AtkinsRéalis

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

White Cross Farm, Wallingford

On behalf of Oxfordshire County Council

PINS reference: APP/U3100/W/25/3361505

Author: Graham Woodward BA DipLA FLI

Notice

This document and its contents have been prepared and are intended solely as information for **Error! No text of specified style in document.** and use in relation to White Cross Farm Appeal

AtkinsRéalis UK Limited assumes no responsibility to any other party in respect of or arising out of or in connection with this document and/or its contents.

This document has 67 pages including the cover.

Document history

Document title: Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

Document reference: 100119158-ATR-LA-WCF-RP-0001

Revision	Purpose description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
P01	For Client Review	GW/PT	PT	GW	GW	06.06.25
C01	For Client Issue	GW/PT	PT	GW	GW	16.06.25

Client signoff

Client	Oxfordshire County Council
Project	White Cross Farm
Job number	100119158
Client signature/date	

Document accessibility

If you need to access this report in a different format like accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille, please get in touch with our team who will do their best to assist.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Expert Witness

1.1 My name is Graham Woodward. I hold a degree in Landscape Architecture and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University). I obtained my full professional qualification in 1986 and I became a Fellow of the Landscape Institute (FLI) in 2022.

1.2 I have over 40 years' experience as a landscape architect, in landscape design, masterplanning, urban design and planning projects and have worked in local government and private practice in the UK and overseas. I have worked for Atkins (now AtkinsRéalis) for 19 years, having previously been a Director at Gillespies and Associate Director at Scott Wilson. My role at AtkinsRéalis is to provide senior level consultant support on design and landscape planning projects.

1.3 I have undertaken the role of Expert Witness over the last 25 years in Public Inquiries, Local Plan Inquiries, Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiries and at Development Consent Order Hearings. Schemes have included large infrastructure projects as well as smaller residential schemes, and I have acted for scheme promotors and local authorities.

Association with Oxfordshire County Council

1.4 AtkinsRéalis was appointed in May 2025 by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to provide landscape and visual expert witness support for the Appeal at the upcoming Public Inquiry for this project.

1.5 I was not involved in the consideration of the planning application by Oxfordshire County Council and its subsequent refusal for permission. However, since my appointment, I have now visited the site on several occasions since May 2025 and therefore not in winter conditions, although site photographs provided by Oxfordshire County Council during winter have been considered. I have reviewed the application and background material including the reasons for refusal, and have prepared evidence based on my assessment of the likely landscape and visual effects of this application.

Scope of evidence

1.6 My evidence covers the potential landscape and visual effects of the Scheme.

Declarations

1.7 I hereby declare that the evidence which I have prepared and provide in this Proof of Evidence is true and has been prepared, and is given, in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

2. Background to Appeal

2.1 The application (MW.0115/21) for mineral extraction at White Cross Farm is for quarrying of 550,000 tonnes of sand and gravel, in 5 phases over a 5-year period. The application working area is 15.5-ha. within the 19ha site. It is proposed that the site would be restored using 280 000 cubic metres of imported inert fill material and the site will then be restored partly to agriculture and nature conservation uses.

2.2 The application was received on 9th September 2021 by OCC and then subsequently went through a period of consultation between September 2021 to June 2024. The application was recommended for approval by OCC Officers at the Planning Committee Meeting on 2nd September 2024 but following a vote by Councillors, the application was Refused for the following reason:

Due to its location, the proposed development would have an adverse landscape and visual impact on the River Thames, the Thames Path National Trail and on the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), contrary to the provisions of policy C8 of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Part 1 Core Strategy and policy ENV1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

2.3 I have reviewed the submitted application Including the applicant's LVIA and proposals plans as well as background documentation relating to the OCC Officers report, including the OCC Landscape Officer's report and reasons for refusal. In the preparation of my evidence, I have taken this information into account, and I have also completed my own analysis, and my proof sets out my conclusions on the likely landscape and visual effects.

2.4 In preparing my assessment I have used a well-developed methodology which I have used on many LVIAs. The approach has been accepted by Inspectors at numerous contested appeals. I have also used the approach set out in the latest Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment published by Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment Guidelines (Edition 3, 2013), known as GLVIA3. Details of my methodology are set out in Appendix C.

2.5 The following sections are my own descriptions of baseline conditions and assessment of the likely effects of the Proposed Development on Landscape and Visual Amenity. Note that text in italics is taken from source documents. Note also that the Core Documents referred to are based on the June 16th 2025 version of the Core Document List.

3. The Application Site

Site and Setting

3.1 The application site covers an area of 19 hectares and is located approximately 1.5km to the south of Wallingford town centre within South Oxfordshire District. It is approximately 12 miles (20km) south-east of Oxford and approximately 11 miles (18km) northwest of Reading.

3.2 As indicated in Figure LA1 in Appendix A, the Red Line Boundary of the application site is broadly rectangular and runs along the A329 Reading Road to the west, A4130 Nosworthy Way to the north and along the River Thames to the east. The southern boundary is more irregular, along a group of trees between the river and Reading Road.

3.3 The surrounding area is open flat farmed landscape with scatterings of small settlements. Wallingford to the north, Cholsey to the southwest and North Stoke to the southeast are the closest settlements. Mongewell Park lies on the opposite bank of the River Thames; this estate was formerly Carmel College boarding school and now has planning permission for a housing redevelopment.

3.4 A residential property, Windward House, is approximately 80 metres south of the application site, with an intervening woodland garden of Mead Furlong. Elizabeth House, a day nursery and preschool is approximately 60 metres west of the application on the opposite side of Reading Road. Just to the south of this is Meadow Farm, both properties are set behind tall hedgerow vegetation. A private mooring point appears to be located at the southeastern corner with private access into a fenced off section of

the adjacent field (outside of the red line boundary). There is also a solar farm between Elizabeth House and Nosworthy Road (A4130). Just northwest of this, beyond Wallingford Road, there is a sand and gravel quarry at New Barn Farm; the site is fully operational with permission for extraction until 2037.

3.5 The proposed site itself comprises of four fields which are currently used for arable and pastoral farming. The roadsides are generally bound with tall trees and shrubs, and the river boundary is generally more open, with irregular groups of shrubs or trees lining the bank. Internally, the fields are most often bordered with large shrubs and there are occasional trees, some of quite large stature. The trees to the southern boundary are more woodland-like in character creating a visual barrier south.

3.6 A ditch with varying boundary vegetation runs north to south along the centre of the site, with another running east to the river.

3.7 There is a large Dutch barn structure located within the northwestern area of the Site, off a farm access track that leads from Reading Road to the River Thames.

Landscape Designations

3.8 As indicated in Figure LA2 in Appendix A The eastern boundary of the site runs adjacent to the Chilterns National Landscape (Chilterns NL) as it follows the River Thames western bank. (approximately 0.05 hectares of the site appears to be within the Chilterns NL where the boundary runs slightly out from the riverbank).

3.9 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (North Wessex Downs NL) lies approximately 1.6km to the west and 1.8 km to the south of the site as the North Wessex Downs NL curves around Cholsey and Wallingford.

3.10 The Thames Path National Trail runs along the western bank of the River Thames through the site. The Ridgeway National Trail runs approximately 280m to the east within the CNL. There are no other public rights of way (PRoW) in the vicinity apart from a short path that leads to St John the Baptist Church on the eastern bank of the river from the Ridgeway).

3.11 The Ridgeway is designated as a Scheduled Monument. There is another Scheduled Monument (North Stoke Henge) located 1.4km to the southeast of the site.

3.12 There are several Listed Buildings in the vicinity mainly clustered within Wallingford, North Stoke and Mongewell. There is a Grade II listed milestone on Reading Road opposite the southwestern corner of the site.

3.13 The two most eastern fields of the site are listed as Low Calcareous Grassland priority habitat; whilst the woodland to the south is deciduous woodland priority habitat.

4. The Proposed Development

4.1 As set out in CD1.02 Planning Statement, the proposed development is for the temporary (up to 5 years) extraction of sand and gravel from within the site. It is proposed to extract 550 000 tonnes of sand and gravel in 4 phases (A, 1, 2 and 3) over the 5-year period. The site would be progressively restored using 280 000 cubic metres of imported inert fill material, with the total project timescale estimated to be 6 years to the end of the restoration period.

4.2 It is anticipated that the sand and gravel deposits are between 2 and 4 metres deep and the overburden is around 1-1.5 metres deep. Therefore, the total depth of working would vary from a maximum of approximately 7 metres generally to around 3.5metres closer to the River Thames. The proposed phases are indicated on CD9.11 R25-7 Proposed Soil Strip Phasing Plan V6.

4.3 A minimum 30m wide buffer from the River Thames is proposed to be left undisturbed; with a 2m high post and wire security fence with signage installed 15m from the riverbank to prevent public access to the site from the Thames Path National Trail. Details of this fencing are described on CD9.05 Root Protection Zones Plan. No security fencing is shown around the remainder of the site, or gates at the site entrance and exit, though it is assumed these will be installed to control access.

4.4 Most of the vegetation (largely grasses and arable) within the site would be lost in the Phase A, Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 areas. An exception to this is a linear vegetation feature of mainly large shrubs running north-south through the site which would be retained. Boundary vegetation would generally be retained, except where removal is necessary for access (to the west from Reading Road) and exit from the site (on Nosworthy Way to the north). An area of blackthorn scrub at the southern end of the site will also be retained. None of the trees to be removed are classified as a veteran tree.

4.5 As indicated on CD9.05 Root Protection Zones Plan, the Root Protection Areas (RPA) of all retained vegetation is proposed to be marked out on site with post and tape. It should be noted that this is not the recommend protective measure for RPA, as set out in the applications Arboricultural Report (CD3.07), RPAs should be protected in accordance with BS5837.

4.6 It is proposed to use straw bales stacked to 4m high to mitigate visual impacts from the Thames Path National Trail, the River Thames and the Chilterns NL. These would be set back approximately 30 metres from the bank of the river and extend for around 370m adjacent to Phase 1 of the extraction works and around half of the Phase 2 works area. It is shown on application drawing Proposed Soil Storage/Screening Bunds & Straw Bales KD,WLF.D013 (CD3.08) and Revised Phasing Plans (CD3.18) that these bales will be placed and removed progressively in sections to screen each phase.

Phased Excavation

4.7 A new, left turn only, site entrance is proposed to be established off the A329 Reading Road, with a left turn only exit proposed off the A4130 Nosworthy Way. Infill planting to the western and northern boundaries is also proposed to strengthen and diversify the boundaries here.

4.8 Phase A would be the first area to be worked, with stripped soils from here, the “as raised” mineral stockpile area and subsequent phase areas, to be placed in soil bunds to the west of the site.

4.9 Topsoil bunds are to be maximum 3m high and subsoil bunds maximum 5m high. These are to be grass seeded and maintained for the duration of extraction.

4.10 Mineral extracted from Phase A (and subsequent phases) area would be placed in the “as raised stockpile”. The stockpiles would be a maximum of 10m high.

4.11 The void in Phase A would be filled with imported material 1.2m below restoration levels, except in the north-eastern area, where a water and silt management lagoon (66m x 55m x 5m) would be established, and just south of here for overburden and stripping of Phase 1.

4.12 The remainder of the Phase A area would be used to construct a mineral processing plant and ancillary buildings, which will be used to process the mineral from the “as raised stockpile” with the products then being transported off site for sale.

4.13 Sequential sections of agricultural straw bales are to be placed along the eastern boundary of Phase 1, to help screen the active mineral extraction area.

4.14 It is understood that gravel extraction would then take place from Phase 1 in a southerly direction into Phase 2, then in a southerly direction across Phase 3; with each Phase void being progressively filled with restoration materials once extraction of that phase is completed. It is not clear whether topsoil and subsoil would be stripped during the enabling works or immediately prior to each phased gravel extraction. However, for the purposes of the assessment, it is assumed that the soil will be stripped in phases.

4.15 The water pumped for the excavation and treatment would enter the lagoon before being discharged into the River Thames via a ditch on the northeastern boundary.

4.16 On the cessation of final mineral processing and sales from the quarry, all processing plant will be decommissioned and removed from Site. The site office, weighbridge, staff facilities and wheel wash will remain until the completion of final restoration works.

4.17 Imported inert material will be directly placed to restore land within any remaining unrestored areas. On achieving restoration formation levels, soils held in the bunds will be placed to complete the restoration soil profile. All remaining quarry offices and equipment will then be removed from Site. It is assumed that all other fencing will also be removed from site, although this is not clear from the application documents.

Processing Plant

4.18 The plant site would include a weighbridge, car parking for 15 cars, HGV parking for 8 HGVs, an office building and a canteen building providing mess room and welfare facilities. The plans for the plant site show a typical plant with a maximum height of 10.3 metres. The total area taken up by the typical processing plant including feed hopper and stockpiles of processed material is 43 metres by 54 metres.

4.19 Provisional elevations of the office and amenity portacabin structure indicate it would be 9.7 metres long, 3.6 metres wide and approximately 2.5 metres high. The canteen unit would also be a portacabin and would be 8.5 metres long, 3.6 metres wide and approximately 2.5 metres high. Each structure would have a door and windows. A weighbridge office is also proposed. A plan of a typical weighbridge office building has been provided, showing a building which is 9.5 metres long, 2.5 metres wide and 3.3 metres high.

4.20 It is understood from the Clarification letter 240610 (CD7.08) that there would be no external lighting around the offices, plant and workshop areas. It is assumed that there would also be no external lighting to quarry areas.

Restoration Plan

4.21 Restoration using inert fill and retained soils would take place progressively, with restoration being commenced in each phase once extraction is complete in that area. Phase A would be the last area to be restored, once the processing plant was no longer required.

4.22 Following the completion of extraction, it is proposed that there would be a further year to complete restoration of the site. The western part of the site would be restored to agriculture with hedgerows. The eastern part of the site would be restored to nature conservation, incorporating reedbeds, marshland and floodplain grazing marsh. The applicant has proposed long term management of the restored site for 30 years.

4.23 It is proposed that the internal haul roads would be retained following restoration to allow agricultural access, and a new agricultural barn will be installed. A new public right of way is also proposed to cross the site at the northern end to connect the Thames Path National Trail to Reading Road, with a gate and style access off Reading Road.

4.24 All restored land will be managed and maintained under a 5 Year Aftercare Period, before being handed back to the landowner.

5. Assessment Assumptions

5.1 It should be noted that due to timeframe constraints of the Appeal site visits were only undertaken during May 2025 when the trees and shrubs were in full leaf. Winter conditions are assumed to be more open with filtered views through leafless vegetation, with some evergreen and denser blocks of planting providing continued screening. It is also understood that during winter particularly, there is occasional flooding to the majority of the eastern fields.

5.2 It is assumed that all vegetation on site (except that noted as being retained) would be removed during the enabling phase. Grass is assumed to be kept cut low until the topsoil is removed during subsequent phases.

5.3 The security boundary fence to Thames Path National Trail is understood to be a 2m high post and wire fence placed at 15m from the riverbank. It is assumed this will be removed on completion of all extraction works.

5.4 Stacked 4m high straw bales, set 30m from the riverbank, will be moved progressively along from north to south as works proceed - only being placed where works are immediately adjacent.

5.5 Lighting will either not be required or only be used during normal working hours in winter.

6. Policy Context

6.1 The site is located within the administrative boundary of South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. Relevant landscape and environmental policies are set out below:

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

6.2 The NPPF has several polices, the most relevant of which here are:

6.3 ***189.*** *Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. …The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.*

6.4 ***187****. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by…b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.*

6.5 ***190.*** *When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.*

Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan

6.6 Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part I Core Strategy (OMWCS) was adopted in September 2017 relevant policies are:

6.7 **Policy C5 Local environment, amenity and economy**: *Proposals for minerals and waste development shall demonstrate that they will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on….the local environment…residential amenity…visual intrusion… light pollution.. Where necessary, appropriate separation distances or buffer zones between minerals and waste developments and occupied residential property or other sensitive receptors and/or other mitigation measures will be required, as determined on a site-specific, case-by-case basis.*

6.8 **Policy C7: Biodiversity and geodiversity**: *Minerals and waste development should conserve and, where possible, deliver a net gain in biodiversity… Development shall ensure that no significant harm would be caused to: - Protected, priority or notable species and habitats, except where the need for and benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm… All proposals for mineral working and landfill shall demonstrate how the development will make an appropriate contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of local habitats, biodiversity or geodiversity (including fossil remains and trace fossils), including contributing to the objectives of the Conservation Target Areas wherever possible.*

6.9 **Policy C8: Landscape:** *Proposals for minerals and waste development shall demonstrate that they respect and where possible enhance local landscape character, and are informed by landscape character assessment. Proposals shall include adequate and appropriate measures to mitigate adverse impacts on landscape, including careful siting, design and landscaping. Where significant adverse impacts cannot be avoided or adequately mitigated, compensatory environmental enhancements shall be made to offset the residual landscape and visual impacts…. Great weight will be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and high priority will be given to the enhancement of their natural beauty.*

6.10 **Policy C9: Historic environment and archaeology:** *Proposals for minerals and waste development will not be permitted unless it is demonstrated, including where necessary through prior investigation, that they or associated activities will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the historic environment. Great weight will be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets: Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site; scheduled monuments; listed buildings; conservation areas; historic battlefields; registered parks and gardens; and non-designated archaeological assets which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to a scheduled monument; and the setting of those assets.*

South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan

6.11 The South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan (SOLP) was adopted in December 2020. A new emerging Joint Local Plan for 2041 is currently in examination with the Secretary of State. Therefore, SOLP currently carries most weight. Relevant policies are:

6.12 ***Policy ENV1: Landscape and Countryside:*** *The highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs): Development in an AONB or affecting the setting of an AONB will only be permitted where it conserves, and where possible, enhances the character and natural beauty of the AONB;…. where it is appropriate to the economic and environmental wellbeing of the area or promotes*

understanding or enjoyment of the AONB;….AONB Management Plans will be a material consideration in decision making.

South Oxfordshire's landscape, countryside and rural areas will be protected against harmful development. Development will only be permitted where it protects and, where possible enhances, features that contribute to the nature and quality of South Oxfordshire's landscapes, in particular: (i) trees (hedgerows and field boundaries….iii) the landscapes, waterscapes, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plains; …and (ix) aesthetic and perceptual factors such as tranquillity, wildness, intactness, rarity and enclosure.

6.13 **Policy ENV2: Biodiversity - Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species**:… *Development likely to result, either directly or indirectly to the loss, deterioration or harm to… Priority Habitats and Species… • Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas)…. will only be permitted if: i) the need for, and benefits of the development in the proposed location outweigh the adverse effect on the interests;…iii) measures will be provided (and secured through planning conditions or legal agreements), that would avoid, mitigate or as a last resort, compensate for the adverse effects resulting from development.*

6.14 **Policy ENV3: Biodiversity:**:… *Planning permission will only be granted if impacts on biodiversity can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated fully.*

6.15 **Policy ENV4: Watercourses - Biodiversity:**:… *Development of land that contains or is adjacent to a watercourse must protect and where possible, enhance the function and setting of the watercourse and its biodiversity…. Development should include a minimum 10m buffer zone along both sides of the watercourse to create a corridor favourable to the enhancement of biodiversity…. Major development proposals which are located within 20m of a watercourse will require a Construction Management Plan to be agreed with the Council before commencement of work to ensure that the watercourse will be satisfactorily protected from damage, disturbance or pollution.*

6.16 **Policy ENV5: Green Infrastructure in New Developments:** *Development will be expected to contribute towards the provision of additional Green Infrastructure and protect or enhance existing Green Infrastructure.*

6.17 **Policy ENV6: Historic Environment:** *Proposals for new development should be sensitively designed and should not cause harm to the historic environment***.**

6.18 **Policy ENV7: Listed Buildings:** *Proposals for development…. affecting the setting of a listed building will be expected to: i) conserve, enhance or better reveal those elements which contribute to the heritage significance and/or its setting; ii) respect any features of special architectural or historic interest, including, where relevant, the historic curtilage or context, such as burgage plots, or its value within a group and/or its setting such as the importance of a street frontage or traditional shopfronts; and iii) be sympathetic to the listed building and its setting in terms of its siting, size, scale, height, alignment, materials and finishes (including colour and texture), design and form, in order to retain the special interest that justifies its designation through appropriate design, with regard to the South Oxfordshire Design Guide.*

6.19 **Policy ENV9: Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments:** *Development must protect the site and setting of Scheduled Monument.*

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Joint Local Plan 2041

6.20 Since the appealed application was determined, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils have submitted their Joint Local Plan to the Secretary of State (pre-submission version

October 2024). The Joint Local Plan 2024 (JLP) contains draft policies NH4, NH6 and NH7 (Annexes 8, 9 & 10) which reflect paragraph 189 of the NPPF, OMWCS policy C8 and SOLP policy ENV1. The JLP and its supporting documents therefore carry some weight in the decision to be made on the appealed application.

Cholsey Neighbourhood Plan

6.21 Cholsey Neighbourhood Plan (CNP) was adopted in October 2022 replacing the April 2019 version and covers the whole of Cholsey Parish, including the application site. Relevant policies include:

6.22 **Policy CNP E1:** *Cholsey's landscape, countryside, biodiversity, and rural areas will be protected against inappropriate development and where possible enhanced. Within the AONBs and their settings great weight will be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty***.**

6.23 **Policy CNP E2:** *Proposals which improve opportunities for residents and visitors to informally enjoy Cholsey's riverside location, or which improve facilities for river-based sport or recreation and are compatible with CNP E1 and CNP E3 will be supported***.**

6.24 **Policy CNP E3:** *Development proposals should respect the landscape, waterscape, cultural heritage and user enjoyment of the River Thames, its tributaries, floodplains, the Ridgeway, and the Thames Path. As far as planning permission is required proposals for mooring stages, posts, earthworks, or river facing banks with piles and planking outside the built-up area boundary will not be supported.*

6.25 **Policy CNP E4:** *Cholsey's designated historic heritage assets and their settings, both above and below ground including listed buildings, scheduled monuments and conservation areas will be conserved and enhanced for their historic significance and their important contribution to local distinctiveness, character, and sense of place.*

6.26 **Policy CNP T1:** *Where appropriate, new developments should connect to and where possible improve Cholsey's walking and cycling network***.**

The Chilterns AONB Management Plan

6.27 The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 is currently under review. However, relevant policies include:

6.28 **DP4**: *In the setting of the AONB, take full account of whether proposals harm the AONB*.

6.29 **DP5** *Require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that meets the standards in the GLVIA latest edition for developments in the AONB or affecting its setting.*

The Chilterns Position Statement on Setting

6.30 The Position Statement "Development Affecting the Setting of the Chilterns AONB" was adopted in June 2011. It sets out guidance for interested parties to consider the impacts on the setting of the AONB, including views in and out of the AONB. *The Board considers that, although it does not have a defined geographical boundary, the setting of the Chilterns AONB is the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design could be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the Chilterns AONB…. Views out of the AONB and into its surrounding areas can be very significant. Development proposals that affect views into and out of the AONB need to be carefully assessed… examples of adverse impacts may include: locking or interference of views into and out of the AONB…loss of tranquillity….introduction of abrupt changes to landscape character.*

The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan

6.31 The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 is currently under review. However, relevant policies include:

6.32 **LA 03**: *Use the North Wessex Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment to inform policy and decision making across the AONB and its setting.*

6.33 **LA 06:** *Ensure that all development in or affecting the setting of the AONB conserves and enhances the character, qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape.*

The North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement on Setting

6.34 The Position Statement "Development Affecting the Setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB" was adopted in 2019. It sets out guidance for interested parties to consider the impacts on the setting of the AONB, including views in and out of the AONB. *The setting of the North Wessex Downs does not have a defined geographical boundary but it should be addressed as the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design can be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB….adverse impacts may include:* development which would have a significant visual impact on views in or out…loss of tranquillity …introduction of abrupt change of landscape character…

7. Landscape Baseline

Landscape Designations

7.1 The site is not within any landscape designation but is immediately adjacent to the Chilterns National Landscape and can also be considered to be within the setting of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Chilterns National Landscape

7.2 The Chilterns NL has the following Special Qualities:

- ***rich natural tapestry*** *of ancient hedgerows, trees, orchards and parkland weaving across farmland.*
- *Unspoilt countryside with relative* ***tranquillity and dark skies*** *on the doorstep of 10 million people.*
- *Nationally important concentrations of* ***species-rich chalk grassland****, home to scarce and threatened species, such as Chiltern gentian and glow-worm.*
- ***One of the most wooded landscapes in England****, including the Chilterns beech wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC).*
- ***Nine precious chalk streams****, home to some of the UK's most endangered species, such as otter, water vole and brown trout.*
- *A* ***diverse archaeological landscape****, with ancient parishes, medieval field patterns, Iron Age hillforts, and remnants of woodland heritage, such as sawpits.*
- *More than* ***2,000 ha of common land****, heaths and greens, rich in wildlife and cultural heritage.*

- *A **network of 2,000 km of rights of way**, including two national trails and numerous ancient routeways.*
- *A **rich industrial heritage** of woodworking, quarrying, brick making and food production.*
- ***Distinctive buildings** made from local materials, attractive villages, notable stately homes and monuments, and medieval churches.*

7.3 Given the designation the Chilterns NL is considered to have a very high value and a high susceptibility to change resulting in a Very High sensitivity.

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

7.4 The North Wessex Downs NL has the following Special Qualities:

- *The AONB is characterized by extensive chalk downlands, which are open, arable sweeps and dramatic scarp slopes.*
- *Semi-natural chalk grassland, with its unique flora and fauna, is a key feature.*
- *The landscape also includes well-wooded plateaus and sheltered chalk river valleys.*
- *Secluded valleys contribute to the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.*
- *Arable lands are present, showcasing the traditional agricultural practices of the area.*
- *The AONB is renowned for its dark, unpolluted night skies, offering opportunities for stargazing.*

7.5 Given the designation the North Wessex Downs NL is considered to have a very high value and a high susceptibility to change resulting in a Very High sensitivity.

Published Landscape Character

7.6 The following table sets out the landscape character of the site and surroundings as defined by published documentation on a National, Regional and District basis. Landscape Character Areas (LCA) and Landscape Character Types (LCT) are noted. Please refer to Figure LA4, LA5 and LA6 in Appendix A for the indicative boundaries of the character areas.

7.7 Note that the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessments form 2003 and 2017 are currently being superseded by the 2024 version for the Joint Local Plan. However, they have been included here as they were relevant at the time of the original application.

7.8 An assessment of the landscape character of the site itself is also provided with author defined character areas presented on Figure LA7.

Table 1 – Published Landscape Character

Published Document	Key Characteristics and Management Recommendations
National Character Areas	
108 - Upper Thames Clay Vales Sensitivity: **Moderate** This NCA is considered to have a high value but given the scale of the NCA a	**Key Characteristics**: *Low-lying clay-based flood plains coursed by the River Thames and its dense network of tributaries and ditches….In the river corridors, grazed pasture dominates with limited areas of historic wetland habitats….A mosaic of mixed agriculture, ponds and small woods…A regular, planned field pattern defined by boundaries of thorn hedgerows, often with mature hedgerow*

Published Document	Key Characteristics and Management Recommendations
medium susceptibility to change.	*trees…Historic settlement is found sparsely dispersed on higher ground and exceptionally at river crossing points such as Wallingford.* **Recommendations**: *Conserve historic features in the flood plains, including traditional flood meadow, pasture… Restore and create wet grassland, ponds and fens in the flood plains. Create new woodlands in places where enclosure of the landscape does not negatively impact upon valued views and does not impinge upon open habitats. Maintain the mix of agriculture and the mosaic of farmland habitats*
110 – Chilterns Sensitivity: **Moderate** This NCA is considered to have a high value but given the scale of the NCA a medium susceptibility to change	**Key Characteristics**: *River Thames valley and associated settlements…A diversity of semi-natural habitats and species special to the Chilterns…One of the most wooded lowland landscapes in the country…An ancient landscape of commons, downland, woodland and field boundaries...An agricultural landscape of cereals and livestock intimately mixed with woodland and defined by ancient hedgerow boundaries…Features linked to recreation are widespread, including an extensive rights of way network…frequent grand country houses and designed landscapes occupy prominent positions*. **Recommendations**: *Protect the character and integrity of the rural landscape… Identify and conserve views to and from key and popular viewpoints and landmarks… Conserve the patchwork land use pattern, valued farmland species and productivity of the landscape… Conserve the range and mosaic of habitats found in the landscape… Manage the flood plain of chalk streams*
Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS) 2004	
LCT Terrace Farmland Sensitivity: **Moderate** This LCT is considered to have a medium value with wide open agricultural fields and a medium susceptibility to change.	**Key Characteristics**: *Broad, flat or low-lying gravel terraces, large regularly shaped field patterns and localised tree lined ditches* **Recommendations**: *Strengthen and enhance the pattern of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree-lined watercourses. Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded…and enhanced... Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the area.*
LCT River Meadows Sensitivity: **High** This LCT is considered to have a high value with generally tranquil, accessible riverside character, and a high susceptibility to change.	**Key Characteristics**: *Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains; Meandering river channel; Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture; Riparian character with a strong pattern of riverside willows and tree-lined ditches*. **Recommendations**: *Conserve and enhance the tranquil, small-scale, intimate pastoral character and visual unity of the river corridor. Ensure that all surviving priority habitats are safeguarded…and enhanced... Safeguard, maintain and enhance all locally important habitats in a way that is appropriate to the landscape character of the ar*
South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 adopted in 2003 as SPG (Atlantic	

Published Document	Key Characteristics and Management Recommendations
Character Area 4 River Thames Corridor Sub Character Area: Flat Floodplain Pasture Sensitivity: ***High*** (as defined by the SOLA 2003 report)	**Key Characteristics**: *Landscape character in this area has a strong degree of coherence, with the River Thames providing a strong unifying influence. There are consequently few variations in landscape character across this LCA.* *Flat Floodplain Pasture : flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character…• intimate, pastoral and tranquil character with some 'arcadian' qualities along the Thames close to settlements and riverside parklands (e.g. Mongewell); • generally low intervisibility, although views along the river corridor may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas; • important areas of riverside greenspace within or adjoining the main settlements and urban areas (e.g. the riverside at Wallingford*)
South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 2017 (Lepus Consulting)	
Character Area 4 River Thames Corridor Sub Character Area: Flat Floodplain Pasture Sensitivity: **High** Given the LCA and LCT is defined exactly the same as the 2003 version.	**Key Characteristics**: *The flat, low- lying alluvial land which forms the corridor of the River Thames between Long Wittenham and Goring and includes the lower reaches of its main tributary, the River Thame…This character area is comprised mostly of floodplain associated with the River Thames and the River Thame…Predominantly agricultural land use, comprising mostly of arable land.* *Flat, low-lying farmland, typically dominated by permanent pasture with a distinctively 'wet', riparian character. • Prone to flooding with distinctive network of drainage ditches. Intimate, pastoral and tranquil character with some 'arcadian' qualities along the Thames close to settlements and riverside parklands (e.g. Mongewell). • Generally low intervisibility, although views along the river corridor may be possible in some more sparsely vegetated areas. • Important areas of riverside greenspace within or adjoining the main settlements and urban areas (e.g. the riverside at Wallingford).*
South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council Landscape Character Assessment September 2024 *(replaces the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessments)*	
LCT13 Lower Vale LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale Sensitivity: **High** This LCA is considered to have a high value with generally tranquil, accessible riverside character, presence of National Landscapes, and a high susceptibility to change	**Key Characteristics**: *A low-lying, gently undulating landform to the west of the River Thames; A rural agricultural landscape of predominantly open large-scale arable farming, albeit with some smaller-scale permanent pasture concentrated in wetter areas next to the River Thames; hedgerow field boundaries are fragmented or missing in places which reinforces the open character; Limited tree cover enables high intervisibility and extensive open views, including south towards the chalk escarpment of the North Wessex Downs and to the edge of the Chilterns National Landscape. Riparian woodland and smaller-scale field pattern along the river and other watercourses results in a greater sense of enclosure and intimacy; A well-connected network of public rights of way; Predominantly rural, tranquil, character, although busy transport corridors, railway infrastructure and electricity pylons are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.*

Published Document	Key Characteristics and Management Recommendations
	The Tranquillity Assessment for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse categorises 85% of the LCA in Zone 2 ('areas of some tranquillity'). **Recommendations**: *Consider the role of this area both as part of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Chilterns National Landscape, and as an immediate setting to the National Landscapes. Consider impact of development within this landscape on views from the National Landscapes. Watercourses should be maintained and enhanced as distinctive landscape elements with high biodiversity value.*
Chilterns National Landscape - Landscape Character (as defined on the Chilterns NL website referring to county and district LCAs 2018)	
River Valleys Sensitivity: **Very High** Given the designation the Chilterns NL is considered to have a very high value and a high susceptibility to change	*The Thames river valley – located at the southern edge of the National Landscape, this area comprises the broad sides and floor of the Thames Valley.*
Scarp Foothills and Vale Fringes Sensitivity: **Very High** Given the designation the Chilterns NL is considered to have a very high value with a High susceptibility to change.	*The scarp foothills and vale fringes consist of the gently undulating chalk slopes with chalk springs between the base of the scarp and the clay vale to the west. Variation in vegetation and land use within the scarp foothills and vale fringes creates subtle changes in landscape character. Most of the area is under intensive agricultural use, with large, ploughed fields and flinty soils.*
North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2002)	
LCA5D Moreton Plain Sensitivity: **Very High** Given the designation the North Wessex Downs NL is considered to have a very high value with a High susceptibility to change.	*The area wraps around the low lying Vale landscape, associated with the floodplain of the River Thames… a varied landform including strong ridges and skylines of downland outliers…large fields of intensive arable farmland dominate the area, with a weak or absent hedgerow structure and a sparse covering of trees, except on the steeper slopes above the Thames to the north of the area.* The visual connectivity between the site and this National Landscape is highly limited and development of this type and scale is considered to be highly unlikely to affect this character area and it is therefore not considered further in this assessment.
Chilterns National Landscape – Special Qualities	
The National Landscape Special Qualities	• ***rich natural tapestry*** *of ancient hedgerows, trees, orchards and parkland weaving across farmland.* • *Unspoilt countryside with relative* ***tranquillity and dark skies*** *on the doorstep of 10 million people.*

Published Document	Key Characteristics and Management Recommendations
Sensitivity: **Very High** Given the designation the Chilterns NL is considered to have a very high value and a high susceptibility to change	• *Nationally important concentrations of **species-rich chalk grassland**, home to scarce and threatened species, such as Chiltern gentian and glow-worm.* • ***One of the most wooded landscapes in England**, including the Chilterns beech wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC).* • ***Nine precious chalk streams**, home to some of the UK's most endangered species, such as otter, water vole and brown trout.* • *A **diverse archaeological landscape**, with ancient parishes, medieval field patterns, Iron Age hillforts, and remnants of woodland heritage, such as sawpits.* • *More than **2,000 ha of common land**, heaths and greens, rich in wildlife and cultural heritage.* • *A **network of 2,000 km of rights of way**, including two national trails and numerous ancient routeways.* • *A **rich industrial heritage** of woodworking, quarrying, brick making and food production.* • ***Distinctive buildings** made from local materials, attractive villages, notable stately homes and monuments, and medieval churches.*
North Wessex Downs National Landscape – Special Qualities	
The National Landscape Special Qualities Sensitivity: **Very High** Given the designation the North Wessex Downs NL is considered to have a very high value and a high susceptibility to change	*Landscape and Natural Features:* • ***Chalk Downs:*** *The AONB is characterized by extensive chalk downlands, which are open, arable sweeps and dramatic scarp slopes.* • ***Chalk Grassland:*** *Semi-natural chalk grassland, with its unique flora and fauna, is a key feature.* • ***Wooded Plateaus:*** *The landscape also includes well-wooded plateaus and sheltered chalk river valleys.* • ***Intimate Valleys:*** *Secluded valleys contribute to the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.* • ***Arable Lands:*** *Arable lands are present, showcasing the traditional agricultural practices of the area.* • ***Night Skies:*** *The AONB is renowned for its dark, unpolluted night skies, offering opportunities for stargazing.*

Site Based Landscape Character

7.9 In terms of the site itself and immediate environs it is considered that the character of the landscape generally accords with that of the published landscape character assessments. Site based landscape character is as follows:

Topography and Land Use

7.10 The site itself is generally flat, set within the floodplain of the River Thames; the land gently rising west from the Thames towards Reading Road. Further west the land remains generally flat rarely rising above 50m AOD, except at Cholsey Hill (3km to the west) where the land rises to 74m AOD. Nosworthy Road on the northern boundary is approximately 4-6m above the site as the road rises east to cross the River Thames on Nosworthy Way Bridge (NB this bridge is variously known as Nosworthy Mamun Bridge and Winterbrook Bridge, it will be referred to in this report as Nosworthy Way Bridge).

7.11 The land east of the Thames rises up to form a ridgeline running north/south just beyond Port Way road (1.5km to east).

7.12 The site itself is agricultural fields, and the surrounding land use east of the River Thames is similar open flat farmland with a golf course (500m to southeast), a solar farm (immediately to west) and a quarry (500m to northwest).

7.13 Wallingford to the north, Cholsey to the southwest and North Stoke to the southeast are the closest settlements. Mongewell, Mongewell Park and the estate of Carmel College lies on the opposite bank of the River Thames and has an estate parkland character.

Land Cover

7.14 The proposed site itself comprises four fields which are currently used for arable and pastoral farming with the western fields generally used for arable and the eastern fields as meadow pasture. The roadsides are generally bound with narrow hedgerows and groups of tall trees and shrubs, the river boundary is generally more open, with irregular groups of shrubs or trees lining the bank.

7.15 The opposite side of the riverbank, on the eastern side of the River Thames, is more vegetated with large trees and shrubs, but there are occasional gaps allowing views to the boat houses and adjacent buildings at the old Carmel College estate. These would be especially evident in winter.

7.16 Internally, the fields are most often bordered with shrub blocks and there are occasional trees, some of quite large stature particularly adjacent to the river. The trees to the southern boundary are more woodland-like in character and form the edge to an orchard type garden setting of the property to the south.

7.17 A ditch with varying boundary vegetation runs north to south along the centre of the site with another ditch branching off this at the north of the site to the river.

Tranquillity and Scenic Quality

7.18 The surrounding roads, although single carriageway, are busy and noisy but generally enclosed by roadside vegetation. Within the site, the noise of the road is still apparent but filtered slightly by the vegetation and, although glimpsed through gaps, there is visual disconnection from the road, certainly in summer months when trees and shrubs are in leaf. In winter, it is likely that intervisibility would be possible.

7.19 Adjacent to the river, the road is raised up and the noise even less noticeable, particularly aided by the attractive river environs giving a good sense of tranquillity.

7.20 The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have produced a Tranquillity Assessment (LUC 2024) which places the northern sections of the site within Zone 4 Low Tranquillity and the southern sections within Zone 2 Some Tranquillity. On site, however, the tranquillity is

considered more nuanced, with the eastern fields considered to have Some Tranquillity, influenced by the River Thames setting despite the presence of the road, and the northwestern field having a Mixed Tranquillity, with really only the noise from the roads causing intrusion. Bird song, the rustle of trees and gentle splash of passing boats can be heard.

7.21 The Thames Path National Trail allows public access and the views across the site are attractive and relaxing, although vehicles can be glimpsed through the tall boundary vegetation and at the river bridge. The Dutch barn structure located within the northwestern area of the site provides an interesting feature in the landscape.

7.22 The Nosworthy Way Bridge on the A4130 is in the Chilterns NL and from its elevated vantage point there are clear panoramic views across the site for pedestrians, cyclists and road users. For those travelling along this road, the bridge provides a significant point to take in views of the river and its associated meadows, both to the north and south of the road.

7.23 Views to the river are tranquil with passing boats and wildfowl. Where vegetation allows, views into the old Carmel estate are interesting, and include the wet boat house, glimpses of St John the Baptist Church, the Julius Gottlieb Gallery and Boathouses, and boats.

Value and Susceptibility

7.24 The site-based landscape may be split into two distinct character areas:

7.25 The western fields are considered to be Terrace Farmland with a rural, agricultural character set between narrow hedgerows. This landscape is quite commonplace but has some levels of tranquillity and scenic qualities. This landscape is considered to have a medium value with medium susceptibility to changes and an overall medium sensitivity.

7.26 The eastern fields are considered to have a Farmed Floodplain Pasture character, with attractive setting along the river, occasionally intimate and enclosed by wooded areas. This landscape is rarer with good levels of tranquillity and scenic qualities despite some glimpses of intrusive elements. This landscape is considered to have a High value. Especially given its location within the setting of the National Landscapes and the presence of the Thames Path National Trail. The landscape is considered to have a high susceptibility to change and an overall High sensitivity.

8. Visual Amenity Baseline

General

8.1 As indicated in the landscape baseline, the site is quite well contained and views in and out are generally limited. Key receptors are those in close proximity, particularly users of the Thames Path National Trail, the River Thames, the Chilterns National Landscape and the few surrounding residential properties.

8.2 The receptors scoped in and out of the assessment are noted below. Their indicative locations are presented on Figure LA8 in Appendix A.

Note VR (Visual Receptor)

Table 2 – Scoped Visual Receptors

VR Number	Receptor	Scoped IN/OUT
1	Users of the Thames Path National Trail	IN
2	Users of the Thames River	IN
3	Users of Reading Road & Nosworthy Way (in and outside the Chilterns NL)	IN
4	Visitors/employees at Elizabeth House and residents/employees at Meadow Farm	IN
5	Residents/visitors to Carmel College Wet Boathouse	IN
6	Visitors to St Johns Baptist Church (listed)	IN
7	Users of grounds at Carmel College estate	IN
8	Private dock and field at southeast corner of site	IN
9	Residents at Barchester - Waterside Court Care Home	IN
10	Users of Mead Furlong woodland garden adjacent to river	IN
11	Residents at Winwood House	OUT Intervening dense vegetation, orientation and intervening buildings heavily restrict views. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant.
12	Residents at other properties east of Reading Road (e.g. Mead Furlong house, Mill Court)	OUT Intervening dense vegetation, orientation and intervening buildings heavily restrict views. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant.
13	Residents in Winterbrook (Wallingford)	OUT Intervening dense vegetation, orientation and intervening buildings heavily restrict views. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant.
14	Users of the Ridgeway	OUT The ridgeway is lined with trees and hedgerow and occasionally woodland which heavily restricts views towards the site. An earth bund at the section between Nosworthy Way and Mongewell further

VR Number	Receptor	Scoped IN/OUT
		restricts views. There are also several other intervening hedgerows and trees and buildings at Carmel College. Any views towards the site would be heavily filtered even in winter. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant.
15	Other receptors within Chilterns National Landscape	OUT Intervening dense vegetation, orientation and intervening buildings heavily restrict views. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant even in winter.
16	Other receptors within North Wessex Downs National Landscape	OUT Intervening dense vegetation, orientation and intervening buildings heavily restrict views. Any effect is highly unlikely to be significant even in winter.

8.3 The scoped in visual receptors are presented on Figure LA9 with representative viewpoint baseline photographs provided in Appendix B.

8.4 To avoid repetitive text and for ease of comprehension, the detailed baseline view and sensitivity for each assessed visual receptor is described more fully alongside the potential visual impacts in the Visual Assessment Table 4.

9. Potential Impacts

9.1 The Proposed Development is likely to cause the following impacts resulting in effects on landscape and visual amenity.

Enabling Works

9.2 During enabling existing vegetation will be removed from along the internal access track and along the ditch to the north of this track. Short sections (up to 9m) of the boundary vegetation to Reading Road and Nosworthy Way will be removed to provide access and egress points. In total 7 individual Cat C or U trees and 11 groups of trees and shrubs (Cat C) will be lost.

9.3 It is assumed that the vegetation within the fields will also be cut down and maintained as low grass areas until the field they are in is needed for extraction, depending on the exact timing of soil stripping and extraction operations.

9.4 The access and egress points and connecting tracks will be constructed. The egress onto Nosworthy Way requiring a ramp to overcome height difference and a bell-mouth, which will open up views into the site.

9.5 The north-west field will be excavated, with retained topsoil and subsoil being placed in bunds along the western boundary and the mineral extracted placed adjacent.

9.6 The resulting void in the north-west field would then be refilled and the processing plant and ancillary buildings installed; a lagoon and water treatment facility will also be constructed.

9.7 Security boundary fencing would be installed along the Thames Path National Trail with warning signage, which would be out of character with the rural setting. No other security fencing or gates are described in the application, but should they be subsequently included these would have a further impact.

9.8 Phased Operation

9.9 The operational phase is considered to be the main phases of quarrying once the processing plant area and lagoon is in place.

9.10 The impacts of the enabling and operational phases will include:

- Loss of vegetation (trees, shrubs, arable and pasture areas)
- Removal of topsoil and subsoil, and subsequent removal of sand and gravel materials.
- Loss of characterful Dutch barn.
- Presence of large construction vehicles and quarry vehicles
- Presence of buildings and industrial scale processing plants
- Noise
- Presence of site security fencing
- Changes to topography of fields
- Presence of quarry traffic on roads
- Introduction of lagoon
- Introduction of bunding 2-10 m high
- Presence of screening straw bales against the buffer to the Thames Path National Trail.

Restoration

9.11 It is proposed to undertake progressive restoration, with quarried areas infilled and restoration process put in place as the works proceed around the site. Therefore, the distinction between enabling, operation and restoration is somewhat blurred.

9.12 Full restoration is anticipated by the applicant to be able to be completed following the 5-year extraction period, although it should be noted that it would normally take some years (usually 10-15) before the restoration planting proposed is sufficiently established to be effective in landscape and visual terms (potentially longer in biodiversity terms). Operation and restoration could also be delayed if there is flooding.

9.13 The impacts of the restoration phases will include:

- New infill planting of trees, shrubs and hedgerows (stock to generally be planted as whips min 300mm high)
- Recreation of damp meadow wetland areas
- Introduction of a permanent lagoon, shallow ponds and ditches
- Restoration of agricultural land to best and most versatile
- Introduction of permissive path from the Thames Path National Trail to Reading Road
- Realignment of the Thames Path National Trail through an existing block of thorn vegetation on the eastern flank of the site.
- Protection of Thames Path National Trail with a 30m buffer (from the River Thames edge), enhancing the grass here to neutral grassland
- Introduction of public information signs on the restoration habitats to be created
- Introduction of new barn and access road

9.14 It should be noted that the definitive line of the Thames Path National Trail goes through a very dense area of blackthorn. In practice, the path curves around this and another smaller block. The restoration plans indicate the path continuing through the retained blackthorn blocks, it is assumed that the current alignment on site will be maintained.

9.15 The assessment of effects takes into account the likely impacts as set out above and assesses the Proposed Development during winter and summer at the following stages:

- Enabling Works – initial site clearance and installation of processing plant and site set up.
- Phased Operation and Progressive Restoration
- Restoration (upon competition of full restoration proposals and also after 15 years to allow for reasonable establishment of restoration proposals)

10. Landscape Assessment of Effects

10.1 The assessment of the effects of Proposed Development on the landscape designations and landscape character is set out as a tabulated assessment below.

10.2 Landscape effects have been considered over three stages of the works, Firstly, the Enabling Works stage and then the Phased Works and Progressive Restoration, and finally Full Restoration Years 1 and 15.