

# Land East of Summerleas, Peartree Lane, Bexhill

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## Landscape and Visual Note

### 1.0 Introduction

This **Landscape and Visual Note** ('LVN') supports the promotion of the proposed development at the *Land East of Summerleas, Peartree Lane, Bexhill* (the 'Site'), which forms a phased extension to the adjoining proposals at the *Land at High House Farm, Ninfield Road, Bexhill*. LDA Design prepared a *Landscape and Visual Appraisal* ('LVA') for this scheme on behalf of Catesby Estates, who are promoting High House Farm in conjunction with Rurban Estates and the same wider consultant team appointed for this subject site.

This **LVN's** purpose is to summarise the relevant landscape and visual factors that will have a bearing on the Site's emerging proposals and consider the context of policy, physical, environmental, social and cultural factors. This document draws on background work conducted for the LVA on the *Land at High House Farm*, where relevant.

LDA Design has considered the Site's ability and its surroundings to accommodate new residential development, identified where opportunities and constraints exist from a landscape and visual perspective, and how potential impacts could be minimised through a sensitive design response.

Opportunities have been sought where local landscape enhancements could be brought forward as part of emerging proposals, with a series of preliminary design principles proposed by LDA Design considered in the evolution of the Site's design and informing the plans produced by urban designers, EdgeUD.

## 2.0 The Site and Its Local Context

### 2.1. The Site

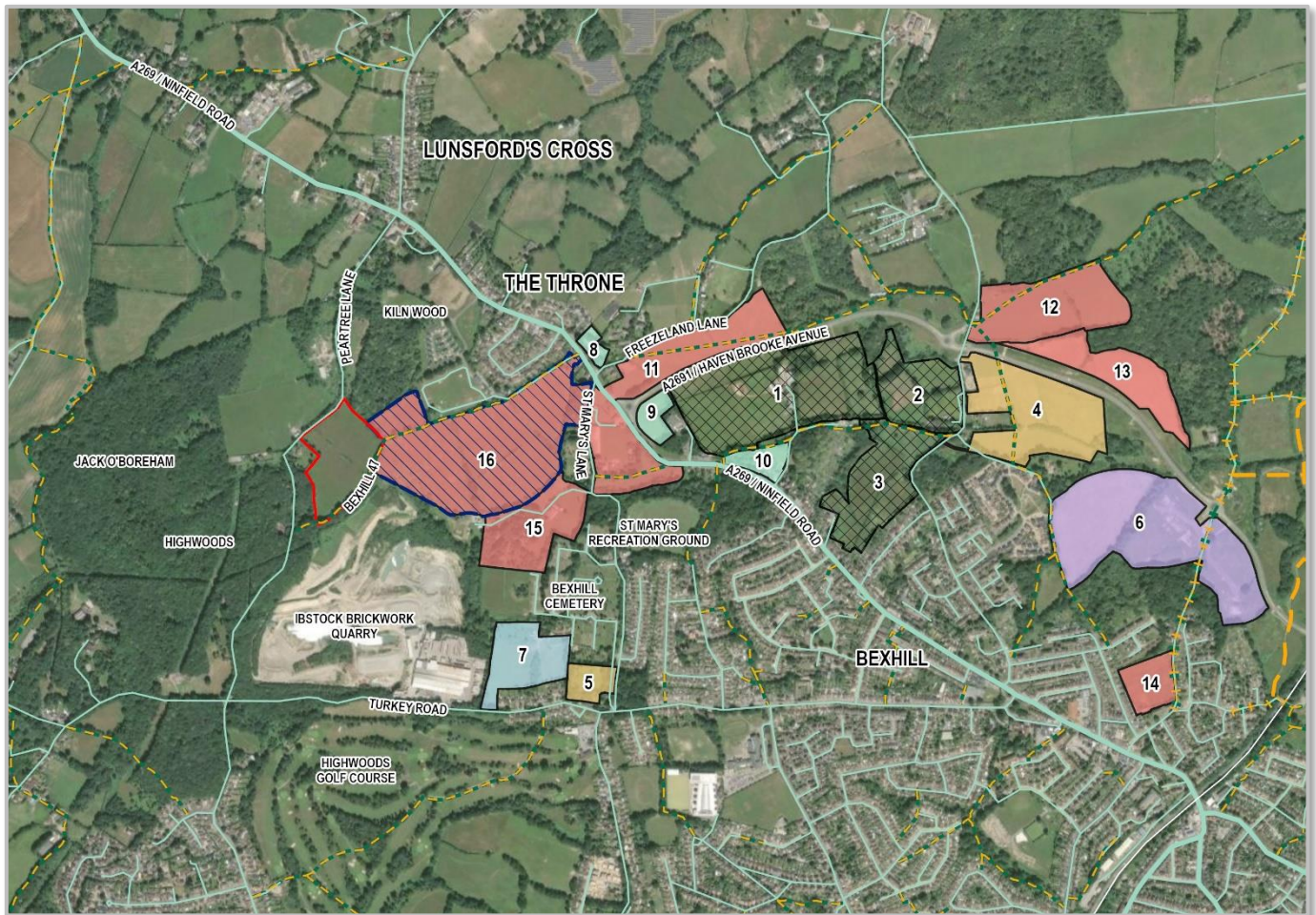
The Site comprises two arable field parcels, encompassing approximately 4.6 hectares ('ha'). It is located within a broad swathe of farmland between the northern extent of Bexhill and the nucleated residential area of The Thorne. **Figure 1** presents the Site's location and its local context.

The Site's boundaries are defined, as follows:

- **The Site's northern boundary** is defined by a mix of established shrub vegetation and mature trees that line the southern side of Peartree Lane (which lines the majority of the Site's northern and western boundary). Beyond this boundary lies a rural landscape that comprises small to medium-sized arable fields, characterised by shrub and tree vegetation. These fields vary in openness, with some areas being relatively exposed while others are enclosed by mature vegetation.
- **The Site's eastern boundary** is formed by a combination of established vegetation. Its north-eastern boundary is marked by the edge of Kiln Wood, an established and mature woodland. The south-eastern boundary is formed from a mix of established shrub and tree vegetation along the field's edge and the Public Footpath 'Bexhill 47'. This vegetation is characteristic of the surrounding landscape to the west and north, providing and provide a high degree of enclosure.
- **The Site's southern and western boundaries** are delineated by a mixture of features; including Peartree Lane and its roadside vegetation; the curtilage of residential property Summerleas; and the north-eastern extent of Highwoods SSSI (which marks the Site's south / south-western boundary). Further west, the landscape is characterised by the substantial area of Highwoods SSSI woodland.

The Site is situated among several consented and planned developments, many of which were allocated in the **Development and Site Allocations Local Plan** ('DaSA') adopted in December 2019. Additionally, several 'potential sites' have been identified in the draft **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment** ('HELAA') published in April 2024.

**Figure 1** below identifies these sites within the Site's local vicinity, illustrating the its location in a landscape that will evolve in the near future.



**Figure 1: The Site and its Local Context**

LEGEND

- Site boundary
- Extent of the Land at High House Farm
- A-Road
- Local Road
- Public Rights of Way Network
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- BOAT
- Local Development Sites
- Status
- Resolution to Grant
- Full Application (pending)
- Outline Application (pending)
- Allocated Site (Residential)
- Allocated Site (Employment)
- Potential Site (HELAA 2024)

ID	STATUS	REFERENCE
1	Resolution to Grant	RR/2022/2545/P
2	Resolution to Grant	RR/2021/2545/P
3	Resolution to Grant	RR/2022/1584/P
4	Allocated Site (Residential)	BEX0003c
5	Allocated Site (Residential)	BEX0005
6	Allocated Site (Residential)	BEX0017
7	Full Application (pending)	RR/2022/2131/P
8	Outline Application (pending)	RR/2023/1706/P
9	Outline Application (pending)	RR/2021/1059/P
10	Outline Application (pending)	RR/2023/129/P
11	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0072
12	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0164
13	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0163
14	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0032
15	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0204
16	Potential Site (HELAA 2024)	BEX0132

### 2.1.1. Landform, Landcover, and Settlement Pattern

The landscape that surrounds the Site features an undulating landscape that is characterised with ridges and narrow valleys. The Site itself gradually descending from its highest elevation on eastern boundary, at approximately 52m Above Ordnance Datum ('AOD'), westwards towards Peartree Lane. The lowest point on-site is in the Site's northern corner along Peartree Lane, which is approximately 37 AOD.

Situated to the north west of Bexhill and west of The Thorne, the Site lies within the 'fringe landscape' that encircles the settled areas of Bexhill, The Thorne, and Lunsford Cross. The Site is physically separated and visually enclosed from its surrounding settlements and landscapes by several natural and man-made features, such as St Mary's Lane Recreation Ground and Bexhill Cemetery. These features, along with notable changes in landform that topographically accentuate this separation and established vegetation that visually encloses this part of the landscape, creating a sense of distinction. However, while there is physical separation, there remains a perceptual sense that the landscape (in which the Site is situated) transitions between (and is influence by) both its nearby urbanised and rural areas. Furthermore, should the *Land at High House Farm* proceed, it is pertinent to consider that this would further change the local landscape and settlement context, and place the Site adjacent to an existing residential area.

### 2.1.2. The Site's Landscape Character

The key characteristics of the Site and its surroundings are detailed in the Rother District Council's **Landscape Assessment** (March 2008) ('RDCLA'). This document evaluates each character area in terms of quality, value, sensitivity, and capacity for change from a landscape and visual perspective. The Site falls within '2. Lunsford Cross' LCA and the search area '2A. Peartree Lane', which is described as follows:

*Area 2 - Lunsford Cross: This is a ridge top site which has a mix of uses, some of which are urban fringe in character. However, the location, whilst related to some urban development does need some careful design in order to avoid the creation of a hill top eyesore. It may be that the community at Lunsford Cross could be enriched by some development of a village green style, but this is not likely to be on the scale of a major development.*

*It is considered that this site should not be brought forward during this plan period because it is a natural extension of Freezeland. However, there would be merit in bringing forward advanced tree planting to enable it to be available for future plans and to enhance the area generally.*

*2.A Peartree Lane: Two grazing fields in remote countryside on the north side of a ridge which is defined by a good treed hedgerow. There are long open views to the north west which makes it very exposed to open countryside. There are some good boundary hedges but the screening effect of them is negated by the north facing slope.*

The **RDCLA** rates the landscape character of 2.A Peartree Lane as ‘Good Quality’ and of ‘High Value.’ Its sensitivity to change is assessed as ‘High’ for character resources and visual receptors, indicating a no capacity to accommodate housing.

The **RDCLA** reports that there are management opportunities to “...to improve the tree cover but the lay of the land would reduce its visual impact unless a “blanket” cover were achieved. Existing grassland could be better managed for visual and biodiversity effect.” Similarly the **RDCLA** states there the potential for mitigation would be ‘poor’ because the “...lay of the land minimises the potential screening effect of any new trees and woodland on the area.”

### 2.1.3. The Site’s Visual Environment

Experience of the Site and its local context indicate that it is typical of its surrounding landscape character, being that it is positioned on elevated ground, and in theory, any development within it could potentially be visible from the surrounding area.

However, despite the Site’s elevated position, established natural features and terrain limit its visual impact on the wider landscape, which is contrary to the conclusions of the **RDCLA**. This visual containment is attributed to the prevalent woodlands, tree belts, hedgerows and shrubs that have matured and further established since 2008. Combined with an undulating landform and buildings in the intervening landscape, the landscape today is more visually enclosed than reported by the **RDCLA**.

**Figure 2** shows an existing view from the Site’s eastern extent, from the northern section of the public footpath ‘Bexhill 47’.



**Figure 2: An existing view from the Public Footpath 'Bexhill 47', in the Site's eastern extent**

#### 2.1.4. The Site's Planning and Landscape Designation

The **Rother Local Plan Core Strategy** (adopted 29th September 2014) is the prevailing local plan for the Site and its surrounding. The policies listed below are pertinent to this LTN:

- Policy OSS2: Use of Development Boundaries
- Policy OSS3 Location of Development
- Policy OSS4 General Development Considerations
- Policy EN3 Design Quality
- Policy EN5 Biodiversity and Green Space
- Policy BX3 Development Strategy

No designated landscapes have been identified within the Site. However, it is acknowledged that the **High Weald National Landscape** is located approximately 2.7km to the Site's north-east (at its nearest point).

Based on knowledge of the Site and its surroundings, it has been determined that there would be no discernible visibility between the Site and the National Landscape due to a combination of factors such as intervening vegetation, landform, and buildings. As a result, it is judged that there would be no likely effects arising from the proposed development on the special qualities and natural beauty of the National Landscape.

### **3.0 Responding to the Site's Landscape Character, Settlement Pattern and Visual Environment**

The Proposed Development will inevitably transform the Site from an open field into a built environment, altering its land use and character, particularly in areas where views of the development are possible within its immediate context.

Currently, the Site and its surroundings are characterised by prevalent and established vegetation along its boundaries and beyond; situated within the 'fringe landscape' that encircles the settled areas of Bexhill, The Thorne, and Lunsford Cross. While the Site is physically separated and visually enclosed from the surrounding settlements / landscape by several natural and man-made features, there remains a perceptual sense that the landscape (in which the Site is situated) transitions between (and is influence by) both its nearby urbanised and rural areas

Therefore, with consideration to the prevailing enclosed and transitional 'fringe' landscape in which it is located, it judged that the Site has capacity to accommodate a scheme that is sensitivity designed and sympathetic to its surrounding character and visual environment, without any undue effects on existing landscape and/or visual resources.

Nonetheless, it remains important for the design of the Proposed Development to carefully address landscape and visual considerations to mitigate potential impacts.

#### **3.1.1. Design Principles for a Landscape-led scheme**

The Site offers opportunities to create a landscape-led scheme that would deliver a beneficial addition to the District without undue consequences on landscape character and views.

The design and consideration of landscape and visual resources is an iterative process, which ensures that all necessary measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects are incorporated into the proposals. This approach puts the environment at the forefront of the design, preserving the existing, enhancing it and ensuring that the newly built environment is sensitively integrated into its surroundings.

Understanding the Site and its context has led to identifying several opportunities and constraints, informing the emerging concept for the proposed development. A series of landscape design principles (outlined in the

following paragraphs) support the overarching vision of the Site, creating a strong sense of place and ensuring that any future masterplan is guided by the Site's inherent qualities. The design principles set out here should be read in conjunction with the plans by EdgeUD.

The **Design Principles** for the project seek a sensitive integration with the existing landscape and community. Any future landscape strategy should focus on preserving and enhancing existing on-site vegetation, ensuring the new development blends well with its surroundings. Particular attention will be given to areas of the Site more visible from the wider landscape, such as its north-western extent along Peartree Lane and the adjoining residential property Summerleas. This approach will create attractive new open spaces and green infrastructure, helping to visually confine the new buildings to the Site and its immediate vicinity. Consequently, long-range views will remain limited. Appropriate offsets should be utilised from the Site's boundaries and other on-site features to ensure their preservation and to work with the landscape. Prevailing characteristics of the existing landscape features, which contribute positively to the rural character of Peartree Lane and the transitional landscape on the edges of nearby settlements, should also be conserved and enhanced where possible.

Should the Proposed Development be visible, it will appear as part of the broader Bexhill settlement context, albeit established vegetation in and around the Site will serve as natural barriers, persevering a clear and natural distinction from the main settlement of Bexhill. This careful integration of the Site's proposals would reinforce Bexhill's identity as a separate town while preserving the fringe landscape's character and broad settlement patterns in the Site's locality.

Overall, the Site has the capacity to accommodate a sensitively designed scheme that is sympathetic to the prevailing characteristics of the surrounding transitional 'fringe' landscape, provided the outlined design recommendations for a landscape-led scheme are followed. The emerging proposals presently adhere to a landscape-led approach and LDA Design's recommendations. Consequently, it is anticipated that the Site's proposals would not result in any undue effects on existing landscape or visual resources.