing unusual historic landscape features. Coppicing is a feature of some areas of the woodland. There is a strong sense of enclosure within woodland and along the Epping Road corridor, which runs through the centre, however from roads at the edges (such as the B1393); open views across adjacent farmland contribute to a recognisable sense of place. The corridor of the M11 cuts through the centre of the area, introducing a source of noise and movement and disturbing the overall sense of tranquillity. At distance from this, however, there is relatively strong sense of tranquillity within the woodland; and a predominantly rural character. This ridge of woodland forms the backdrop to views from adjacent Landscape Character Areas and is a recognisable landmark within views from the M11 corridor. The western edge of the woodland in this area meets the settlement edges of Epping.

Visual Character

- Woodland provides a strong sense of enclosure and limits views across the area;
- This wooded ridge forms a recognisable landscape feature and backdrop to views from adjacent Landscape Character Areas and from the M11 road corridor;
- Open views across adjacent lower, gently undulating farmland from the edges of the woodland.