



WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

**LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL REVIEW OF TWO ADDITIONAL SUBMISSIONS FOR
WITNEY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS
JANUARY 2015**



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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL REVIEW OF TWO ADDITIONAL SUBMISSIONS FOR WITNEY STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

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1. Background to Study and Report

- 1.1 This report is prepared by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd (KLPL) on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd was commissioned to examine the landscape and visual aspects of two further options for major development: on the southern edge of Witney and on the north eastern edge of Witney. The report goes on to make recommendations to WODC on the landscape and visual potential and constraints of each option and on a possible way forward.
- 1.2 This Report draws on earlier landscape character and landscape sensitivity studies undertaken on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council: West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 (WOLA) and the Witney Landscape Assessments, 2007 and 2009 respectively, by Amanda Hopwood Associates (AHLC). Further field studies have been undertaken and a examination of the supporting documents produced for the options. Particular attention has been given to the inter-relationship between the landscape hinterland and the main settlements and the nearby villages which lie within 1km of the towns (Curbridge, Ducklington and High Cogges); and to the degree that the landscape hinterland is representative of the wider landscape within which it lies.
- 1.3 The promoters for South Witney have submitted an indicative masterplan and Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Barton Willmore dated 9 September 2015. I have considered the assessment carried out in the LVA in making my recommendations to West Oxfordshire Council.
- 1.4 This Report assesses the submissions in general terms but does not comment on detailed design proposals. Instead it focuses on the main aspects of each development option and the impact on the key features of the landscape, settlement and visual environment that make Witney, the surrounding villages and the surrounding countryside distinctive, sensitive, and valued. It explores the manner in which each option will either contribute to, or detract from, the local landscape, visual and settlement character.

2. Overview of landscape and visual characteristics and sensitivity and guidance from WOLA and AHLC Landscape Character Assessments

- 2.1 The WOLA study was undertaken in 1998 and the AHLC study in 2007. The WOLA and AHLC studies are taken as the starting point for this report and the key landscape characteristics of the area derived from this work. This report uses the 'updated settlement edge areas' identified in AHLC as its reporting units and endorses the boundaries of these areas. However the brief for this report required a review of the landscape sensitivity and importance of those areas affected by development options. The option at South Witney falls within and outside of AHLC 'updated settlement edge areas'. The AHLC areas are shown in attached Figures.

2.2 Table 2.1 below sets out the results of this review:

Witney Landscape Area	AHLC landscape sensitivity	AHLC landscape importance	2015 conclusions	Reasons
South Witney				
F2	Moderate to high	High local and moderate district	The sensitivity of this area varies internally but overall it is clearly part of the wider open countryside south of the A40 (which contains the town and defines its southern edge). It is important to retain the separate identity of Ducklington and contain the urbanising influence of Witney. It is therefore of high landscape sensitivity. The AHLC concludes that the land in the east is of higher sensitivity due to the impact of existing development in the east. However the southern parts of the area and land to the south of F2 have a stronger rural character resulting in a higher sensitivity.	The sensitivity of this area has been compromised to some extent by the A40, the sewage works and adjacent buildings and views of Witney. However this area is part of the open countryside not only south of A40 but also of the wider Bampton Vale. A narrow gap separates Ducklington from Witney which is already heavily compromised by the A40/A415 junction and these two busy highways. Although the western edge of Ducklington is more urban in character, it is small in scale and contained by the A415 and vegetation, largely maintaining a village character to Ducklington. These more urbanising elements in the east have already had some adverse impact whereas the southern part shares the rural characteristics of the wider landscape.
G	High	High local and district	The sensitivity of this landscape has been rather compromised by the A40 and the approval of development at Coral Springs. However the local character is an important contrast to the more open wold and vale landscapes and an important landscape buffer between Curbridge and Witney. The land south of the A40 remains of high sensitivity with the land to the north of moderate sensitivity, although this retains its high level of importance in protecting this gateway to Witney	Small fields and boundary vegetation are key characteristics of the area. The Colwell Brook forms the centre of a linear landscape corridor which extends into Area H. The A40 slices through the centre of this area with the result that the northern sector now relates more to Witney than the open countryside to the south. The approach to Witney is however characterised by the tree lines and framed views into open fields. East of the raised A4095 the landscape relates less well to Curbridge although it still contributes to the gap between the two settlements
East Witney				
D1	High	High	The whole area has strong landscape links with the landscape to the north and east with the higher ground the most visually sensitive. Although a small pocket lies below the 95m AOD contour which still largely defines the eastern limit of settlement at Witney, overall D1 has a high landscape and visual sensitivity.	Cogges Wood to the north-east is a local landmark to which D1 forms an important open rural setting. The small scale well hedged field pattern is a surviving remnant of agricultural clearance in the Wychwood Forest. Visibility is partly contained by perimeter planting and landform but there are key views from the north. WOLA recommends that small scale development may be acceptable provided it 'conforms to existing field pattern, is sensitively designed and does not significantly alter settlement form'. The rural character of the area is affected by both Jubilee Way and housing at Madley

Witney Landscape Area	AHLC landscape sensitivity	AHLC landscape importance	2015 conclusions	Reasons
				Park. However even localised major development east of Jubilee Way would erode the integrity of the whole of D1
E	High	High	This area has good landscape and visual links with the wider open countryside to the north, south and east, despite the presence of the A40 and Shores Green Junction. It is visually prominent and the sensitivity remains high.	The area contributes to the open setting of Cogges Wood to the north and has a role to play in contributing to the character of the Wychwood Forest. It lies on a prominent ridge which separates the open countryside to the east and south-east from the valley sides which slope towards Witney. The lower slopes close to High Cogges contribute to the immediate setting of this village.

3. Overview of settlement pattern at Witney and its landscape hinterland

- 3.1 The area is a mix of contrasting settlement patterns and character. The current study was not required to undertake a detailed assessment of the settlement pattern but identifies key features that will contribute to a better understanding of the best townscape options for the area.
- 3.2 This study also seeks to help identify a meaningful buffer to the surrounding villages. The landscape buffers were in this case determined by the need to protect the surviving historic landscape character setting of High Cogges, Curbridge and Ducklington; to maintain the perception of separation between these settlements and Witney and to maintain the separate identity and local distinctiveness of the villages. The final recommended buffers are plotted on Figures 1E and 1F. In each case the proposed buffer takes into account the land use, landscape features and landscape pattern of the open land between the settlements; the visual characteristics of the land; and the character of the limits of each settlement.
- 3.3 **Witney:** Witney is a typical Cotswold town, with a distinctive character of its own centred on the Windrush river corridor and the historic core. The West Oxfordshire Design Guide identifies the town as a nucleated settlement historically located in the low lying/floodplain of the Limestone Wolds character area, although modern development has extended up into the open wolds. The town centre contrasts, by virtue of its scale and extensive 20th century peripheral development, with the character of the surrounding villages but shares many architectural and historic patterns in common. The retention of this contrast, whilst conserving the townscape character of the town, is important. To the north, west and east of the historic core the land rises onto the plateau above the river valley. In the north-west from 100m AOD above the land lies within the Cotswolds AONB. The Wychwood Project Area covers the open higher ground north and east of the town. To the south the land gently slopes away into Bampton Vale and Lower Windrush Valley. Overall the town has remained largely contained below the 95m AOD contour on slopes dropping down to the town in the north and east. To the west it has extended onto the ridge up to 110m AOD, resulting in significant visual prominence over a wide area and unsympathetic urban spread above of the valley sides. In this generally open rolling landscape this extension of the town from 95m to 110m makes a big impact on the containment of the town, the visibility of the built form from the wider countryside including the AONB and the overall settlement form.

The A40 at present forms a well defined limit to the town along its southern edge although the built form is visible in views from south of the A40, particularly between Curbridge and Ducklington.

- 3.4 **Curbridge:** The hamlet has a strong rural identity in contrast to the modern estate character of south-west Witney. It forms a discrete area, separated by only 700m, and with the landscape buffer severed by the A40. The setting of the village is the small scale landscape of minor valleys which include the Colwell Brook and the land both sides of the A4095 which are very vulnerable to further urban erosion.
- 3.5 **Ducklington:** This small village has a strong historic core closely related to the River Windrush and its meadows east of the village. Modern housing on the west of the village up to the A415 is extensive but has a small scale pattern of development. This has sub-urbanised the village but remains in scale with the historic settlement pattern. The village is severed from Witney by the A40 which prevents intervisibility with the town, although the gap between Ducklington and Witney is very narrow (300m). Ducklington is set within the open vales to the west and south which contribute to maintaining its rural context.
- 3.6 **High Cogges:** This small hamlet also has a strong traditional rural character but due to the local landform and the A40 (in a cutting) is orientated towards the wider landscape to the east. There is some inter-visibility with the higher land south of Oxford Hill (Area D2) and north of the A40 (Area E). The landscape buffer is however very narrow, 400m at its narrowest, and both visual and physical separation is needed to retain the separate identity of this hamlet.
- 3.7 The past expansion of Witney lends itself to further expansion through urban extensions but this places significant pressure on the character of the landscapes that extend from the wider countryside up to the edge of the town and on the surrounding villages. This report has therefore looked at both the impact of development and the potential for integrating new development and new green infrastructure into the town, the surrounding landscape and village pattern and for enhancing the existing urban-rural edge.

4. Summary of expansion options

- 4.1 Urban capacity in Witney is relatively limited and to meet the identified housing requirement for the town, it will be necessary to develop on Greenfield land on the fringe of the town. A number of site options have been submitted to the Council which together would offer a substantial area of housing. Two further options are under consideration in this addendum. The additional site in the north east of Witney overlaps with the northern part of an earlier submission by The East Witney Land Consortium (north of the Oxford Road B4022) and extends further eastwards to the A40. The additional site (South Witney) lies to the south of the A40 and west of Ducklington and proposes to accommodate 1200 houses. This lies to the east of an earlier submission by Persimmon Homes, Bovis Homes and Sovereign Land in West Witney which includes the Colwell Brook valley and higher ground west of Deer Park Road. This report re-examines the landscape, visual and settlement attributes of the additional alternative options at Witney and provides

landscape guidance towards selecting the best way to deliver new dwellings on the edge of the town, whilst minimising the harm to landscape character, visual amenity and settlement pattern.

5. Key constraints and opportunities

5.1 A number of key factors will determine the best landscape, townscape and visual option for the expansion of Witney:

- Retention of built form on slopes facing in towards Witney and avoidance of any further expansion onto exposed high ground;
- Retention of an open landscape setting to the villages;
- Conservation and enhancement of the most sensitive and historically intact areas of open landscape within the existing rural hinterland;
- Conservation of the continuity of the landscape types around the town;
- Retention of the existing visual envelope to Witney and avoidance of expansion into prominent open fields beyond existing visually strong barriers;
- Protection of the built form character and separate identity of Witney and the surrounding villages;
- Protection of the unique river Windrush landscape which is a defining feature of the town and its landscape setting;
- Integration of key areas of green infrastructure into the settlement either as part of the landscape transition zone to the town or as an internal asset forming part of the enhancement of the townscape pattern; and
- Creation of an opportunity to significantly improve the hard urban edge and meet landscape targets for the area as set out in OWLS, WOLA and AHLC.

5.2 In the past the provision of new green infrastructure has concentrated on providing landscape buffers to the open countryside which would also help to screen the new built form in time. However Government guidance looks for green infrastructure to provide for open space opportunities with a multiple of purposes to serve the community as a whole. Any tree or woodland planting should also conserve and enhance the current landscape character, and not be used solely to screen development.

6. Review of Additional Development Options in Witney

6.1 Assessment of South Witney (Abbey Development Ltd)

Overview of proposals in relation to landscape and visual assessments

The proposed site option abuts the A40 along its northern edge, the A4095 in the west and the A415 to the east, and the rural Curbridge Lane to the south. Housing on the edge of Witney lies to the north of the A40 and is visible from the site and Curbridge Lane to some extent. The village of Ducklington immediately abuts the A415 and modern housing is visible on the village edge along this road. However views from the site are screened by a belt of trees along the A415. Curbridge similarly lies just beyond and is visible from the A4095 where the site falls away from the A4095, which is elevated at this point to pass over the A40. These features give some visual separation between the site and the adjacent villages.

The site lies mainly within Area F2 (South West Witney: Valley Floor) and the open countryside to the south of F2, although the most north-easterly part is in Area G (West Witney: Minor valleys). Area F2 is typical of the flat open arable farmland that extends south into the Bampton Vale, rising to local hillsides as on the Aston Road and at Moulden Woods south of Curbridge Lane. This landscape forms the western setting to the Lower Windrush Valley. Area G is a more complex valley landscape of the semi-enclosed rolling vale landscape. The AHLC identifies F2 as having a moderate to high sensitivity with the higher sensitivity in the east. G is of high sensitivity with high local and district importance. Although the site extends to the south beyond both areas F2 and G, the landscape is typical of F2. A landscape and visual appraisal for the site is summarised in the Development Framework Document 2014 prepared by Barton Willmore.

Key landscape, visual and townscape features of proposals

The proposals are for a sustainable neighbourhood development of 1200 houses with a new primary school and local retail/healthcare facilities. Primary access is off the A415 junction and the A4095. The sewage works and abattoir are retained within a woodland belt of some width and the land to the east and south shown as a mix of open space, recreational grounds and agricultural land which serves as an open setting to Ducklington. Housing is set back slightly from Curbridge Lane broken up by small areas of open space along the lane. A landscape buffer is proposed east of the A4095. A central spine of open space runs along the alignment of a small brook west to east through the development and the railway line is retained as a landscape corridor linking to pedestrian and cycle access to Witney over the A40.

Assessment of impact on key characteristics of the landscape

Table 6.1.1:

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
F2: South West	Flat valley floor	Small amount of modification to accommodate development	Higher ground in east retained as open land	X

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
Witney: Valley Floor and land to the south	Ditches and partly in flood plain	Subsumed into proposed housing; Extant rural character lost	Brook landscape corridor used as linear open space	Exclude housing from area F2 as shown in Figure 2E and land to the south to retain open landscape corridor to brook to form southern boundary of any development
	Predominantly agricultural - arable	Subsumed into proposed housing; Extant rural character lost	Area of agricultural land retained	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to retain agricultural land south of the brook and sewage/abattoir works. Link this rural area into agricultural land retained to the east
	Sewage works and abattoir	Retained within wide woodland belt and landscape buffer	Sewage works and abattoir screened by planting and isolated from housing Visual impact on Curbridge Lane mitigated	X
	Busy A415 forms strong boundary to Ducklington and open countryside	A415 retains some of this boundary function although the land to the west would no longer be open countryside to the same extent	Boundary function reinforced by retention of tree planting along roadside	X
	Strong hedgelines/trees along watercourses and field boundaries and former railway line	Alignment of former railway line retained as landscape corridor Development parcels follow field boundaries	Potential to retain some hedgerows and hedgerow trees	Integrate existing vegetation links into boundary of development Retain hedgerows south the 'reduced' development area
	Mainly regular medium scale pattern	Proposed development partly reflects scale and pattern of the landscape	X	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to reduce development area to be more in keeping with local landscape scale
	Open except where blocked by large hedges and trees	Loss of openness across the site	Existing and proposed vegetation further encloses the landscape	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to retain openness on southern and eastern part of the site
	Generally tranquil away from A40/A415 junction	Complete removal of sense of tranquillity	Localised pockets of greater tranquillity retained in east through existing and proposed planting	Protect local tranquillity south of the site and into the wider landscape by containment of the development north of the brook alignment and west of the sewage/abattoir works
	Single footpath across area	Footpath retained and additional link with Witney provided	No additional links with wider landscape	Improve links new rural boundary along brook alignment

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
	Strong contrast between rural land west of A415 and urban areas north of A40 and at Ducklington	Contrast lost over the site Urban form breaches A40	Landscape structure frames the built form and amenity provision Surviving agricultural land too small to maintain contrast	Expansion south of the A40 is a key issue. This should only be contemplated if a substantive open rural link is maintained between Curbridge and Ducklington north of the Curbridge Lane
G: West Witney: Minor valleys	Rolling small scale valley	Modification of the landform to accommodate new housing	Development set down below raised A4095 and landscape buffer to western edge of the site	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to protect this landscape east of the A4095
	Some arable and pasture	Loss of grassland to highway infrastructure and housing	Area of open pasture incorporated into open space in the north-west and west of site	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to conserve remaining areas of pasture
	Colwell Brook valley A local landscape asset	Subsumed into proposed housing; Extant rural character eroded	Brook landscape corridor used as linear open space	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to maintain rural context to brook and form southern boundary to any development
	Dissected by A40 and A4095	Urbanising impact on A4095 increased Noise attenuation along A40	Landscape buffer to both roads	X
	Strong tree line along Colwell Brook.	X	Potential to retain	Retain tree cover to contribute to strong southern edge to any development
	Small scale and regular field pattern (varied by line of brook)	Development area mainly in larger arable landscape	Scale maintained	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to avoid area of pasture
	Contrast between higher open areas and enclosed valleys	Enclosed valley occupied by housing;	Brook landscape corridor used as linear open space	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to avoid impact on enclosed valley
	Part of former Curbridge meadow	Enclosed between A40 and housing	Retained as open space	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to conserve remaining areas of pasture
	Footpath links with Curbridge severed by A4095 and poor links with the countryside to the south	Existing footpath retained	No additional direct links to the south	Incorporate new links along brook
Tranquillity within Colwell Brook valley lost elsewhere	Remaining area of relative tranquillity (although close to A40 and A4095) contained by housing	Landscape buffers to roads and housing	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to minimise impact on tranquillity within Colwell Brook	

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
	Strong rural landscape structure	Rural landscape structure lost	Pattern and structure retained and incorporated into development	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to retain a strong rural landscape link north of Curbridge Lane
Landscape setting of Curbridge	Area G makes up the landscape setting to Curbridge and is very vulnerable to further erosion.	Housing within area G south of the A40 would erode the narrow gap between Witney and Curbridge. The latter has a traditional village character which strongly contrasts with the urban form of Witney which is being extended south towards the A40 through new housing schemes.	Narrow landscape buffers are provided east of the A4095 and along the A40	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to ensure an adequate landscape and visual gap between settlement
Landscape setting of Ducklington	The eastern part of F2 and the land south of F2 both help to retain a rural landscape setting to Ducklington but do not contribute to maintaining the gap between Witney and the village. The existing sewage works and abattoir do not affect the immediate landscape setting of the village.	A principal access will affect the most northerly part of the setting (already affected by the junction) The proposals allow for the retention of an open landscape character west of the village and include the maintenance of some open farmland	Additional woodland belt around the sewage works and abattoir	Proposals would maintain the immediate landscape setting of Ducklington but not the continuity of open land south of the A40, and north of Curbridge Lane

Assessment of visual impact on key views and visual qualities

Table 6.1.2:

Area LA	Key visual characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
F2: South West Witney: Valley Floor and land to the south	Some high intervisibility across the landscape	Views across open landscape lost	X	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to reinforce existing vegetation cover and set back development to maintain some visibility across open fields north of Curbridge Lane
	Vegetation blocks views	Built form will add to blocking of views	Additional vegetation will block views over the landscape but will screen the sewage works and abattoir	Reinforce this local feature to help screen appropriate development
	Views from outliers of high ground in Moulden's Wood area	Views are mainly of the eastern area to be retained in agriculture and as amenity space	New planting in the east will add layers to help screen Witney	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to protect these views

Area LA	Key visual characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
	Continuity with Lower Windrush Valley	Eastern part largely undeveloped and will retain open landscape links	X	Exclude housing from Area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to maintain some continuity between F2 and the lower Windrush landscapes
	Views to Areas G	Views across site into the eastern part of G lost	X	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to retain views from Curbridge Lane to the open areas of Area G
	View to St Mary's Church (landmark)	Views to church lost	X	Potential to design in vistas to church
	Little visual connection with historic core	Development further removed from historic settlement pattern	X	X
	Views to edge of Witney	Distant views to Witney replaced by near views to modern development along Curbridge Lane	Hedgerows along road retained with landscape buffer along southern edge of site	Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to avoid additional visual intrusion from new development
G: West Witney: Minor valleys	Low intervisibility in valleys, high from higher open ground	Development potentially visible from higher ground in area G	Development set back a little from A4095	X
	Strong visual connection with Lower Windrush Valley but views back from the valley often screened by vegetation	Visual connection between rural landscape lost	X	X
	View to St Mary's Church spire from higher ground	Development would form foreground of view of church from elevated A4095 and footpath replacing pastoral setting A40 and Witney largely screened by tree cover even in winter	Development set down on lower ground levels	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to retain view to church from footpath
	Willows and poplars along Colwell Brook and Curbridge Road are prominent in views from Lower Windrush Valley	These will be seen in within an urban setting	Retention of existing tree planting	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to allow for views of poplars and willows in a semi-rural setting
Visual setting of Curbridge	At present Curbridge is partially visually separated from Witney by local landform and tree cover	Potential intervisibility between the village and eastern edge of the development	Landscape buffer and retained planting	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to ensure visual separation of the settlements
Visual setting of Ducklington	At present Ducklington is visually separated from Witney by the A40 and belts of trees	Development will not change this relationship and intervisibility between the development and Ducklington is unlikely	Large area of open space with extensive planting west of Ducklington	X

Assessment of contribution to local townscape and settlement pattern

Table 6.1.3

Area LA	Key settlement characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
F2: South West Witney: Valley Floor and land to the south	Abuts urban edge	Would extend the urban edge south of the A40 and into open countryside	Some views of the existing and proposed urban edge will be mitigated by the proposed additional planting in the east part of the site	Expansion south of the A40 is a key issue. This should only be contemplated if a substantive open rural link is maintained between Curbridge and Ducklington north of the Curbridge Lane
	A40 forms physical barrier (not prominent)	Physical barrier of the A40 breached No similar well defined new physical barrier to South Witney created	Some set back from Curbridge Lane with landscape treatment	Expansion south of the A40 is a key issue. This should only be contemplated if a substantive open rural link is maintained between Curbridge and Ducklington north of the Curbridge Lane
	Sewage works and abattoir relatively contained in the landscape	Sewage works and abattoir form part of a swathe of proposed mixed land uses, mainly urban, across the site	Containment improved by proposed woodland planting	Exclude housing from area F2 as shown in Figure 2E to avoid development to the south of the southern extent of the sewage/abattoir works
	Little of very small gap between Witney and Ducklington remains	Erosion of gap between Witney and Curbridge No significant adverse impact on Ducklington	X	Development would form part of Witney. Exclude housing from area F2 and land to the south as shown in Figure 2E to maintain gap to Ducklington
	Connectivity with town severed by A40	New bridge over A40	X	X
G: West Witney: Minor valleys	Hard edge to some adjacent housing areas	Hard edge extended south of A40	Some views of the existing and proposed urban edge will be mitigated by the proposed additional planting	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to ensure provision of substantive soft edge to new housing areas
	Vegetation important in softening views to Witney and providing buffer between town and countryside	Benefit of existing planting will be lost as new development extends south of the A40	Existing planting on the site will help to soften built form New planting will help to soften new development in time	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to ensure provision of substantive soft edge to new housing areas
	Important to gap between Witney and Curbridge	Erosion of gap between Witney and Curbridge	Landscape buffer and retained planting	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E to maintain sufficient gap between new settlement extension to Witney and Curbridge
Integrity of Curbridge	Distinctive rural character to Curbridge survives	Highway works and new housing are very close to the eastern edge of this rural settlement The character and separate identity of the village will be adversely affected by the development	Insufficient protection to the character of the village	Exclude housing from area G as shown in Figure 2E and provide planting in keeping the local character to maintain the distinctive character and separate identity of Curbridge
Integrity of	Distinctive historic core with	Development has been moved	X	X

Area LA	Key settlement characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
Ducklington	extensive area of modern housing between the centre and A415 Scale of modern development is not out of keeping with village character	away sufficiently to prevent an impact on the character of Ducklington		

Assessment of potential benefit of landscape mitigation and contribution to Green Infrastructure at Witney

At present the site contributes to the rural landscape setting of Witney and that of the historic rural villages at Curbridge and Ducklington. However it is recognised that both the sewage/abattoir works and housing in Witney are already intrusive and have an effect of the rural character of the area. Some development may therefore be possible in a reduced area as shown in Figure 2E subject to substantial green infrastructure which builds on the existing alignment of the brook and contains the expanded town with substantive native woodland and tree belts which should screen the development, even in winter.

Conclusion and recommendations

The site lies within two AHLC character areas F2 and G. Development within parts of F2 and G might be acceptable in landscape and visual terms subject to the landscape design objectives set out below. Development within F2 and G as proposed, would damage the landscape and visual separation of the historic settlement of Curbridge from Witney and have a significant adverse impact on the open landscape which separates Curbridge from Ducklington and which links into the wider landscape south of Curbridge Lane. It is important that an appropriate landscape buffer be retained to protect both villages (see Figure 1E). The built form on the southern edge of Witney however has a negative impact on the rural landscape quality and although the local field pattern is largely intact, the immediate landscape and visual setting of Witney has been eroded, although many significant landscape elements remain such as the distinctive valley feature (reinforced by perimeter planting of historic origin), hedgerows, open pasture and wider agricultural landscape. If development were to be allocated to this site, it is essential that this pattern is conserved and protected from adverse impact from local development. The need to protect and enhance the key landscape, visual and settlement characteristics of this area must lead to a restriction on the extent of the development. In this respect I disagree with the recommendations for mitigation set out in the submitted LVA. These are insufficient to properly and fully mitigate the harm arising from development as proposed in the current Abbey Development Ltd site option submission.

It is recommended from a landscape perspective that if the South Witney option is pursued further, major revisions will be needed to the extent of development and a revised comprehensive Green Infrastructure masterplan prepared for the site. The number of potential dwellings will need to be reduced significantly in order to protect important landscape, visual and townscape features of the area. The development footprint should reflect the existing footprint of Ducklington, to avoid an urban extension which is out of scale. Separation from both Ducklington and Curbridge could create a contained small settlement.

- Extent of development area to be no further south than the existing southern edge of the sewage/abattoir works and the brook;
- Brook valley corridor to be conserved as a key dominant feature of the site and used to define the southern edge of the development area;
- Open landscape proposed in the site option to the west of Ducklington to be included and extended along the north side of Curbridge Lane as far as the A4095;
- Buffer to Curbridge to be widened to ensure landscape and visual separation and maintain the separate identity of the village;
- Vegetation buffers to be substantial and to reflect local landscape pattern in order to screen the built form;
- Retain hedgerow pattern and railway line link as shown in site option;
- Improve footpath links generally along Green Infrastructure corridors;
- Highway access to be provided as shown in the site option, taking advantage of tree and woodland belts to screen highway works from the wider landscape.

The potential area to be considered further is shown in Figure 2E.

6.2 Assessment of Land North East of Witney (West Waddy)

Overview of proposals in relation to landscape and visual assessments

The site option extends along the north side of the B4022 Oxford Hill and overlaps with SHLAA site 201 by 11.1ha although it does not extend fully down to Jubilee Way. This site option lies on the middle and upper slopes of area D1: Madley Brook Valley Side and hilltop at area E: East Witney Eastern Windrush/Madley Brook Valley Side. D1 and E are part of the open rolling vale landscape of the Eynsham Vale and both areas are part of the Wychwood Project Area and have strong landscape and visual links with the slopes rising north, north-east of Witney (D1) and south east (E). The AHLC Study identifies the area as of high sensitivity and importance overall.

Key landscape, visual and townscape features of proposals

The West Waddy Alternative Site Suggestion shows the developable area but provides no details of any proposed development area or other supporting information.

Assessment of impact on key characteristics of the landscape

Table 6.2.1:

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
D1: North East Witney: Madley Brook Valley side	Smoothly undulating undeveloped valley side; part of undeveloped ridge around Witney	Development area extends up undeveloped valley side and well above 95m contour up to 110m AOD	N/A	Witney largely retains the settlement pattern of development below the 95m AOD contour along its eastern boundary. Avoid development on middle to upper slopes of valley side and ridgeline
	Mix of arable and pasture in a medium scale field pattern	Development area extends over series of irregular pasture fields		Avoid loss of open arable and pasture east of Jubilee Way
	Strong species rich hedges and hedgerow trees	Retention of field boundaries could be provided as part of the development		Loss of open landscape setting to field boundaries would erode the rural landscape and be detrimental to the Wychwood Forest landscape
	Irregular old enclosure field pattern	Development area extends over series of irregular pasture fields		Loss of fields would erode the rural landscape and be detrimental to the Wychwood Forest landscape
	Open on higher ground	Development extends into more open higher ground		Avoid development on middle to upper slopes of valley side and ridgeline

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
	Landscape setting to Cogges Wood	Separated from Cogges Wood by a single field The site forms part of the wider landscape setting to Cogges Wood A surviving part of the Wychwood Forest would be eroded.		Avoid any impact on the historic open landscape setting of Cogges Wood
	Part of the Wychwood Forest Project area	Loss of part of the Wychwood Forest project close to Witney		Avoid any adverse impact on the historic Wychwood Forest area
	Part of former Cogges heath (area of heath extending towards Eynsham)	Would not appear to have adverse impact on heathland		X
E: East Witney Eastern Windrush/Madley Brook Valley Side	East facing undulating valley side and very prominent ridge	Development area straddles ridge top and descends eastern slope		Avoid development on ridgeline and east facing slopes
	Agricultural land in a mix of arable and pasture	Development area extends over arable fields		Avoid loss of open arable land which forms part of the wider landscape
	A40 by-pass and Shores Green junction divide area	Highway infrastructure would form southern boundary Tree planting along A40 encloses highway		Avoid urbanising this junction and approach into Witney
	Scattered farmsteads	Site area comes up to setting of isolated farmstead		Avoid adverse impact on the rural landscape setting of isolated farmsteads
	Strong hedgelines and hedgerow trees	Retention of field boundaries could be provided as part of the development		Loss of open landscape setting to field boundaries would erode the rural landscape and be detrimental to the Wychwood Forest landscape
	Cogges Wood to north forms skyline	Separated from Cogges Wood by a single field The site forms part of the wider landscape setting to Cogges Wood A surviving part of the Wychwood Forest would be eroded.		Avoid development that encroaches into landscape setting of Cogges Wood
	Medium scale open landscape	Loss of open landscape		Avoid any loss of field system in this area
Landscape setting of High Cogges	Series of medium sized irregular fields either side of the A40; A40 and its tree planting form a strong feature separating Witney from the hamlet; High Cogges retains its rural character; landscape setting extends eastwards into the Eynsham Vale	The development area does not extend into the landscape buffer for High Cogges and is separated from the village by the highway infrastructure and its tree cover		X

Assessment of visual impact on key views and visual qualities

Table 6.2.2:

Area LA	Key visual characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
D1: North East Witney: Madley Brook Valley side	High intervisibility with the north	The development will be visible from New Yatt area	N/A	As D1 is visually a central part of the open landscape, avoid development above Jubilee Way
	Good visual connections with Wychwood Uplands to the north	Views sweeping over the site are similar to the visual characteristics of views over the Wychwood Uplands		See above
	Hard edge to existing Madley Estate is now softening. This area is sited low in the landscape.	Development would extend the hard edge eastwards up to the ridgeline. Development would be visible on ridgetop skyline		Development would extend beyond the existing maturing vegetation either side of Jubilee Way, which defines the edge of east Witney
	Part of open backcloth to Witney	Significant loss of open backcloth. Middle and upper slopes in development area		Avoid any development which would erode this open backcloth
	Long views across the area	Development would be intrusive in long views		Avoid any development which would break up the long views of open countryside
	Visual links with wider Eynsham Vale	Development on skyline would erode rural visual link between D1 and the Eynsham Vale		Avoid any development that would be visually intrusive from Eynsham Vale to the south-east
	Intrusion from A40 and Stores junction – lower tranquillity	Area within D1 is separated from the A40 and junction by area E. Development would affect local sense of tranquillity		Presence of highway infrastructure does not justify expansion of Witney in this direction
E: East Witney Eastern Windrush/Madley Brook Valley Side	High intervisibility to east and south from higher ground	Development would be very visible on the skyline in views from the south-east and A40	N/A	As Area E is visually a central part of the open landscape devoid any development in this area
	Strong visual connection with Eynsham vale landscape	Visual connection between the rural landscapes either side of the A40 would be damaged		Avoid any development that would be visually intrusive from Eynsham Vale to the south-east
	Long views east and south	No public views to east and south		X
Visual setting of High Cogges	There is little intervisibility between the hamlet and Witney at present. The farm buildings at High Cogges are intervisible with Area E	Visual erosion of the landscape between the two settlements as development breaches the ridge skyline	N/A	Avoid any development which would be visible over the ridgeline

Assessment of contribution to local townscape and settlement pattern

Table 6.2.3

Area LA	Key settlement characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
D1: North East Witney: Madley Brook Valley side	Existing strong edge along Jubilee Way and semi-rural character of this road	Extends town well beyond this edge which is beginning to mature and create attractive edge to the town. Development area disconnected from urban edge	N/A	Avoid development eastwards beyond Jubilee Way
	Part of the manor of Cogges	Relationship with Cogges Manor has already been severed by modern development. No public view of the church or manor		X
	Oxford Hill is an important semi-rural approach to Witney. Perception of open countryside to the north of this gateway	Development area extends up to Oxford Hill Loss of perception of open countryside to the north in this approach to Witney		Avoid development that would urbanise this stretch of Oxford Hill
	Existing development in east Witney is largely below the 95m AOD contour	Development area is well above 95m AOD and would significantly extend the town up the valley sides to the ridgeline		Avoid development above 95m AOD
	Contrasting settlement pattern at Witney: one of a number of riverside towns set historically on a landform island on lower slopes above the alluvial floodplain; recently spreading up onto more exposed wolds	Risk of further erosion of traditional settlement pattern at Witney		Avoid extensive development out of the valley bottom and lower valley sides
E: East Witney Eastern Windrush/Madley Brook Valley Side	No physical or visual connection with Witney	Development area remote from settlement		Avoid development which is isolated from the town
Integrity of High Cogges	High Cogges retains its rural character and at present has a strong sense of place uninfluenced by Witney or even the A40.	Development in the proposed site area would urbanise the setting of the village to the detriment of its rural character		Avoid development in the landscape setting that would be out of keeping with the character of the village

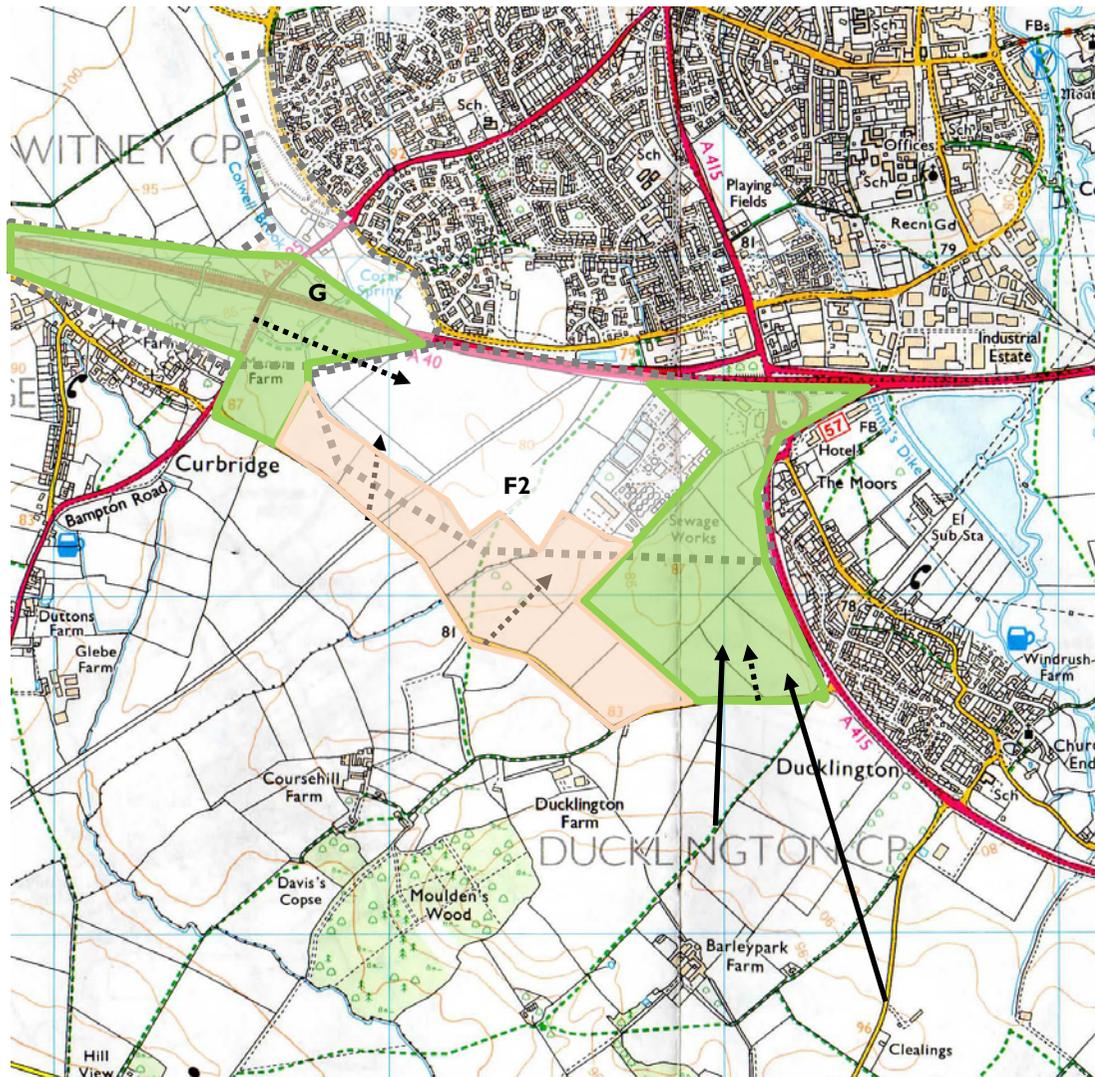
Conclusion and recommendations

The site lies within two AHLC character areas D1 and E. These are both highly sensitive areas both in landscape and visual terms and are important to the Wychwood Forest landscape setting to the town. Site 201 was not recommended for development in 2012. This site is less suitable. It is recommended that none of this alternative site option is considered further as there are several objections in principle to this site option which cannot be mitigated through a reduction in the development area or landscape measures.

7. Summary of Recommendations: Witney

Site	Location	Promoter	Submission housing no.s	AHLC Character Area Witney	Key constraints to development	Recommendations	Recommended action as shown in Figures 2E	Estimated housing capacity **
South Witney	South of Witney	Abbey Development Ltd	1200	F2 and G	Buffer to Curbridge and Ducklington to maintain their separate identity; Expansion of Witney into open countryside south of the A40; Visual impact on the wider countryside; Containment of the built form and scale of development in keeping with local settlement and landscape pattern	Development part of the site option area with extensive landscape and visual buffers as shown in Figure 2E	Reduced area to be considered in further detail	Estimate 500
North East Witney	North east of Witney	West Waddy	Not specified	D1 and E	Open landscape setting of Witney on rising ground; Location within Wychwood Forest and role in the setting of Cogges Wood; Visibility of high ground; Containment of built form on lower slopes in keeping with the adjacent settlement pattern	Site should not be taken forward	N/A	N/A

** Estimated numbers are based on reduced site area, open space requirements and potential range of housing density. Final numbers will depend on more detailed assessments, housing needs, and requirements for Green Infrastructure and an appropriate built form for each area in keeping with the local character.



KEY



WITNEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 2007



ESSENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BUFFER TO CURBRIDGE AND DUCKLINGTON



AREA OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE SOUTH OF BROOK CLOSELY RELATED TO WIDER LANDSCAPE



KEY LONG AND MEDIUM DISTANT VIEWS TO SOUTH WITNEY AND THE SITE (SEE ALSO BARTON WILLMORE'S LVA 2014)

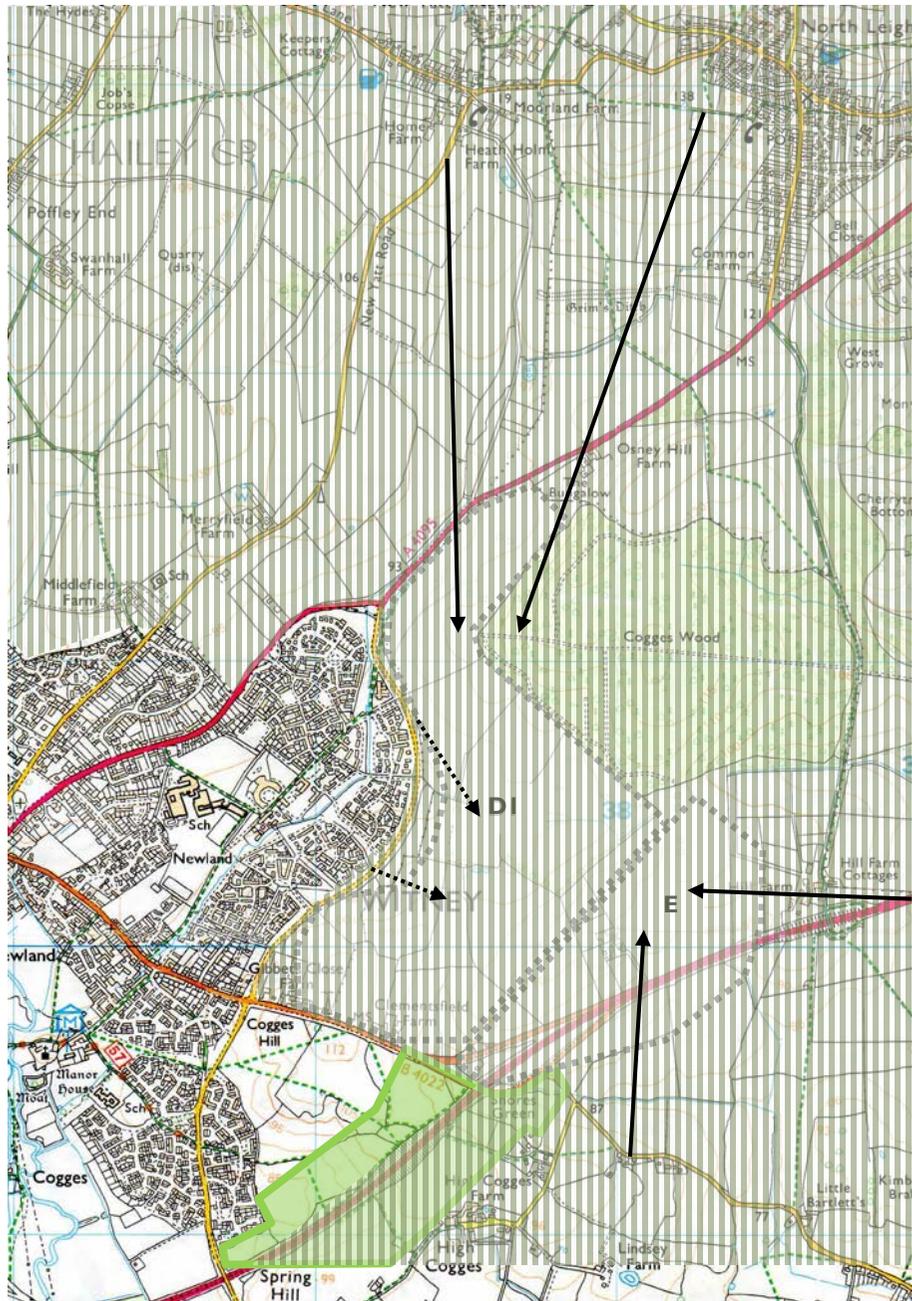


KEY CLOSE VIEWS TO SITE

FIGURE 1E: SOUTH WITNEY

PLAN SHOWING KEY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT OPTION

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KEY



WITNEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 2007



ESSENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BUFFER TO HIGH COGGES



WYCHWOOD PROJECT AREA



KEY MEDIUM DISTANT VIEWS TO EAST WITNEY AND TO THE SITES

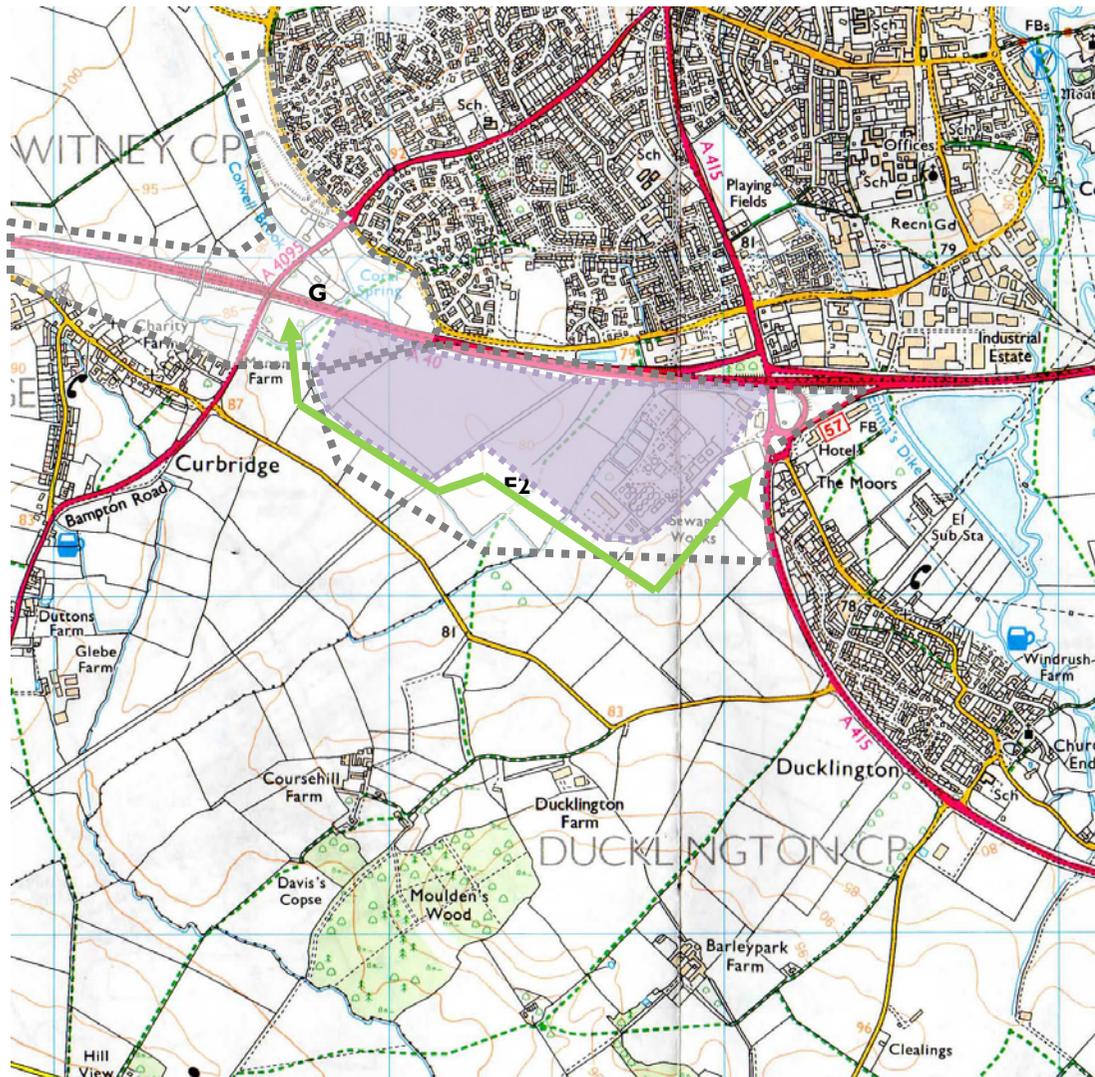


KEY CLOSE VIEWS TO AND FROM THE SITE

FIGURE 1F: EAST WITNEY (WEST WADDY ALTERNATIVE)

PLAN SHOWING KEY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

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KEY



REDUCED AREA DEVELOPMENT OPTION
 SOUTH WITNEY



ESSENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL
 BUFFERS

NOTES:

1. See Addendum to Witney Report 2015 for explanatory notes and recommendations
2. Development area has a predominantly moderate to high landscape and visual sensitivity, but overall, expansion of Witney to the south would offer landscape and townscape opportunities
3. Urban-rural open grassland/wooded landscaped transition zones to be designed to retain the separate identity of settlements; to retain field pattern and brook alignments important to the character of the settlements; provide for open space; meet local recreational needs; and conserve and enhance biodiversity. Land beyond these areas to remain under agriculture
4. The design, siting and layout of any development and the landscape infrastructure should respect and, where possible, enhance the intrinsic character, quality and distinctive features of the local landscape of the area

FIGURE 2E: SOUTH WITNEY

PLAN SHOWING REDUCED DEVELOPMENT OPTION AREA WITH POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

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