

**NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 – 2026 PART 1**

**EXAMINATION**

**Inspector's requests and points arising during hearing sessions**

**Issue 7: Blandford and Issue 9: Shaftesbury**

**Note on: The weight afforded to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in relation to sites in Blandford and Shaftesbury.**

**May 2015**

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# 1. Recommendation

1.1 The recommendation arising out of this note is that:

- the wording of paragraph 4.59 of the Local Plan should be revised to include specific reference to the setting on an AONB.

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## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 At the Examination in Public Hearing Session, the Inspector asked the Council to prepare a note explaining the weight which the Council attached to the need to protect land within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with particular reference to sites at Blandford and Shaftesbury. The Inspector subsequently asked the Council to comment on how it has addressed the advice in the Planning Practice Guidance, which confirms that a consideration to be taken into account is the setting of such a protected area (ID: 8-003-20140306).

## 3. Need to protect AONBs

### National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear about the importance of conserving landscape and scenic beauty<sup>1</sup>: 'The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, ...'.
- 3.2 The NPPF goes on to say that: 'Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework'<sup>2</sup> and 'Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty'<sup>3</sup>.

### Planning Practice Guidance

- 3.3 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) elaborates on the above. Guidance on the Natural Environment (Reference ID: 8-001-20140306) refers to legislation<sup>4</sup> which requires that 'in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land' in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, relevant authorities 'shall have regard' to their purposes<sup>5</sup>. The Guidance points out that

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1 Paragraph 109, National Planning Policy Framework.

2 Paragraph 110, National Planning Policy Framework.

3 Paragraph 115, National Planning Policy Framework.

4 Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 and Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

5 Planning Practice Guidance - Natural Environment: Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 8-004-20140306.

'The duty is relevant in considering development proposals that are situated outside National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries, but which might have an impact on the setting of, and implementation of, the statutory purposes of these protected areas.<sup>6</sup>

- 3.4 Guidance also makes it clear that local planning authorities 'should have regard to management plans for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'<sup>7</sup>.

## 4. Need for housing sites

- 4.1 Given the projected level of new development needed in North Dorset over the plan period indicated in the SHMA and the extent of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB in the District, it is clear that careful planning is required to avoid adverse impact on the AONB.
- 4.2 Indeed, consultation on the former draft Core Strategy in 2010 particularly highlighted the concerns of local communities regarding the landscape impact of potential development at Blandford and Shaftesbury. The Council therefore commissioned landscape impact assessments to examine the potential impacts of taking forward possible housing sites (as identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - SHLAA) both on AONB and other landscapes. These landscape impact assessments<sup>8</sup> are set out at Appendix A.
- 4.3 The assessments examined a number of different sites against the same criteria. It was not the intention to rank, or attempt to rank the sites according to their landscape value or make judgements about the suitability of certain sites for development, but they provided consistent data to help inform such judgements and provided guidance where mitigation was an option.

## 5. Weight Given to AONB Protection

- 5.1 Given the clear direction given to policy preparation by the NPPF and NPPG when relating development to AONBs, the Council attached considerable importance to the potential impact of development on the AONBs and their immediate hinterlands. This was reflected in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA)<sup>9</sup> and in the site selection procedure.
- 5.2 The SA particularly notes the proximity of certain potential development sites in

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6 Planning Practice Guidance - Natural Environment: Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 8-004-20140306.

7 Planning Practice Guidance - Natural Environment: Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20140306.

8 Undertaken by Tony Harris, Senior Landscape Officer in Dorset County Council's Natural Environment Team.

9 North Dorset Local Plan 2011-2026 Part 1 - Sustainability Report and Appendices (SUD003a, b, c and d).

Blandford and Shaftesbury to the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB and the Dorset AONB and the potential for adverse impact.

- 5.3 Site selection in Blandford and Gillingham was carried out on the basis of consideration of a number of factors, such as flood risk and sustainability, as well as potential impact on the AONBs. A consideration of the Background Paper<sup>10</sup> which explains how the Council identified locations for development in the four main towns, shows that AONB concerns figured large in the selection of sites.
- 5.4 In addition, the Council took careful note of and had full regard to the respective Management Plans for the two AONBs, as reflected in Policies in the Local Plan<sup>11</sup>.
- 5.5 Significant weight was therefore given to the protection of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB, in terms of both its special character and its setting. Reflective of this are the various changes made to the pre-submission version of the Local Plan following consultation with the AONB management teams. Notably, Policy 4 - the Natural Environment - was amended in line with the PPG such that the submitted Policy reads 'Within the areas designated as AONB and their setting, development will be managed in a way that conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the area'.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Given the above, the Council takes the view that the policy direction given in Paragraph 110 of the NPPF can be seen to have been followed, as has the Guidance on the Natural Environment (Reference ID: 8-001-20140306).

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10 Market Town Site Selection Background Paper 2013 (MTC001).

11 Notably Policy 4.

## Appendix A:

### Landscape Impact Assessment - Sites at Blandford

A.1 Nine sites were appraised at Blandford:

- Land between A354 and A350;
- Land west of Blandford St Mary;
- Land west of Blandford (Crown Meadows);
- Land at Junction A354 /B3082;
- Land north east of Blandford (Salisbury Road);
- Land at Lower Bryanston Farm;
- Land north of Milldown Local Nature Reserve;
- Land north east of Blandford (off Higher Shaftesbury Road); and
- Land west and east of Sunrise Business Park.

#### **Land between A354 and A350**

A.2 The assessment concluded that development would impact negatively on the site's role in forming part of the rural countryside setting of the town and would extend the urban edge beyond the existing logical edge created by the A354 bypass. In this way, development would impact negatively on the open, undeveloped character of the South Blandford Downs landscape character area and on the amenity of users of Wards Drove. This impact would be greater in the winter months when vegetation is not in leaf. Development would also adversely affect trees/copses and hedgerows directly or indirectly. For example, development would damage the root zone and would break up the unity of the field pattern in this part of the downland landscape. Development would also impair the open views and context that this site provides when viewed from the busy A354/A350 roundabout.

A.3 The site has a relatively high amenity value for users, from Wards Drove in particular, and has a high value in terms of its contribution to the rural setting of the town in its surrounding downland setting. The site has some historic value as part of the enclosed field pattern and the hedgerows/trees have some wildlife value. The site lies outside both the Dorset and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

6.2 The overall conclusion of the assessment was that due to the sensitivities and vulnerabilities outlined above any form of mitigation would have limited effectiveness. The only form of mitigation which might be considered worthwhile would be restricting development to a small area in the lower slopes of this site in the far north-east corner which would have some benefits in ensuring that development would not be seen on the skyline. This would reduce some of the adverse impacts on landscape character but would create a new hard urban edge



outside the context of the existing settlement pattern and disrupt the existing field pattern. Development here would also be viewed directly from Wards Drove, thus reducing the amenity of users and the setting of the town when viewed from this location.

### **Land west of Blandford St Mary**

- 6.3 Development on this site would affect a series of undeveloped paddocks and farmland and potentially impact on the important trees, hedgerows and copses within and around the site. Development would be on greenfield land adjacent to the Dorset AONB and would have some negative impact on the character and setting of this designation and its landscape character. Any development on the elevated part of the site would have a greater negative impact on the character and setting of the AONB and its landscape character.
- 6.4 As the site abuts the AONB it has an impact on its setting and therefore has a high sensitivity rating. It also has some amenity value as open, undeveloped greenfield land and the trees and hedgerows have some important wildlife value.
- 6.5 If development were to be located away from the more elevated and exposed parts of the site (within the southern arable field) then this would minimise the identified impacts on landscape character and the AONB. Additionally, if development also ensured the retention, protection and management of the key mature old hedgerows crossing the site and those which border it then impacts could be minimised. This network of vegetation would provide a mature framework within which development could 'sit'.
- A.4 The fact that development would not break the skyline when seen from key viewpoints on New Road (due to the rising landform and the existing development to the south-east) is a key factor in mitigating identified impacts. The framework of mature vegetation and existing development off Fairmile Road also provides a backdrop and context/setting for any new development which would, in turn, help to integrate it. In other words, such development would be within the context of the existing pattern of development on this edge of Blandford.

### **Land west of Blandford (Crown Meadows)**

- A.5 A number of impacts were identified in the landscape assessment with regard to development of this site. There would be a negative impact on the open, undeveloped floodplain parkland character of the site and therefore an impact on its function in contributing to the setting of the town, Conservation Area and the setting of the Dorset AONB. Development would also impact negatively on the important mature parkland trees in the site and potentially 'block off' open views out across to the floodplain meadows to the backdrop of the cliff beyond. Lastly, development would impact on the historic urban edge of the town, particularly

around the southern edge of the site, and the setting of the leisure centre grounds which currently enjoy open aspects and vistas out across the floodplain.

- A.6 Due to its Conservation Area designation, this site has high value in its contribution to the historic context and setting of the town. High value is also due to its position within the setting of the Dorset AONB, the boundary of which lies along the eastern edge of the River Stour. It also has some amenity value as open, undeveloped country.
- A.7 However, if development were to be limited to the more 'urban fringe' northern part of the site, and the paddocks with the closest association with the floodplain landscape were left undeveloped, this would limit the identified impacts on character and important site features. The areas considered potentially as more suitable for development are those closest to the urban edge. Maintaining a green, open 'wedge' through any development would also help mitigate the impact on views, break-up the development and link physically and visually the existing floodplain meadows and the undeveloped grounds of the leisure centre.

#### **Land at Junction A354 /B3082**

- A.8 This site was granted planning permission in October 2011 and development is well advanced.

#### **Land north east of Blandford (Salisbury Road)**

- A.9 Development of this land would have an injurious effect on the open, undeveloped, rolling rural character of this site, harming its role in providing a green setting for this edge of Blandford. Development would also have an adverse impact on the existing character and visual amenity of this part of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The fact that the site slopes south towards the AONB increases the impact of any built development on the site. An obvious and distinctive edge to this settlement is formed by the A354 when viewed from the open countryside and any further development would break this important physical and visual function, creating a negative cumulative impact. Development would also have a deleterious impact on the integrity of the internal hedgerow boundaries, two of these being important historical parish boundaries. The potential negative impact on hedgerows and trees around and adjacent to the site is also a key sensitivity. Lastly, the setting and context of Letton Park would also be adversely affected.
- A.10 While the site is outside the AONB, it does impact on the overall setting of the AONB, thereby elevating the site's sensitivity to high, particularly as it is open to views from key viewpoints within the AONB. It has a high visual amenity status in its role as providing a green undeveloped setting and context for this edge of the

settlement. The adjacent and internal hedgerow trees and copses have a high wildlife value.

- A.11 Due to the openness of the site to views from the AONB, little mitigation is possible which could minimise the identified negative impacts on the landscape and townscape character. In the winter months, potentially additional open views would be possible into the site, for example, from along A354.

### **Land at Lower Bryanston Farm**

- A.12 The site has a high value in terms of landscape and visual impact due to being within the Dorset AONB. It has some value in providing a green open undeveloped wedge which flows in from the wider countryside up to the existing urban edge. It has some amenity value as green, open countryside for passers-by, users of the public rights of way and residents.
- A.13 If development were to be restricted to the lower / flatter eastern half of the site then this would minimise the identified impact. If the creation of a new, hard, urban, and west facing edge were to be softened by structural planting then this also would be a key mitigation measure. Development in this suggested limited location would also sit within the context of existing development and be at a low enough elevation not to create a significant negative landscape and visual impact on the wider character of the AONB and the setting of the town. If existing hedgerows / trees were protected, maintained and managed then this also would be a significant mitigation measure.

### **Land north of Milldown Local Nature Reserve**

- A.14 Development would create a significant adverse impact on the rural setting and landscape character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and would be very dominant, especially in views from the north-west. This would create an unacceptable detrimental impact on the setting and context of this rural edge of the town. It would also impact negatively on the context setting and integrity of the Trailway, the Milldown Local Nature Reserve and the Blandford Conservation Area.
- A.15 Development would create an incongruous and large urban extension out into open downland countryside. It would not link in with any other built form and therefore be at odds with the current settlement pattern. Further, development would impact directly and indirectly on the important dense and mature wooded areas around and within the site.
- A.16 The site lies within the AONB and it is continuous with the chalk escarpment / downland landscape out to the A350. This designation gives it a high sensitivity rating. The site has a vital role in providing an open, green, undeveloped area of countryside helping to create a 'soft' edge to this part of the settlement and forming a key backdrop to the Milldown Local Nature Reserve, the North Dorset

Trailway and the Blandford Conservation Area. The trees, woodland and hedges around and within the site have significant wildlife value as does the Milldown Local Nature Reserve / SNCI adjacent to this site.

- A.17 Due to the openness of the site to views from the AONB and Milldown LNR, little mitigation is possible which might minimise the identified negative impacts on the landscape and townscape character. In the winter months, potentially more open views would be possible into the site, from Milldown LNR and along the A350, for instance.

### **Land north east of Blandford (off Higher Shaftesbury Road)**

- A.18 This site was granted planning permission in March 2010 and development is currently taking place.

### **Land west and east of Sunrise Business Park**

- A.19 Development would have a significant, adverse impact on the rural setting and landscape character of the AONB, being seen on the skyline from several directions and therefore creating a negative landscape and visual impact. It would have an unacceptable impact on the setting and context of this part of the settlement and form a large, incongruous urban extension out into open, undeveloped countryside. Development would also impact negatively on the internal and boundary trees, hedgerows and copses.
- A.20 The site lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and is continuous with this open, downland landscape in the AONB to the north; this designation gives it a high sensitivity rating. The site also has an important role in providing a green, open, undeveloped area of countryside rolling up to the A350 boundary and in creating a distinct, urban/rural edge to this northern side of the settlement. Some of the surrounding trees and copses will have some wildlife value and the site's historic field pattern has some historic value.
- A.21 Due to the openness of the site to views within the AONB, little mitigation is possible which could minimise the identified injurious impacts on character of the landscape. In the winter months, there is the possibility of more open views into the site from along the A354 Blandford Bypass.

## **Landscape Impact Assessment - Sites at Shaftesbury**

- A.22 In Shaftesbury, ten sites were assessed.

### **Sensitive sites**

- A.23 For the following sites, the studies concluded that the sites were considered to be too sensitive from a landscape and visual point of view for any mitigation to be effective:

- Land east of Church Farm;
- Land east of Lower Blandford Road;
- Land east of New Road;
- Land south of New Road;
- Land east of Woolands Lane;
- Site surrounding Blackmore Vale Dairy; and
- Allotment site in St James.

### **Land east of Church Farm**

- A.24 Dismissed, as development would impact negatively on the open, undeveloped rural character of the site and create a development that is not associated with the existing settlement pattern. It would also impact negatively on the setting of the Shaftesbury Conservation Area which is just to the north-east of the site. Development would impact negatively directly or indirectly on the integrity of the hedgerow network around the site.

### **Land east of Lower Blandford Road**

- A.25 Dismissed, as development would create a new hard urban skyline when viewed from the A350 and would therefore create a significant negative impact on local landscape character. It would impact negatively on the amenity of footpath users and on the green undeveloped 'buffer' effect the site provides in association with the important linear woodland belts to the east which together sweep right up to the Royal Chase roundabout. These open green spaces provide an important component of the overall green setting and context of Shaftesbury as a whole.

### **Land east of New Road**

- A.26 Dismissed, as development would have a significant negative impact physically and visually on the important dense tree canopy which currently covers the whole site. It would have a significant negative impact on the setting and historic context of this north-west edge of the settlement and would impact negatively on the integrity of the ancient woodland and would fragment the continuous woodland cover which runs along the Greensand slopes to the north-east. Development would impact negatively on the amenity of users of the public right of way and the A30.

### **Allotment Site in St James**

- A.27 Dismissed, as development would remove a 'green lung' and 'green open space' in the historic core of the Conservation Area that would impact negatively on settlement pattern and character. Development would impact on the setting and character of the wider context of the historic town and particularly the town walls to the north which overlook the area.

### Land south of New Road

- A.28 Dismissed, as development would impact negatively on the setting and context of this edge of the settlement site that provides a green undeveloped backdrop to the town and its Conservation Area. Development would create areas of cut and fill which would alter the nature of the sloping landform and therefore affect landscape character in a negative way. Development would also impact on users of the public right of way.

### Land east of Woolands Lane

- A.29 Dismissed, as development would impact negatively on the quiet, undeveloped nature of this rural intimate countryside location impacting on views, amenity and landscape character in an unacceptable and negative way.

### Site surrounding Blackmore Vale Dairy

- A.30 Dismissed, as housing development would create a very harsh and hard urban edge, facing directly towards the AONB and seen right on the skyline from this designation. This would create a significant negative impact, impacting adversely on this designation and extending the existing urban edge out into open undeveloped countryside. Development would impact directly and negatively on the public right of way across the site. Cumulative physical and visual impact of new development, on top of the existing Blackmore Vale Dairy complex, would create a significant adverse impact close to the AONB, impacting negatively on its setting and the amenity of the footpath users in this vicinity.

### Less sensitive sites

- A.31 The following three sites were acknowledged as having sensitivity issues but, with careful mitigation, could be appropriate for development without having an unacceptable negative impact on the landscape setting of the town:
- Land to the west of the A350 (opposite Wincombe Business Park);
  - Land to the south of Wincombe Business Park; and
  - Land to the south of Wincombe Lane.

### Land west of the A350 (opposite Wincombe Business Park)

- A.32 Land to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park is an area of flat farmed grassland site that is divided by a mature native hedgerow. The area to the north of the site is enclosed by vegetation and along its northern boundary it has a strong relationship with the Little Down Industrial Estate, residential property and The Cliff. This northern edge has a hard urban feel to it due to the domination of the large industrial units and there are very limited views into and out of this part of the site due to the roadside evergreen hedge, the mature native hedgerow and the trees/woodland associated with The Cliff. A well-used public right of way also

crosses this northern part of the site to the Cliff which is an SNCI and an ancient and semi natural woodland.

- A.33 The southern part of the site is more open and exposed. It sits on the skyline when viewed from the south-west and has an urban fringe feel created by the weak, roadside boundary, an old agricultural shed/barn and electric power lines.
- A.34 The study identified that the skyline significance of this elevated plateau was a key sensitivity issue for developing the site. However, it did not rule out development but suggested that this impact could be resolved by 'pulling back' any future line of development to the east of the site and locating any public open space associated with the development along this south-western edge.
- A.35 It suggested that any new public open space would provide opportunities for native tree planting and that this would enable the site to tie-in with the existing vegetation. The study also suggests that the hedgerow and tree network within and adjacent to the site should be protected, retained and managed with suitable undeveloped buffering either side of the existing mature hedgerow. This hedgerow and buffer could form the basis for public open space/access corridor running through the site to link in to any public open space on the south-west edge of the site.
- A.36 The study also recommends that the evergreen hedgerow along the roadside part of the northern area is retained and that the existing access to Little Down Industrial Estate and dwelling is used as any future access to the site. Enhancement of the roadside boundary along the A350 is seen to be essential mitigation. This could be carried out, for example by new hedgerow, tree edge and/or boundary wall provision. The study also recommends that a Landscape Masterplan for the site is submitted as part of any future planning application on the site as a means of coordinating the mitigation measures for the site.

### **Land south of Wincombe Business Park**

- A.37 Land to the south of Wincombe Business Park is a rectangular medium scale grassland field site that is mainly flat but slopes towards the north-eastern boundary with a distinctive sloping 'hollow' in the far north-eastern corner adjacent to Higher Wincombe Farm. It is enclosed and defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees along three sides and a mainly bracken covered ancient parish hedge bank along the fourth. There are some important hedgerow trees around the site.
- A.38 The site is bounded on three sides by well used public rights of way which radiate out from the site into adjacent open countryside. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB abuts the site at Higher Wincombe Farm. There are many views into and across the site from the footpaths and bridleways around the site and those which radiate out from these. There are also some distant views to the chalk escarpment/ridge around Win Green and Melbury Abbas to the south and

south-east. Along the south-west edge is dense residential development that creates a strong 'urban- edge'.

- A.39 Due to its location the site forms a transition and buffer between the open, undeveloped countryside and the built-up edge of north-east Shaftesbury. Without mitigation measures the study suggests that development here could create an additional and cumulative negative visual impact on the skyline adjacent to the AONB therefore impacting negatively on the landscape character of the surrounding open countryside.
- A.40 Development could also impact negatively on the amenity of users of the public rights of way and on some open views into this site. By developing this site the physical and visual buffer the site provides at the moment between open, undeveloped countryside and the existing settlement edge would be removed.
- A.41 However, the study does suggest that through careful mitigation measures these sensitivity issues could be overcome. In particular the existing landform and land cover (hedgerows and trees) could help to mitigate the identified impacts, particularly if development was limited to selected parts of the site and housing numbers were reduced. By keeping any future development to the lower sections of the site and off the skyline would also help minimise visual impacts as would keeping development out of the 'hollow' area in the north-east corner of the site. Together this would also help reduce the impact on the adjacent AONB. Any new development would need to include structured planting to create public open space and green buffers to the development.
- A.42 Creating suitable buffers or margins along the ancient boundary hedgerows and route ways on the north and south-east boundaries of the site would be seen as essential. Once again the development of a strategic Landscape Masterplan for the site is seen as essential and should be developed prior to any future planning application.

### **Land south of Wincombe Lane**

- A.43 The site assessed in the study identified as land to the south of Wincombe Lane includes the northern tip of the area known as Land East of Shaftesbury. Part of the site is also known as 'Hopkins Land'.
- A.44 In general, the site is part of the elevated plateau on the edge of the Shaftesbury Greensand Terrace Landscape Character Area and is within 300m of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.
- A.45 The site is formed of a number of small to medium sized arable fields which are flat to gently sloping and is subdivided by dense and mature hedgerows. These hedges are key features as are the few isolated 'in field' trees which are remnant hedgerow trees. The site is strongly influenced physically and visually by the recent housing



development especially along the western edges where it creates a hard urban edge, particularly along the more exposed north-western edges. Elsewhere the existing hedgerows 'soften' the impact of this developed edge.

- A.46 This existing urban edge provides part of the far north eastern extent of the settlement and that to the north west of the site, is seen on the skyline from views within the AONB. A public right of way runs through the site along the line of a mature belt of trees/hedgerow providing a key feature down the central part of the site. The site provides a physical and visual buffer between the Blackmore Vale Dairy and existing housing.
- A.47 Due to the existing vegetation around and within the site there are limited views out, particularly in the summer months, with only distant glimpsed views south to the chalk escarpment about two miles away. The south eastern fields extend beyond the historic pattern of hedged field boundaries and in this way are at odds with the rest of the boundaries to the site. The northern most field has a smaller and more intimate character despite being dominated by existing housing.
- A.48 Without mitigation measures, development on this site could add a more prominent hard skyline to views from the AONB when viewed looking north-west and south west from rights of way within the AONB. Development could also affect the important hedges/trees around and within the site and have a negative impact on the AONB when looking west from the footpaths near Higher Wincombe Farm. Development could have a negative impact on the amenity of users of the footpaths in the locality and by developing this site the physical and visual buffer the site provides at the moment between open, undeveloped countryside and the existing settlement edge would be removed.
- A.49 Retaining and using the existing pattern of hedged field boundaries is essential to mitigating the identified impacts. These key features need to be retained, protected and managed as the mature framework for any future development. Keeping development off sensitive skyline views from the AONB and limiting the extent of development and urban encroachment into underdeveloped open countryside is also critical. Concentrating new development within the 'central' fields would help in this regard and it would also help ensure a better relationship with the existing pattern of recent housing development and retaining the central core belt of woodland/trees as a landscape and visual 'buffer' along the more sensitive eastern edge of the site. Retention, protection and management of the 'in field' trees is also important mitigation. The development of a strategic Landscape Masterplan for the site is essential and should be developed 'up front' prior to any future planning application.

## Additional site

- A.50 At the Hearing, an additional site was introduced into the discussion of land at Shaftesbury:
- land east of Higher Blandford Road/south of A30, Shaftesbury.
- A.51 This land has been subjected to a recent landscape appraisal<sup>12</sup> on the same basis as other sites and comprises a long, wedge shaped pasture field, internally divided by an indistinct fence line. The predominant perception is one of an open, rural, agricultural landscape which provides an attractive countryside edge to the town. The site is bound by post and wire fencing to the north and west, resulting in a very open outlook across the site to the scenic landscape beyond. To the north lies new residential development, with a hard urban edge. To the north east, the agricultural character is maintained by existing commercial uses in converted agricultural buildings. It is noted that the land to the east of the site is allocated for commercial / industrial uses. To the west, existing residential development is low density, set back and down from the road resulting in a discrete rural village character, which prevails immediately south of the A30. Significant open views are available to the south towards the distinctive skylines of the Melbury Downs. There are some important trees to the north of the site, and strong characteristic hedgerows bounding the site to the south.
- A.52 The site has a high value in terms of its contribution to the landscape setting of the town, forming a large and consistent component of the gently sloping Greensand terrace landscape. It also has a high value in the experience of (in particular views towards) the Cranborne Chase AONB.
- A.53 The main sensitivities of the site are:
- Development would impact negatively on the rural character of the site and surrounding landscape to the south.
  - Development would breach a strong boundary formed by the A30 which distinguishes the urban form of Shaftesbury from the open countryside beyond; and
  - Development would interrupt scenic open views south towards the AONB.
- A.54 The key characteristics which could be lost or changed were the site to be developed are:
- The site is a medium to large open pasture field which forms part of the wider Shaftesbury Greensand Ridges Landscape Character Area<sup>13</sup>.

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12 31 March 2015.

13 North Dorset District Council Landscape Character Assessment, Addendum – July 2008.

- The site is bound by low density residential development to the west which has a rural village character. To the north of the A30, a hard urban edge is created by the new residential scheme at The Maltings.
- The site has an open countryside perception, being the first large open area reached when leaving Shaftesbury and forming a large and consistent component of the Greensand Terrace landscape to the south east of the town.
- There are extensive views across and out of the site to the south towards the Melbury Downs.
- The site is slightly elevated above higher Blandford Road, particularly at the southern end. This effect is exaggerated by the lower elevation of existing dwellings to the west of the road.

- A.55 It is likely that the site is too sensitive from a landscape and visual perspective for mitigation to be effective. Residential development would need to be of such low density and small scale so as to retain the rural village character south of the A30. Even with this design mitigation in place, the open countryside character and open views towards the Cranborne Chase AONB would be damaged.
- A.56 Given this landscape assessment, the site should be viewed as one of the first groups of assessed Shaftesbury sites, that is, considered as too sensitive from a landscape and visual point of view for any mitigation to be effective.