



LANDSCAPE TECHNICAL NOTE

LAND WEST OF ROYAL OAK CLOSE, BECKLEY

Rother District Council – Local Plan Regulation 18
Consultation 2024

On behalf of Mr Nick Hedges

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Where field investigations have been carried out, these have been restricted to a level of detail required to achieve the stated objectives of the work.

This work has been undertaken in accordance with the quality management system of RSK ADAS Ltd.

Version history

Version	Date	Amendments
1	22/07/2024	Final

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1. Introduction

1.1.1. A Landscape Technical Note (LTN) has been prepared by ADAS Landscape in relation to Land west of Royal Oak Close, Beckley which has been assessed under the Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) under Site ID BEC0025. The land parcel is considered within this LTN (the 'site'). This report has been prepared in order to identify potential landscape opportunities and constraints of the site for residential development.

1.2. Objectives of this report

1.2.1. The objectives of this LVA report are to:

- Identify the relevant planning policy considerations for the site and proposed development;
- Identify the relevant landscape characteristics and guidelines for the site and proposed development;
- Identify potential visual sensitivities for the site and proposed development; and
- Identify landscape and visual opportunities and constraints to the type of development proposed within the site.

1.3. Author of the report

1.3.1. This report was written by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), who is trained and experienced in undertaking landscape and visual appraisals. ADAS is a Landscape Institute registered practice and all work is subject to peer review.

2. Planning policy context

2.1. Local planning policy

Rother Local Plan: Core Strategy (2014)

2.1.1. The Rother District Local Plan Core Strategy provides broad guidance on the scale and distribution of development and replaces a number of policies in the Local Plan. The policies considered relevant to the site are set out below.

2.1.2. Policy OSS2: Use of Development Boundaries, states:

“Development Boundaries around settlements will continue to differentiate between areas where most forms of new development would be acceptable and where they would not.

Existing development boundaries will be reviewed by the Development and Site Allocations DPD, having regard to the:

- i. Existing pattern, form and function of settlements, including of closely ‘linked’ settlements and important ‘gaps’ of countryside between them;***
- ii. Character and settings of individual towns and villages;***
- iii. Sensitivity to further development both within the main built up confines and in more rural fringes;***
- iv. The amount of land needed to fulfil development needs and requirements;***
- v. Availability of local infrastructure and services;***
- vi. Accessibility to facilities and services, and avoiding scattered and ribbon development;***
- vii. Environmental considerations, including the need to conserve designated areas of national and local landscape, archaeological, geological, ecological or historical importance; (viii) Following physical features, unless this may suggest a potential for development that is inappropriate.”***

2.1.3. Policy OSS3: Location of Development, states:

“In assessing the suitability of a particular location for development, when both allocating land for development and determining planning applications, sites and/or proposals should accord with the relevant policies of this Core Strategy and be considered in the context of:

- i. The spatial strategy for the particular settlement or area, and its distinct character;***
- ii. The capacity of, as well as access to, existing infrastructure and services, and of any planned or necessary improvements to them;***

- iii. *The local need for affordable housing;*
- iv. *Needs and priorities identified in approved Local Action Plans;*
- v. *The low carbon and renewable energy potentials of the site;*
- vi. *The character and qualities of the landscape;*
- vii. *Making effective use of land within the main built-up confines of towns and villages, especially previously developed land, consistent with maintaining their character;*
- viii. *Any constraints relating to land stability, contamination, air quality, agricultural land quality and coastal erosion, and the ability to satisfactorily address these;*
- ix. *The deliverability of development, including consideration of land ownership patterns and the viability of development;"*

2.1.4. Policy OSS4: General Development Considerations, states:

"In addition to considerations set out by other policies, all development should meet the following criteria:

- iii. *It respects and does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality;*

2.1.5. Policy RA1: Rural Villages, states:

"The needs of the rural villages will be addressed by:

- i. *Protection of the locally distinctive character of villages, historic buildings and settings, with the design of any new development being expected to include appropriate high quality response to local context and landscape;*

2.1.6. Policy EN1: Landscape Stewardship, states:

"Management of the high quality historic, built and natural landscape character is to be achieved by ensuring the protection, and wherever possible enhancement, of the district's nationally designated and locally distinctive landscapes and landscape features; including

- i. *The distinctive identified landscape character, ecological features and settlement pattern of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;*
- ii. *The distinctive low-lying levels to the east of the district with particular regard to the landscape setting of Rye and Winchelsea;*
- iii. *Nationally designated historic sites including listed Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the Registered Historic Battlefield at Battle;*

- iv. *The undeveloped coast;*
- v. *Open landscape between clearly defined settlements, including the visual character of settlements, settlement edges and their rural fringes;*
- vi. *Ancient woodlands; (vii) Tranquil and remote areas, including the dark night sky;*
- vii. *Other key landscape features across the district, including native hedgerows, copses, field patterns, ancient routeways, ditches and barrows, and ponds and water courses"*

2.1.7. Policy EN5: Biodiversity and Green Space, states:

"Biodiversity, geodiversity and green space will be protected and enhanced, by multi-agency working where appropriate, to:

- i. *Maintain and develop a district-wide network of green infrastructure where possible linking areas of natural green space;*
- ii. *Protect and enhance the international, national and locally designated sites, having due regard to their status;*
- iii. *Establish a major area of accessible open space at Combe Valley Countryside Park, between Bexhill and Hastings;*
- iv. *Enhance the nature conservation value and multi-functional nature of the Romney Marsh Biodiversity Opportunity Area;*
- v. *Support opportunities for management, restoration and creation of habitats in line with the opportunities identified for the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) and targets set out in the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan;*
- vi. *Continue to develop the wetland habitat at Bewl Water Reservoir, with compatible recreational uses;*
- vii. *Increase accessibility to the countryside from urban areas, especially in the Hastings and Bexhill fringes;*
- viii. *Ensure that development retains, protects and enhances habitats of ecological interest, including ancient woodland, water features and hedgerows, and provides for appropriate management of these features;*
- ix. *Require developers to integrate biodiversity into development schemes by avoiding adverse impacts from development on biodiversity or habitat, or where wholly unavoidable, provide appropriate mitigation against or compensation for any losses. In any event, developers will also be expected to consider and promote opportunities for the creation and/or restoration of habitats appropriate to local context.*

Rother District Local Plan (2006)

- 2.1.8. A number of policies contained within the adopted Rother District Local Plan have been replaced by those set out above. There are no saved policies that haven't been replaced that are of relevance to residential development on the site.

Rother Local Plan 2020 – 2040 Draft (Regulation 18) Version (2024)

- 2.1.9. The policies within the Draft Local Plan will replace the Core Strategy. The Below policies within the Draft Local Plan are considered relevant to the site. Proposed Policy GTC9: High Weald National Landscape (AONB), sets out:

All development within or affecting the setting of the High Weald National Landscape (AONB) shall conserve and enhance its distinctive landscape character, ecological features, settlement pattern and scenic beauty, having particular regard to the impacts on its character components, as set out in the latest version of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Development within the High Weald National Landscape should be small-scale, in keeping with the landscape and settlement pattern, and designed in a way that reflects its nationally-designated status as landscape of the highest quality, following the guidance in the High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide and Colour Study. Major development should not take place in the AONB save in exceptional circumstances as outlined at paragraph 183 of the NPPF.

- 2.1.10. Proposed Policy LWL2: Facilities & Services, sets out:

(A) All development proposals for one or more new dwellings must meet the following criteria:

.....

ii) Public Squares and Spaces. Provide, or contribute to, a connected and accessible network of safe, attractive, varied public squares and open spaces with paths and other routes into and through, places to rest and interact e.g. benches and other types of seating and provide good signage and wayfinding that is accessible to all. This should form part of a wider connected accessible Green Infrastructure network which includes food growing opportunities (allotments and community gardens) and prioritises locally native plant species.

2.1.11. Proposed Policy LWL5: Distinctive Places, sets out

All development proposals for one or more new dwelling must meet the following criteria:

- i. Response To Site, Character and Landscape Context. Demonstrate a clear understanding of the context and landscape character (including townscape) of the site and beyond. New development must conserve, enhance, and draw inspiration from this context and character in either a traditional or contemporary style. The use of standard building or house types that take no account of local character, bad imitation of traditional design or simply replicate generic or mediocre design in the locality will not be acceptable.*
- ii. Design Concept. Be visually attractive and be informed by a clear rationale and strong design concept developed in response to an understanding of the context and landscape character (including townscape). The design concept must also inform a consistent choice of high-quality materials, finishes, detailing and landscape design. Generally, unprepossessing late twentieth century and twenty-first century development in the area should not be used as precedents for material and finishes choices in new development.*
- iii. High Weald National Landscape. All development within or affecting the setting of the High Weald National Landscape shall conserve and enhance its distinctive landscape character, ecological features, settlement pattern and scenic beauty, having particular regard to the impacts on its character components, as set out in relevant policies in this plan, the latest version of the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan and the High Weald AONB Design Guide and Colour Study.*

2.1.12. Proposed Policy HWB5: Green and Blue Infrastructure, sets out:

The protection, enhancement and provision of green and blue infrastructure⁴¹, including sufficient, well-managed and accessible, sports and recreation spaces, both formal and informal, will be achieved by:

- i. Safeguarding existing green and blue infrastructure (designated through this Local Plan's Policies Map) from development, and only permitting its loss where it results in improved provision (in terms of quantity and quality) as part of a redevelopment or elsewhere within the locality.*
- ii. Permitting proposals for the improvement of existing, or provision of new, green and blue infrastructure, in localities where deficits are identified.*

- iii. Requiring development proposals to respond to and incorporate existing green and blue infrastructure, and integrate new, into design proposals, including providing links to existing green and blue infrastructure outside the development's boundaries.*

2.1.13. Proposed Policy LAN1: Rural Environments and Landscape Character, sets out:

The siting, layout and design of development should maintain and reinforce the natural and built landscape character of the area in which it will be located, based on a clear understanding of the distinctive local landscape characteristics. Priority must be given to the conservation and enhancement of the district's national designated and locally distinctive landscapes and landscape features, including but not limited to:

- i. The High Weald National Landscape (which is also subject to Policy GTC9).*
- ii. The Romney Marshes, comprising of the distinctive low-lying levels to the east of the district with particular regard to the landscape setting of Rye and Winchelsea.*
- iii. The Pevensy Levels, comprising of the low-lying area of wetland meadows between Bexhill-on-Sea and Hailsham in Wealden District.*
- iv. Nationally designated historic sites including listed Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the Registered Historic Battlefield at Battle.*
- v. The undeveloped coast.*
- vi. Open landscape between clearly defined settlements, including the visual character of settlements, settlement edges and their rural fringes.*
- vii. Ancient Woodlands.*
- viii. Tranquil and remote areas, including the dark night sky.*

2.1.14. Proposed Policy LAN2: Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows, sets out:

Development must, where appropriate, enhance and expand the district's tree, hedgerow and woodland resource.

Development that would result in the unacceptable loss of, or damage to, or threaten the continued well-being of, locally valued and/or protected hedgerows, community orchards, veteran trees or woodland will not be permitted.

Rother District Council Draft Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2024)

2.1.15. The Rother District Draft Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), Part 2: Site Assessments, assesses the site as two separate land parcels within the Rye Sub Area Beckley. The site is considered under Site ID BEC0025. The HELAA notes of Site ID BEC0025:

“This is a relatively small field bound by existing development and historic field boundaries. As one of the undeveloped gaps in Beckley between short rows of dwellings, and centrally located in the village, it contributes to the rural character of the village. Development of the entire site would be uncharacteristic of the settlement pattern. More limited development in part of the site is also likely to be problematic. In the southern part of the site development would have an urbanising impact on the narrow lane and would be prominent in views from the north due to the topography. In the northern part of the site development would be prominent in views from Main Street and would significantly change the open aspect of this site which currently contributes to the rural character and appearance of this part of the village.”

3. Existing landscape and visual context

Designations

- 3.1.1. The site is located immediately south of the B2088 amongst the ribbon development that follows the road, forming the settlement of Beckley and is entirely situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Topography

- 3.1.2. The site sits within an area of gently undulating land with much of the site being situated at approximately 30m AOD with gentle undulations within the land parcel itself. Land in the vicinity of the site slopes gently down from a high point south of the site, to a low point north of the site. Land in the wider landscape is gently undulating with the topography of the area combining with vegetation to limit the extent of many views.

Vegetation and land use

- 3.1.3. The settlement of Beckley is set within the context of a patchwork of small irregular agricultural fields that are separated by mature hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees and tree belts that connect large areas of broadleaved woodland, much of which is designated as Ancient Woodland. The site is currently actively utilised as pasture and is bound on all sides by hedgerows and trees.
- 3.1.4. The settlement of Beckley primarily follows the route of the B2088 where it comprises a ribbon of development amongst the heavily vegetated landscape of the High Weald AONB.

3.2. Landscape character

- 3.2.1. The landscape character assessment approach is a descriptive approach that seeks to identify and define the distinct character of landscapes that make up the country. This approach recognises the intrinsic value of all landscapes, not just 'special' landscapes, as contributing factors in people's quality of life, in accordance with the European Landscape Convention. It also ensures that account is taken of the different roles and character of different areas, in accordance with the NPPF Core Principles. The description of each landscape is used as a basis for evaluation in order to make judgements to guide, for example, development or landscape management.

County character assessment

East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (2016)

3.2.2. As identified within the East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment, the site is situated within the Landscape Character Area (LCA) Lower Rother Valley, the key characteristics of which are considered to be:

- *“The area from Salehurst in the west to Rye in the east, the boundary with Kent in the north and the ridgetop B2089 to the south.*
- *The broad valley of the lower reaches of the River Rother.*
- *The Tillingham Valley with a flat open floor and steep well wooded sides.*
- *Long dramatic views across both valleys from the enclosing ridges and spurs.*
- *Engineered raised grass flood banks along the main river and straightened rivers channels which detract from the naturalness of the river valley.*
- *The ancient inland sea cliffs at Rye and Playden.*
- *An intricate pattern of rectangular fields bounded by reed fringed ditches in the flood plains.*
- *A few remaining extensive areas of orchards and some remnants of hop growing.*
- *Lines of Italian poplars planted as wind breaks are an introduced and characteristic feature, notably at Bodiam.*
- *Extensive loss of hedgerow on the lower valley slopes with trimmed and remnant hedgerows resulting in a stark intensively farmed landscape.*
- *Exceptionally remote unspoilt areas away from the main roads and villages.*
- *The larger settlements are on the ridge tops with typical ribbon development extending along the main roads.*
- *Typical High Weald scattered development of farmsteads, hamlets and large country house estates.*
- *Significant houses and designed landscapes at Brickwall, Great Dixter and Peasmarsh Place.*
- *Bodiam Castle dominates the Rother Valley landscape.*
- *Oast houses are characteristic and found on most farmsteads, many now converted into houses.*
- *Typical High Weald white weatherboarding and some villages have more subtle weatherboarding of pastel shades giving a sea side feel.*
- *Scattered woodland across the valley slopes and higher ground, much of this is ancient woodland. About half of the latter has been planted and some with extensive areas of conifers.*
- *The central area is heavily wooded with the Beckley, and Flatropers woodland areas, much of which is publically accessible.*

- *Indigenous characteristic tree species are oak and ash with sweet chestnut coppice on drier slopes.*
- *Beech, lime and pine feature locally and other exotic specimens are found in gardens and villages.*
- *Swans, herons and other wetland birds are very much features in the landscape.*
- *Three main roads cross the area the A21, A229, A28 and the A268, the B2089 forms the southern boundary.*
- *Winding and very narrow sunken country lanes with steep gradients where they drop down into the valleys.*
- *The Kent and East Sussex Steam Railway runs from Bodiam to Tenterden in Kent."*

3.2.3. The Landscape Character Assessment identifies a number of Landscape Management Guidelines for the Lower Rother Valley, with those specifically relevant to the site and its proposed allocation for residential development under the heading Protect and Enhance the character of the villages, set out below:

- *Encourage the production of Neighbourhood Plans which incorporate village design guides.*
- *Plan for new development in the villages to ensure it is designed to a high standard to reflect local character and sense of place.*
- *Establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting.*
- *Prepare village design guides and tree conservation plans.*
- *Consider traffic management on rural lanes.*

Site landscape character

3.2.4. The site is formed by an area of land to the south of the B2088 where the hedgerow along the northern site boundary separates it from the carriageway of the road. The southern boundary of the site is formed by a hedgerow along King's Bank Lane, with vegetation on the eastern and western site boundaries separating it from the existing residential development either side of the site that occupies the parcels of land between the two roads.

3.2.5. The site bears a strong relationship with the existing residential development along the B2088 which forms the settlement of Beckely, with properties generally lining the route of the road. The site is enclosed on all sides by either existing residential properties or roads, and is not connected to the wider undeveloped countryside. North of the site, existing residential properties line the B2088, such that it provides a sense of continuous development along the road albeit that the site is currently undeveloped.

4. Opportunities and Constraints

4.1. Landscape strategy

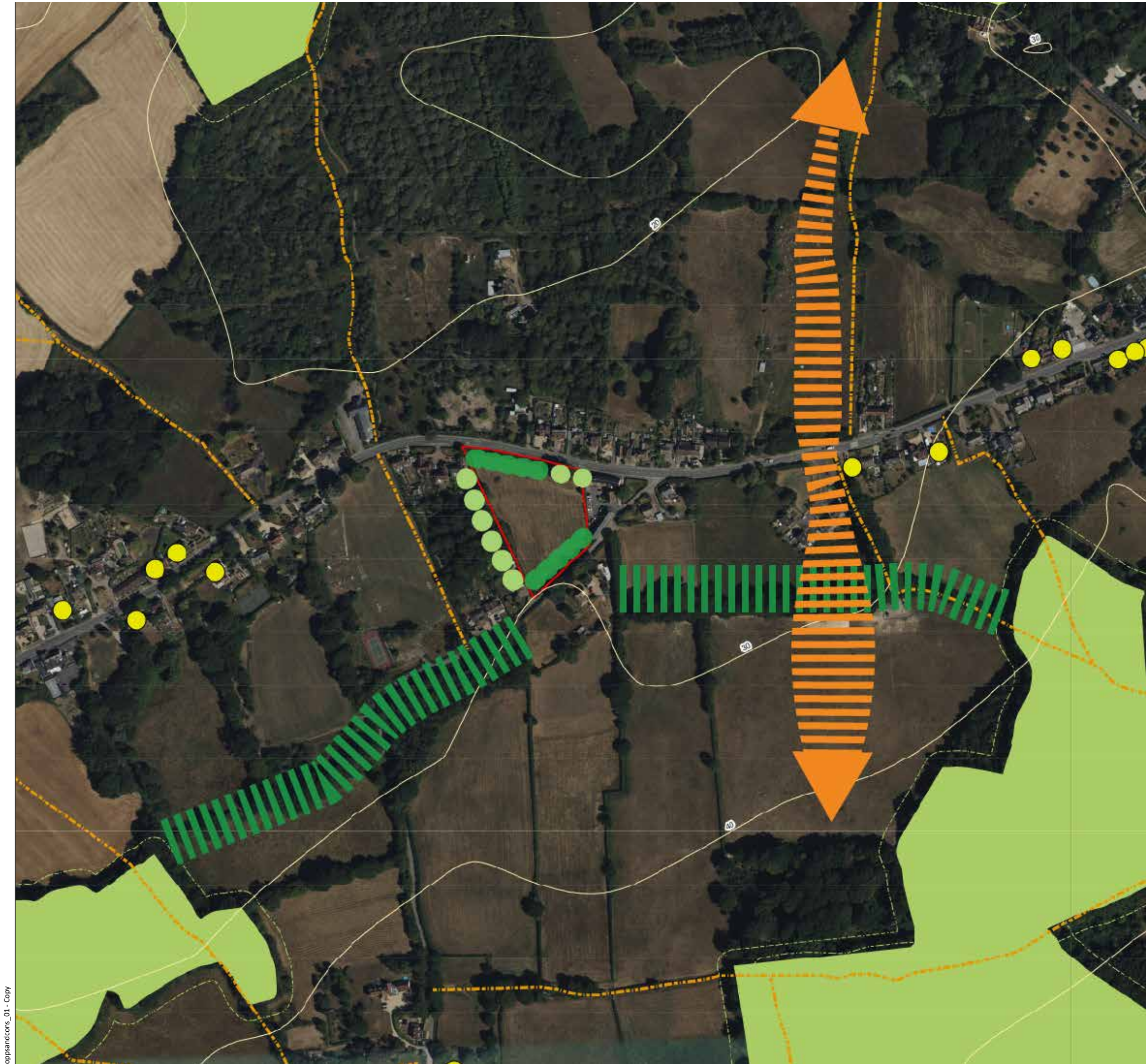
- 4.1.1. The site comprises a single agricultural field that is currently in active arable production, bound on all sides by mature hedgerow and woodland vegetation, providing the site with a strong physical and visual enclosure.
- 4.1.2. Development of the site should seek to retain as many of the important landscape features on site as possible and include an appropriate landscape scheme that has been informed by desk and site study, as shown in the Opportunities and Constraints Plan. A landscape strategy has been developed for the site with the following broad aims:
- Deliver residential development within the existing landscape pattern, utilising and enhancing existing vegetation to deliver strong boundaries to development that build upon the existing network of habitats and Green Infrastructure;
 - To assimilate the proposed development into the receiving landscape where existing residential development follows the route of the B2088. Development on the site will represent an infill of residential development, between development either side of the site occupying land between the B2088 to the north and King's Bank Lane to the south;
 - Consolidate the existing settlement of Beckely at the junction of the B2088 and King's Bank Lane, where existing residential development either side of the site fronts onto both roads;
 - Create a strong vegetated edge that contributes to the continuous tract of vegetation between Milldown Wood to the south-west of the site, and Oakhill Wood to the south-east of the site.
- 4.1.3. The Rother District Draft Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), Part 2: Site Assessments, notes that the site sits amongst existing residential development ***"this is a relatively small field bound by existing development"***.
- 4.1.4. The Draft HELAA also notes that ***"centrally located in the village,"*** and that it contributes to the rural character of Beckley, significantly altering the rural character of the village, which is comprised of ribbon development along the B2088. At the point in which the site is located along the B2088, residential properties front onto the B2088 to the north of the site, providing the sense of continuous settlement. Furthermore, the site forms a small area of land adjacent to existing residential development fronting onto both the B2088 and King's Bank Lane as they converge.
- 4.1.5. The delivery of vegetation along southern boundary of the site, will facilitate in defining the southern edge of Beckely as King's Bank Lane by forming part of a wider swathe of vegetation connecting the two ancient woodlands of Milldown Wood to the south-west of the site, and Oakhill Wood to the south-east of the site,

in line with the aspirations of the Landscape Management Guidelines for Rother Valley, which aim to ***“establish defined development edges to villages with new tree planting”***.

- 4.1.6. A strong landscape strategy that builds upon the existing enclosure that the site is afforded by adjacent vegetation will limit the spatial extent of any visibility for development on the site within the wider landscape of the High Weald AONB. Development on the site will not extend the influence of existing built form at Beckley, where residential development is strung out along the B2088.
- 4.1.7. The existing settlement of Beckley is consolidated in the vicinity of the site, evidenced through the provision of village services such as Beckley Recreation Ground and Beckley Village Centre, either side of the B2088, approximately 90m west of the site. delivery of residential development on the site will respect the existing layout of the settlement with development set behind existing boundary vegetation enabling it to assimilate into the rural character of the village.
- 4.1.8. The proximity of the site to the Beckley Recreation Ground and Village centre provides additional opportunity for connecting new development to existing services provided by the Recreation Ground, in line with Policy OSS3: Location of Development, taking account of ***“the capacity of, as well as access to, existing infrastructure and services, and of any planned or necessary improvements to them”***.
- 4.1.9. Furthermore, development of the site offers the opportunity to deliver residential development in a configuration that respects Policy OSS2: Use of Development Boundaries, which highlights the need for development to be delivered with ***“accessibility to facilities and services, and avoiding scattered and ribbon development”***. The site relates strongly to existing built form within the settlement, will enable the creation of strong a strong southern boundary to Beckley that is defined by King’s Bank Lane along the southern boundary of the site.

5. Summary

- 5.1.1. An initial landscape opportunities and constraints exercise has been undertaken for Land west of Royal Oak Close, Beckley to identify appropriate measures to support the accommodation of residential development.
- 5.1.2. Through landscape and visual interrogations, an opportunities and constraints study has been undertaken, focusing on the landscape and visual context of the site to make recommendations to facilitate the delivery of residential development on the site. It is considered within the capacity of the site to accommodate residential development without altering the character of the settlement.
- 5.1.3. Development of the site will occupy the existing landscape pattern, assimilating built form into the setting of Beckley through the utilisation and enhancement of existing vegetation to deliver strong boundaries to development that build upon the existing network of habitats and Green Infrastructure.
- 5.1.4. Development of the site will represent an infill of residential development, between development either side of the site occupying land between the B2088 to the north and King's Bank Lane to the south where development of the site provides the opportunity to create a strong vegetated edge that contributes to the continuous tract of vegetation between Milldown Wood to the south-west of the site, and Oakhill Wood to the south-east of the site.
- 5.1.5. The site and relates strongly to the adjacent residential properties within the settlement of Beckley, with existing residential properties to the north, east and west on its northern extent and residential properties east, west and south on its southern extent.
- 5.1.6. A strong landscape strategy that builds upon the existing enclosure that the site is afforded by adjacent vegetation will limit the spatial extent of any visibility for development on the site within the wider landscape of the High Weald AONB. Development on the site will not extend the influence of existing built form at Beckley, where residential development is strung out along the B2088
- 5.1.7. Furthermore, the proximity of the site to the Beckley Recreation Ground and Village centre provides additional opportunity for connecting new development to existing services provided by the Recreation Ground, in line with Policy OSS3: Location of Development, taking account of ***“the capacity of, as well as access to, existing infrastructure and services, and of any planned or necessary improvements to them”.***



- LEGEND
- Site Boundary
 - Ancient Woodland
 - Proposed planting to create vegetative buffers
 - Listed buildings
 - opportunity to contribute to strong belt of connected Green Infrastructure, through delivery of planting on southern site boundary
 - Gap in ribbon development with absence of residential properties both to the north and south of B2088
 - Existing visual enclosure to the site, afforded by the vegetation on its boundaries

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Client:
Rother District Council

Project:
Land at Beckley - BEC0025

Drawing Title:
Opportunities and Constraints Plan

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Scale: NTS

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Checked by: RG

Date: 22/07/24
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