

Innovation Park Medway

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
September 2018

^A 17 Minster Precincts
Peterborough PE1 1XX
United Kingdom

^T +44 (0) 1733 310 471

^F +44 (0) 1733 553 661

^W www.lda-design.co.uk

LDA Design Consulting Ltd
Registered No: 09312403
17 Minster Precincts, Peterborough PE1 1XX

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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2008.

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1.0 Summary

This assessment describes the existing landscape and views, considers their sensitivity to change and identifies the changes likely to arise from the proposed development; providing judgements of the importance of effects arising.

The site is approximately 18.36 hectares and is located within an urban area approximately 3.5km to the south of Chatham and Rochester, between Maidstone Road (A229) to the east and the M2 and Rochester Road (B2097) to the west. The site is split into two separate areas to the north and the south of the existing airfield.

The Innovation Park Medway Masterplan allows for the construction of up to 101,000 square metres of Business (Use Class B1) and General Industrial (Use Class B2) floor space with associated means of access, distributor and service roads, multi-storey parking facilities, footpaths and cycle ways, sustainable drainage systems and landscaping. The proposed buildings would be between two storeys and six storeys in height (between approximately 8m and 20m).

Landscape and visual considerations have informed the design proposals from the outset, to ensure impacts on the Kent Downs AONB are limited and that the development is in keeping with its surrounding context. Proposed buildings would be no higher than the BAE Systems buildings to the north of the site to limit visual impacts on the AONB; proposed tall buildings (six storeys or 20m) would be limited to a single plot (effectively a single building); and proposed buildings across the two site areas would be variable in height, providing a staggered roofline. Within the southern site area, proposed buildings along the south-eastern boundary are restricted to no higher than 2 storeys, limiting the impact on the amenity of residential properties to the south. Other parts of the southern site area are able to accommodate buildings of a similar scale to Innovation Centre Medway.

1.1. Landscape and Visual Effects

A summary of the key landscape and visual effects is set out below.

The site is located on a plateau of high ground within an urban area, beyond which to the west and south is a wooded ridge that constitutes part of the Kent Downs AONB. The AONB is separated from the urban area and the site by a steep valley within which runs the M2 motorway. To the north and east, the urban area extends across an undulating landscape with valleys that descend towards the River Medway.

The area of high ground within the AONB immediately to the south, west and north-west of the site limits visibility of the proposed development, with visibility confined to parts of the ridge where woodland cover is sparse. To the north, east and south-east, visibility is limited by the dense grain of built development within the urban area, with small patches of visibility possible within areas of open space, such as Horsted Valley. Views of the proposed development would generally be confined to areas within close proximity to the site, or from areas of high ground to the west within 2km.

1.1.1. Effects on Landscape Character and Landscape Designations

Effects on landscape character are limited to those areas within the site and its immediate surroundings, and within Nashenden Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA 33) to the north-west of the site, beyond the M2.

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Effects on a small parcel of land within the site would be of Medium-Low magnitude, Slight significance and, on balance, Adverse. Effects on landscape and townscape within the site and urban area would rapidly reduce to Negligible magnitude and Minimal significance, given the proposed development would be similar to surrounding land uses, or would occupy previously developed land.

Effects on Nashenden Valley LCA would be of Low-Negligible magnitude, Slight significance and Neutral, given the existing influence of buildings within the Rochester Airport employment area, the M2 and High Speed Railway and the limited visibility of the proposals.

Beyond these areas, effects reduce to Negligible magnitude and Minimal significance, with little or no discernible change to landscape character.

The proposals would impact on views from the Kent Downs AONB towards the scarp slope that defines the urban edge of Chatham, which is considered to contribute to the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Down AONB.

Localised effects are identified approximately 500m to the north-west of the site, where views of the proposals appear above the treeline along the scarp slope. From this part of the AONB, effects on views looking towards development beyond the AONB but within its setting, would be of Low-Negligible magnitude, Slight significance, and on balance, Adverse, as the proposals would introduce additional built form above trees along the scarp slope, despite the presence of similar development already occupying views within this part of the AONB.

Within the study area and the AONB as a whole, effects would be of Negligible magnitude, Minimal significance and Neutral, and would not undermine the special characteristics, qualities or reasons for designation of the Kent Downs AONB.

1.1.2. Visual Effects

The primary visual effects arising from the development would be on users of routes immediately to the east and west of the site, and from a group of recreational routes to the north-west of the site within the Kent Downs AONB, in and around Nashenden Down Nature Reserve.

From Laker Road to the west of the site, effects would be of High-Medium magnitude, Moderate-Slight significance and, on balance, Adverse.

From Maidstone Road (where it runs parallel with the airport) and from residential areas to south of Parcel 3 and east of the road, effects would be Medium magnitude, Moderate significance and, on balance, Adverse. Within Horsted Retail Park to the west of Maidstone Road, effects would be Medium magnitude, Slight significance and, on balance, Neutral, as the proposals would be seen in the context of similar development. From National Cycle Route 17, where it runs along Maidstone Road in close proximity to the site, effects would be Medium magnitude, Moderate significance and on balance Neutral, given this stretch of the route is not used for its scenic qualities and development of a similar character to the proposals occupies views.

Nashenden Down Nature Reserve lies to the west of the site, beyond the M2 and railway infrastructure corridor. The nature reserve and the surrounding area encompasses users of the North Downs Way national trail and users of permissive rights of way within the nature

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reserve itself. Effects on users of the nature reserve and nearby rights of way (including the North Downs Way) would be, in the worst case, Medium-Low magnitude, Moderate significance, and on balance, Adverse, as the proposals would be seen in the context of similar development already occupying views within the receptor group.

For the North Downs Way National Trail, visibility of the proposals would be restricted to short stretches of the route. To the north of Burham Hill Farm, on a similar latitude to Wouldham, occasional glimpsed views towards the site are possible, particularly in winter months where vegetation lining the route would be more permeable. From this stretch of the route, effects would be of Low-Negligible magnitude, Slight significance and, on balance, Neutral, due to the elevation of this stretch of the route, resulting in the proposals being seen clearly in the context of adjacent industrial and employment areas. Further northwards, the route descends the ridge towards Nashenden Down Nature Reserve. For the stretch of route between the entrance to the Nature Reserve and as far as the railway overbridge, effects would be Low-Negligible magnitude, Slight significance and, on balance, Adverse, given that additional built form is introduced along the scarp slope, despite the proposals being seen in the context of development with similar characteristics. Overall, effects on the route as it passes through the study area are judged to be of Negligible magnitude and Minimal significance.

The proposed development would be visible from other locations, namely from areas along the upper slopes of Horsted Valley, near Snodhurst Avenue, but effects would be limited due to views being screened, or because the proposals would be seen in the context of existing development.

There would be Minimal or no effects on other receptors including Rochester Road (B2097), M2 motorway, HS1/CTRL Railway Line, A230 and Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI).

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2.0 Introduction

2.1. Background

LDA Design was commissioned in February 2018 to carry out a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) of the proposed Innovation Park at Rochester Airport on behalf of Medway Council. It forms part of a suite of documents supporting a Local Development Order (LDO) application for this development proposal.

This assessment defines the existing landscape and visual baseline environments; assesses their sensitivity to change; describes the key landscape and visual related aspects of the proposed development; describes the nature of the anticipated change upon both the landscape and visual environments; assesses the effects during construction and following completion of the development (long term).

2.2. The Site and Proposals

Figure 1 and 2 place the proposed development within its local context. The 18.37 hectare site and is located within an urban area approximately 3.5km to the south of Chatham and Rochester, between Maidstone Road (A229) to the east and the M2 and Rochester Road (B2097) to the west. The site is split into two separate areas to the north and the south of the existing airfield site.

The Northern Area consists of two distinct parcels. The main parcel, Parcel 1, comprises the airfield occupied by part of runway 16/34, which is laid to well-maintained grass. The second parcel, Parcel 2, is currently occupied by BAE Systems. It is laid to concrete slabs as a car park area and secured by a palisade fence.

The Southern Area also consists of two distinct parcels. The eastern parcel, Parcel 3, has concrete remnants of structures that have previously been demolished on the site. Part of the site is currently being used as overflow parking for the Innovation Centre, to the north. Within Parcel 3 is a single storey brick structure and fenced compound. It is thought that both are related to utilities supplies within the site and the wider area. The western parcel, Parcel 4, is the site of the Woolmans Wood Caravan Park. The site is currently operational as a caravan park and has space for approximately 100 – 125 caravans.

The Innovation Park Medway Masterplan allows for the construction of up to 101,000 square metres of Business (Use Class B1) and General Industrial (Use Class B2) floor space with associated means of access, distributor and service roads, multi-storey parking facilities, footpaths and cycle ways, sustainable drainage systems and landscaping.

2.3. The Study Area

It is accepted practice within landscape and visual assessment work that the extent of the study area for a development proposal is broadly defined by the visual envelope of the proposed development site and the anticipated extent of visibility arising from the development itself, based on the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) study. In this case a study area of 3km has been agreed with the planning authority as being appropriate to cover all potentially material landscape and visual impacts.

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2.4. Report Structure

This report is structured as set out in the table of contents.

This assessment relates to both areas of landscape and areas of townscape. Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) defines townscape as “...*the landscape within the built-up area, including the buildings, the relationship between them, the different types of urban open spaces, including green spaces and the relationship between buildings and open spaces*”. GLVIA3 does not differentiate between approaches to assessment for areas of landscape and townscape and in this LVIA the word ‘landscape’ should be taken to also include ‘townscape’.

Supporting appendices have been prepared that supplement the sections regarding methodology, planning policy and baseline. The appendices are important to the assessment and should be read alongside this report

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3.0 Methodology

3.1. Overview

“Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and the effects of change resulting from development on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and people’s views and visual amenity.” GLVIA 3, para. 1.1).

Paras. 2.20-2.22 of the same guidance indicate that the two components (assessment of landscape effects, and assessment of visual effects) are *“related but very different considerations”*.

The assessment method for this LVIA draws upon the established GLVIA3; An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014), Landscape Information Technical Information Note (LI TIN) 05/2017 regarding townscape character; and LI TIN 02/17, Visual Representation, and other recognised guidelines.

The methodology is described in more detail in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.2. Assessment Terminology and Judgements

A full glossary is provided in Appendix 1. The key terms used within this assessment are:

- Susceptibility and Value – which contribute to Sensitivity of the receptor;
- Scale, Duration and Extent – which contribute to the Magnitude of effect; and
- Significance.

These terms are described in more detail below

3.2.1. Sensitivity of the Receptor

Susceptibility indicates the ability of a landscape or visual receptor to accommodate the proposed development <i>“without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.”</i> (GLVIA3, para. 5.40).	
High	Undue consequences are likely to arise from the proposed development.
Medium	Undue consequences may arise from the proposed development.
Low	Undue consequences are unlikely to arise from the proposed development.

Susceptibility of landscape character areas is influenced by their characteristics and is frequently considered (though often recorded as ‘sensitivity’ rather than susceptibility) within documented landscape character assessments and capacity studies.

Susceptibility of designated landscapes is influenced by the nature of the special qualities and purposes of designation and/or the valued elements, qualities or characteristics, indicating the degree to which these may be unduly affected by the development proposed.

Susceptibility of accessible or recreational landscapes is influenced by the nature of the landscape involved; the likely activities and expectations of people within that landscape and the degree to which those activities and expectations may be unduly affected by the development proposed.

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Susceptibility of visual receptors is primarily a function of the expectations and occupation or activity of the receptors (GLVIA 3rd version, para 6.32).

Landscape Value is “the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society” (GLVIA3, page 157).	
National/International	Designated landscapes which are nationally or internationally designated for their landscape value.
Local / District	Locally or regionally designated landscapes; also areas which documentary evidence and/or site observation indicates as being more valued than the surrounding area.
Community	‘Everyday’ landscape which is appreciated by the local community but has little or no wider recognition of its value.
Limited	Despoiled or degraded landscape with little or no evidence of being valued by the community.

Areas of landscape of greater than Community value may be considered to be ‘valued landscapes’ in the context of NPPF paragraph 170.

Sensitivity is assessed by combining the considerations of susceptibility and value described above. The differences in the tables below reflect a slightly greater emphasis on value in considering landscape receptors, and a greater emphasis on susceptibility in considering visual receptors.				
Landscape Sensitivity				
		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National/International	High	High-Medium	Medium
	Local/District	High-Medium	Medium	Medium-Low
	Community	Medium	Medium-Low	Low
	Limited	Low	Low-Negligible	Negligible
Visual Receptor Sensitivity				
		Susceptibility		
		High	Medium	Low
Value	National/International	High	High-Medium	Medium
	Local/District	High-Medium	High-Medium	Medium
	Community	High-Medium	Medium	Medium-Low
	Limited	Medium	Medium-Low	Low

For visual receptors; susceptibility and value are closely linked - the most valued views are also likely to be those where viewer’s expectations will be highest. The value attributed relates to the value of the view, e.g. a National Trail is nationally valued for access, not necessarily for the available views. Typical examples of visual receptor sensitivity are plotted in a diagram in Appendix 3.

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3.2.2. Magnitude of Effect

Scale of effect is assessed for all landscape and visual receptors and identifies the degree of change which would arise from the development.	
Large	Total or major alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline will be fundamentally changed.
Medium	Partial alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline will be noticeably changed.
Small	Minor alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline will be largely unchanged despite discernible differences.
Negligible	Very minor alteration to key elements, features, qualities or characteristics, such that post development the baseline will be fundamentally unchanged with barely perceptible differences.

Duration of effect is assessed for all landscape and visual receptors and identifies the time period over which the change to the receptor as a result of the development would arise.	
Permanent	The change is expected to be permanent and there is no intention for it to be reversed.
Long-term	The change is expected to be in place for 10-25 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.
Medium-term	The change is expected to be in place for 2-10 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.
Short-term	The change is expected to be in place for 0-2 years and will be reversed, fully mitigated or no longer occurring beyond that timeframe.

Most effects will be Long term or Permanent; however, Medium or Short term effects may be identified where mitigation planting is proposed or local factors will result in a reduced duration of effect (for example where maturing woodland will screen views in future). The effects arising from the construction of the development will usually be Short term.

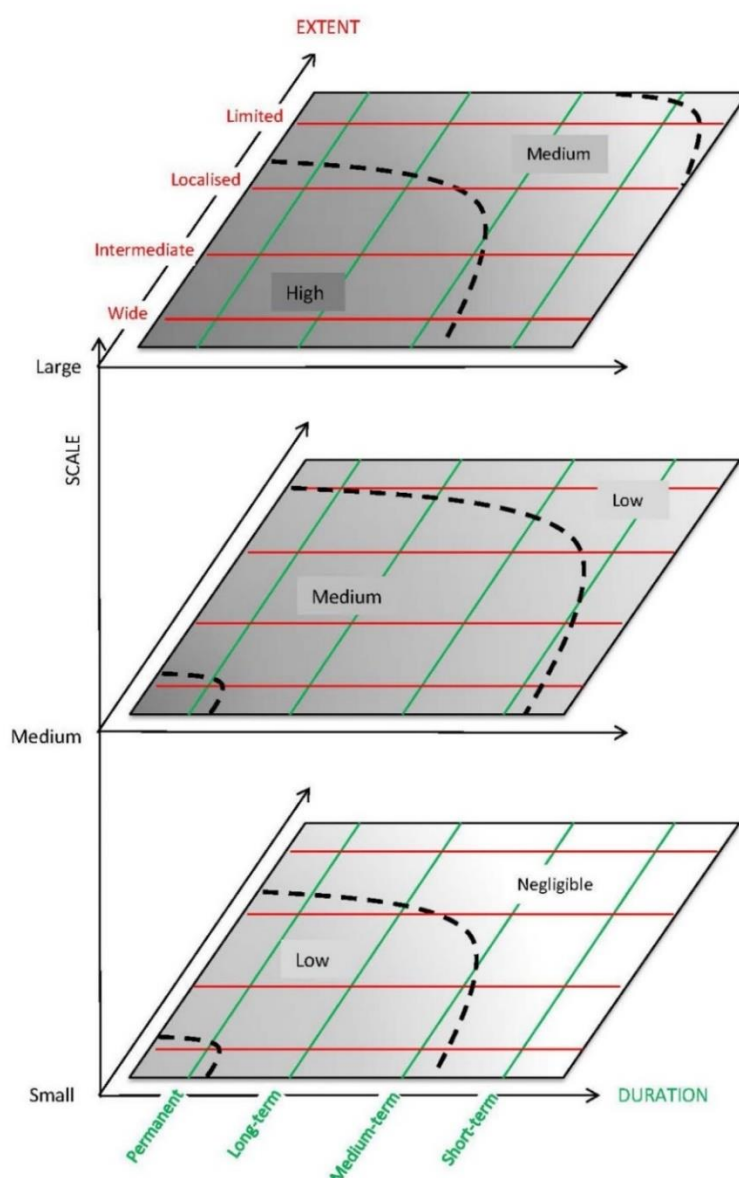
Extent of effects is assessed for all receptors and indicates the geographic area over which the effects will be felt.	
Wide	Beyond 4km, or more than half of receptor.
Intermediate	Up to approx. 2-4km, or around half of receptor area.
Localised	Site and surroundings up to 2km, or part of receptor area (up to approx. 25%).
Limited	Site, or part of site, or small part of a receptor area (< approx. 10%).

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The **Magnitude** of effect is informed by combining the scale, duration and extent of effect. **Diagram 1** below illustrates the judgement process:

Diagram 1: Magnitude of Effect



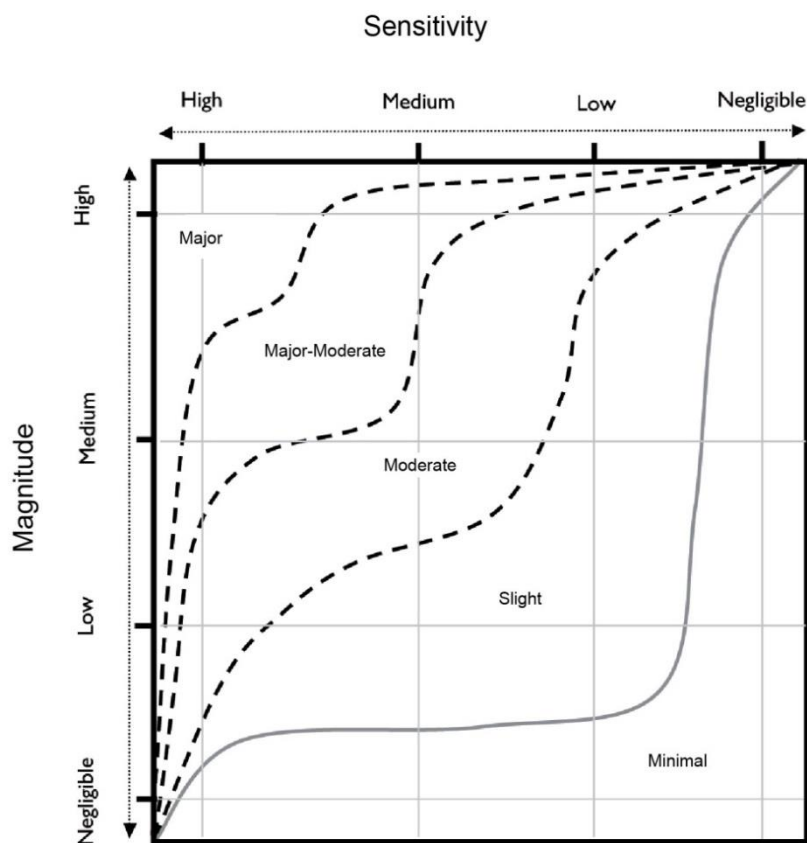
As can be seen from the illustration above, scale (shown as the layers of the diagram) is the primary factor in determining magnitude; most of each layer indicates that magnitude will typically be judged to be the same as scale, but may be higher if the effect is particularly widespread and long lasting, or lower if it is constrained in geographic extent or timescale. Where the Scale of effect is judged to be Negligible the Magnitude is also assumed to be Negligible and no further judgement is required.

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3.2.3. Significance

Significance indicates the importance or gravity of the effect. The process of forming a judgement as to the degree of significance of the effect is based upon the assessments of magnitude of effects and sensitivity of the receptor to come to a professional judgement of how important this effect is. This judgement is illustrated by the diagram below:

Diagram 2: Significance



The significance ratings indicate a 'sliding scale' of the relative importance of the effect, with Major being the most important and Minimal being the least. Effects that are Major-Moderate or Major are considered to be significant. Effects of Moderate significance or less are "*of lesser concern*" (GLVIA, 3rd edition, para 3.35). It should also be noted that whilst an effect may be significant, that does not necessarily mean that such an impact would be unacceptable, or should necessarily be regarded as an "*undue consequence*" (GLVIA, 3rd edition, para 5.40).

Where intermediate ratings are given, e.g. "Moderate-Slight", this indicates an effect that is both less than Moderate and more than Slight, rather than one which varies across the range. In such cases, the higher rating will always be given first; this does not mean that the impact is closer to that higher rating, but is done to facilitate the identification of the more significant effects within tables. Intermediate judgements may also be used for judgements of Magnitude.

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Positive/Adverse/Neutral

Effects are defined as adverse, neutral or positive. Neutral effects are those which overall are neither adverse nor positive but may incorporate a combination of both.

The decision regarding the significance of effect and the decision regarding whether an effect is beneficial or adverse are entirely separate. For example, a rating of Major and Positive would indicate an effect that was of great significance and on balance positive, but not necessarily that the proposals would be extremely beneficial.

Whether an effect is Positive, Neutral or Adverse is identified based on professional judgement. GLVIA 3rd edition indicates at paragraph 2.15 that this is a “*particularly challenging*” aspect of assessment, particularly in the context of a changing landscape.

It should be noted that whilst an effect may be identified as adverse, that does not necessarily mean that such an impact would be unacceptable.

3.3. Residential Amenity

Given that residential properties in close proximity to the site have views of buildings similar to those being proposed, this LVIA does not include a separate residential amenity assessment. It is considered that the effects resulting from the proposed development would fall below the threshold of being “*so unpleasant, overwhelming and oppressive that this would become an unattractive place to live*” (known as the Lavender Test) and “*would not feature in the planning balance, irrespective of how many dwellings were so affected*”.

3.4. Distances

Where distances are given in the assessment, these are approximate distances between the nearest part of the Site and the nearest part of the receptor in question, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

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4.0 Planning Policy

4.1. National Planning Policy

Relevant national planning policy is set out in Appendix 5.

4.2. Local Planning Policy

The site lies within the boundary of two Local Authorities: Medway Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

Maidstone Borough Council is also located within the study area, 1.7km to the south-east of the site. Policy for this district is not relevant to this assessment as it lies beyond the development's zone of influence.

Current local planning policy is described in the following adopted documents:

4.2.1. Medway Council

- Saved policies of the Medway Local Plan 2003 (Saved 2007)
- Emerging policy is set out within the Development Options (Regulation 18) consultation report, dated January 2017. It is expected that Regulation 19 (Pre-submission) will be consulted in winter 2018, after which the new Local Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public in March 2019, with adoption in mid-2020.

At this stage in the process, the Development Options policies are not relevant to this assessment.

4.2.2. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

- Saved Policies of the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Local Plan – identifies no local landscape designations, as the policies were superseded by those identified in the Core Strategy.
- Core Strategy (September 2007)
- Managing Development and the Environment DPD (April 2010)
- Emerging policy is set out within the Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan - The Way Forward (consulted on in Autumn 2016,). The Council is in the process of completing the evidence base and preparing the detailed Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan which is anticipated to be consulted upon during the Autumn 2018, after which the new Local Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public in April 2019, with adoption at the end of 2020.

At this stage in the process, policy within the Regulation 18 version of the emerging local plan are not relevant to this assessment.

4.2.3. Saved policies of the Medway Local Plan 2003

Policies of relevance to this LVIA are outlined below:

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Policy BNE32 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) only permits development when it conserves the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB.

Effects on the Kent Downs AONB are considered in Section 7 of this assessment.

Policy BNE34 – Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) identifies areas of landscape that enhance local amenity and environmental quality, providing an attractive setting to the urban area. The policy requires that the landscape character and function of the designated ALLIs is protected.

There are two ALLI within the study area: Horsted Valley and Nashenden Valley. Effects on the ALLI are considered in Section 5 of this assessment.

Policy BNE41 – Tree Preservation Orders seeks to protect trees of important public amenity value.

An area of woodland within Parcel 4 is subject to a TPO. Effects on trees are considered in Section 7 of this assessment as part of the assessment of landscape character.

Policy BNE43 – Trees on Development Sites seeks to protect trees, woodlands, hedgerows and other landscape features that provide a valuable contribution to local character.

Effects on trees are considered in Section 7 of this assessment as part of the assessment of landscape character.

4.2.4. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Core Strategy (2007)

Policies of relevance to this LVIA are outlined below:

Policy CP7 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty states that development must not be detrimental to the natural beauty and quiet enjoyment of the AONB, and any development must have regard to local distinctiveness and landscape character.

Effects on the AONB are considered in Section 7 of this assessment.

4.2.5. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Managing Development and the Environment DPD (2010)

Policies of relevance to this LVIA are outlined below:

Policy SQ1 – Landscape and Townscape Protection and Enhancement states that in addition to the AONB, there are other broad areas of landscape which are of strategic importance because they have landscape value in their own right.

Effects on Landscape Character are considered in Section 7 of this assessment.

4.3. Local Guidance

In addition to the policy documents identified above, there are local guidance documents as follows:

- **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan (April 2014)**
- **A Building Heights Policy for Medway, Medway Council (May 2006)**

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These form part of the documented baseline and are reviewed in Section 5, with accompanying commentary on the implications for the development siting and design and the assessment methodology, as appropriate.

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5.0 Baseline

5.1. Introduction

An overview of the baseline study results is provided in this section with the full baseline description of the individual landscape and visual receptors being provided alongside the assessment in Section 7 for ease of reference.

This section provides a review of the key local guidance documents and identifies those landscape and visual receptors which merit detailed consideration in the assessment of effects, and those which are not taken forward for further assessment as effects “*have been judged unlikely to occur or so insignificant that it is not essential to consider them further*” (GLVIA3, para. 3.19).

Both this baseline section and the effects section describe townscape/landscape character and visual receptors before considering designated landscape. It is common for designations to encompass both character and visual considerations within their special qualities or purposes of designation. It therefore makes a more natural reading sequence to draw together those aspects of character and views which relate to the designation if they have been described earlier in the chapter.

5.2. Key Local Guidance Documents

The following guidance documents provide advice relevant to this assessment, as follows:

5.2.1. Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019 (April 2014)

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (published April 2014) identifies several special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish the AONB as a landscape of national and international importance. The plan also sets out long-term policy objectives for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. These special characteristics and policies provide the basis against which impacts on the AONB can be judged, and is used as the basis of assessment of effects on the AONB in section 6.

5.2.2. A Building Heights Policy for Medway, Medway Council (May 2006)

This guidance document was produced by Medway Council to ensure that any new high buildings are appropriately located and designed. Part 1 of the document provides general guidance on the design and location of high buildings within Medway. Part 2 contains specific guidance on appropriate locations for higher buildings within the Medway Waterfront Renaissance Strategy area, where the major centres and regeneration sites are located, largely beyond the 3km study area to the north-east of the site.

‘Higher buildings’ are defined as buildings that are substantially higher than surrounding development, with a threshold of 6 storeys or 20m and above triggering application of the guidance.

Relevant design guidance for this assessment is as follows:

- the effect on the whole existing environment, contributing positively to the overall townscape and landscape and not detracting from their surroundings;
- the effect on the streetscape character and the public realm;

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- design quality, ensuring careful consideration of scale, form and proportion relative to surrounding buildings and the established skyline

Relevant guidance on location is as follows:

- Higher buildings should only be located where they do not adversely affect or block strategic or important views and vistas and backdrops and where they can provide an attractive punctuation feature within the wider urban skyline;
- Higher buildings should be placed where they:
 - reinforce existing townscape and street patterns or create new townscape of attractive streets and spaces;
 - do not have an adverse impact on the character, amenity or microclimate of the surrounding area;
 - preserve skylines and silhouettes of significant buildings or landscape features.
- the existence of a higher building in a particular location does not necessarily justify its replacement with a new high building on the same site or in the same area.

5.2.3. Other studies

There are also a number of baseline landscape character studies which are considered in Section 5.5 below.

5.3. Visual Environment of Existing Site

As shown on Figure 4, the site is located on a plateau of high ground within an urban area, beyond which to the west and south is a wooded ridge that constitutes part of the Kent Downs AONB. The AONB is separated from the urban area and the site by a steep valley within which runs the M2 motorway. To the north and east, the urban area extends across an undulating landscape with valleys that descend towards the River Medway.

Northern Area

The Northern Area consists of two distinct parcels. The main parcel (Parcel 1) comprises the airfield occupied by part of runway 16/34, which is entirely laid to well-maintained grass. The area is secured on all boundaries, save for the eastern boundary into the main airfield, by a chain link fence, allowing views into the site. To the northern boundary, the fence is marked by an existing hedgerow and trees that run the entire length of the boundary, preventing views into the site. Along the western boundary, beyond the security fence, Laker Road serves the adjacent industrial estate. The eastern boundary of the site is currently open and forms part of the adjacent Rochester Airport.

Parcel 2 is laid to concrete slabs as a car park area and the area is secured by a palisade fence. The eastern boundary to this parcel is currently open and forms part of the adjacent Rochester Airport. There are a number of single and double storey commercial/manufacturing buildings along the north-eastern boundary, within the red line,

The land surrounding the site comprises the following (annotated on Figure 1):

- BAE Systems to the north, which comprises a mixture of industrial and office accommodation between 1 and 5 storeys, the highest of which is approximately 23m above ground level. There is no uniformity between building styles, ages and heights;

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- Rochester Airport Industrial Estate to the north-west, which comprises a variety of building types including office and industrial with no uniformity in building types, height and materials;
- Laker Road Industrial Estate to the west, which comprises a variety of office and industrial / manufacturing uses with no uniformity in building types, materials and heights;
- The Airport to the south and east, which comprises open land as part of the runway and varied buildings including 2 hangars, plus additional buildings with planning consent;
- Horsted Retail Park to the east, beyond the airport, which comprises double height retail units, Holiday Inn Hotel and a variety of frontages;

The buildings surrounding the northern area to the north and west prevent views into the site. From the east, views into the site are largely obscured by Hortsted Retail Park and vegetation along the A229, although there are occasional views into the site where gaps in the roadside vegetation allow. From beyond the immediate vicinity of the site, views into the northern area are extremely limited, prevented by buildings within the urban area and by rising terrain and woodland. From higher ground to the west, views into the site are also limited but the elevated terrain affords views of buildings within the surrounding employment areas, particularly the BAE Systems buildings.

Southern Area

The Southern Area also consists of two parcels. The easternmost parcel (Parcel 3) is surrounded on the western, southern and partially along the eastern boundaries by existing hedgerows and trees. The eastern edge of the parcel is bound by the A229 and views into the site are relatively open.

The western parcel (Parcel 4) is the site of the Woolmans Wood Caravan Park and is surrounded on all boundaries by dense trees, enclosing the site and screening it from view in summer months, although in winter filtered views through the trees are possible.

The land surrounding the site comprises the following:

- Innovation Centre Medway to the north, which comprises a 3 to 3.5 storey building approximately 12.5m above ground level at its highest point;
- Two storey residential properties immediately to the south;
- A mix of buildings to the east of the A229, including residential properties predominantly two storeys in height and a supermarket (ASDA) and associated parking;
- The Airport to the north, as described above.

Visibility of these two parcels from the wider area is limited due to buildings within the urban area, by roadside vegetation and the dense belt of trees surrounding Woolmans Wood Caravan Park.

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5.4. Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) study and Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI)

5.4.1. ZTV

A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) study was generated, based on the proposed building heights parameter plan (see Appendix 6). This is shown on Figure 3 and indicates areas of potential visibility. The analysis was carried out using a topographic model including settlements and woodlands (with heights derived from NEXTMAP 25 surface mapping data) as visual barriers in order to provide a more realistic indication of potential visibility.

The ZTV study was used to aid the identification of those receptors that are likely to be most affected by the proposed development and those which are unlikely to have visibility. However, areas shown as having potential visibility may have visibility of the development screened by local features such as trees, hedgerows, embankments or buildings.

The ZTV for the proposed development shows that potential visibility is, broadly speaking, confined to within 2km of the site.

The area of high ground immediately to the south, west and north-west of the site limits visibility of the proposed development, with potential visibility confined to parts of the ridge where woodland cover is sparse. To the north, east and south-east, potential visibility is limited by the dense grain of built development within the urban area. Areas of open space within the urban area indicate potential visibility, particularly along Horsted Valley.

Beyond 2km, overall potential visibility becomes limited and correlates with areas of higher ground. The ZTV study indicates patches of visibility further to the north-west, where the ground rises up from the River Medway towards Ranscombe Country Park; areas of potential visibility around Capstone Country Park and Darland Banks to the east, and Great Lines Heritage Park to the north-east.

5.4.2. ZVI

As noted above, areas shown as having theoretical visibility may have visibility of the development screened by local features such as trees, hedgerows, embankments or buildings.

Site observations confirm that extensive vegetation within the wider landscape would significantly reduce the extent of visibility of the proposed development from that illustrated by the ZTV.

There is extensive tree cover within the urban area, particularly within Horsted Valley, and many of the pedestrian and vehicular routes within the surrounding countryside are lined by mature hedgerows or trees, in particular Rochester Road to the west of the site.

Realistically, views of the proposed development would generally be confined to areas within close proximity to the site, or from areas of high ground to the west within 2km.

From further afield views of the proposals may be possible but would be seen in the context of the existing urban environment, as illustrated by Viewpoints A, B and C.

Effects on landscape or visual receptors beyond 2km would be negligible and are not assessed in detail.

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5.5. Landscape Character

Paragraphs 5.13-5.15 of GLVIA, 3rd edition indicates that landscape character studies at the national or regional level are best used to “*set the scene*” and understand the landscape context. It indicates that Local Authority Assessments provide more detail and that these should be used to form the basis of the assessment of effects on landscape character – with (appropriately justified) adaptation, refinement and interpretation where required.

Relevant assessments are:

- **National Character Area Profile No.119: North Downs**

The site is situated within the North Downs (NCA 119) national character area, which is described as:

“chain of chalk hills extending from the Hog’s Back in Surrey and ending dramatically at the internationally renowned White Cliffs of Dover... The Kent Downs and Surrey Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations are testament to the scenic qualities and natural beauty of the area.”

Given the scale of the national character and the presence of more detailed character areas at a local level, this information provides context for the assessment and effects on the national character area is not assessed in detail.

- **The Landscape Assessment of Kent (October 2004)**

The Landscape Assessment of Kent draws together existing landscape character assessments within the county of Kent, allowing them to be viewed in one report. This includes the Kent Downs AONB report which covers the landscape to the west of the M2, within Tonbridge & Malling Borough.

The Assessment is updated by the more recent and more detailed Medway Landscape Character Assessment (March 2011), however Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council does not have a more detailed character assessment and as such, those character areas that fall within TMBC’s boundary are used to form the basis of the assessment of effects on landscape character in section 6.

- **Medway Landscape Character Assessment (March 2011)**

The Medway Landscape Character Assessment (MLCA) covers the whole of Medway. This district scale review divides Medway’s countryside into forty-two landscape character areas. The assessment is up to date and contains sufficient detail in relation to the characteristics of the landscape to form the basis of the assessment of effects on landscape character in section 6.

5.5.1. Local Landscape Character

Local landscape character areas are shown on Figure 5. The site is situated in an “Urban and Industrial” area, as identified in the Medway Landscape Character Assessment.

The following character areas are excluded from more detailed assessment on the basis that effects are likely to be Negligible:

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- Nashenden Scarp (LCA 32): Visibility is limited to a small proportion of the character area within close proximity to the site, where the proposals are visually screened by vegetation along Rochester Road. The character area is also heavily influenced by the existing employment uses between the site and the character area boundary.
- Nashenden Valley - Mid Kent Downs: This character area is located immediately to the west of the site. Visibility of the proposals would be limited to areas of open land in an otherwise wooded context. Where the proposals are visible, they would be seen in the context of existing development which already exerts an influence on the character of the area. The part of the character area where visibility is most concentrated coincides with LCA 33, Nashenden Valley, as identified in the Medway Landscape Character Assessment, which is identified for more detailed assessment. Given the remainder of the character area would have little visibility of the proposals, and where the proposals are visible they would be seen in the context of the existing urban environment, it is excluded from assessment.
- Horsted Valley (LCA 30): Whilst the proposals would be visible from parts of the character area, they would be seen in the context of existing development which already exerts a heavy influence on the character area, as demonstrated by Viewpoints 4 and 5.
- Taddington Wood and Beechen Bank: These two small wooded valleys to the south-east of the site (formerly designated as ALLIs) would have little to no visibility of the proposals.
- To the east, beyond 2km, are several character areas, namely East Hill (LCA 25), Capstone Farm (LCA 26), Sharstead Farm (LCA 27) and Elm Court (LCA 28). These LCAs also coincide with the Capstone Downs character area, as identified in the Kent Landscape Character Assessment. These character areas would have little visibility of the proposals and are already heavily influenced by existing development.
- Wouldham Scarp East (LCA 34) and The Eastern Scarp Medway: These LCAs broadly cover the same area within 2km of the site and there would be limited visibility of the proposals. The Eastern Scarp Medway also extends to the south-west, beyond LCA 34, but there would be no visibility of the proposals from these parts of the character area due to intervening terrain and woodland.
- Chatham Outskirts – Mid Kent Downs: there would be little visibility of the proposals from this character area due to intervening woodland and road infrastructure.
- To the north-west, beyond 2km, there are several of character areas, namely Wouldham Marshes (LCA 35), Cuxton Scarp Foot (LCA 36) and Medway Lower Valley. Whilst the ZTV indicates some visibility of the proposals for these areas, they are located beyond 2km and the proposals, if visible, would be seen in the context of the existing urban area which already exerts an influence on landscape character, as illustrated by Viewpoint C.
- Kent Down – Medway, Western and Eastern Scarp: The character area is located beyond 2km of the site and there would be no visibility of the proposed development.

Effects on the following character areas are set out within Section 7, with baseline description provided alongside the assessment of effects for ease of reference:

- Nashenden Valley (LCA 33)

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- Rochester Airport and surroundings, as described in section 5.3 above. Whilst not identified in any character assessments, Rochester Airport and its surroundings is of a distinctly different character to the residential development within the urban area to the north, east and south, will be directly affected by the proposed development, and as such is identified for assessment.

5.6. Visual Receptors

Visual receptors are “*the different groups of people who may experience views of the development*” (GLVIA, 3rd edition, para 6.3). In order to identify those groups who may be significantly affected the ZTV study, baseline desk study and site visits have been used.

The different types of groups assessed within this report encompass local residents; people using key routes such as roads; cycle ways, people within accessible or recreational landscapes; people using Public Rights of Way; or people visiting key viewpoints. In dealing with areas of settlement, Public Rights of Way and local roads, receptors are grouped into areas where effects might be expected to be broadly similar, or areas which share particular factors in common.

Representative viewpoints have been selected to assess the effects on visual receptors.

5.6.1. Visual Receptor Groups

The ZTV study (Figure 3), indicates limited visibility from visual receptors beyond 2km of the site, with patches of potential visibility being confined to areas of higher ground. Given the nature of the proposals (i.e. buildings intended for B1 and B2 uses adjacent to other visible employment areas with buildings of a similar scale), it is judged that effects on these receptors are likely to be Negligible, and they are not considered further.

The area to the west of the site falls within the Kent Downs AONB and is used for recreation. Visitors to the AONB typically follow the primary walking routes, in particular the North Downs Way Long Distance Recreation Route. The area also encompasses Nashenden Down Nature Reserve, which includes well used permissive walking routes.

Within the urban area to the north, east and south, there are a number of publicly accessible open spaces, in particular Horsted Valley that comprises open access land at Coney Banks, recreation areas and several public rights of way.

Within 2km of the study area, primary road and rail corridors (namely the M2 and High Speed Rail Line) follow the valley to the west of the site, with the rail route entering a tunnel to the north and south the M2 junction (Junction 3). Other key routes within close proximity to the site are the A229 (Maidstone Road) to the east of the site, running north-south; and Rochester Road (B2097) to the west, also running north south.

The following visual receptor groups are located within the study area and have theoretical visibility of the development, as shown on Figure 3:

- Laker Road – site boundary, west
- Maidstone Road (A229) – site boundary, east
- Monk Wood Area – 120m, south-west
- Nashenden Down Nature Reserve – 560m, west

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- Horsted Valley South – 250m, east
- Horsted Valley North – 1.35km, north-east

There are a number of groups listed above which are excluded from the detailed assessment.

- Monk Wood Area – This receptor group includes the Public Right of Way that descends the steep valley side and crosses the M2 to the west of Rochester Road, and continues up through Monk Wood, joining the North Downs Way near the Robin Hood Pub. The proposals would be screened by woodland, the scarp slope adjacent to the M2 and by tree belts running alongside the motorway and Rochester Road.
- Horsted Valley North – This receptor group covers the area between Walderslade Road and Fort Luton, within which pass a number of public rights of way. Viewpoint 5 illustrates a view from upper slopes on the northern side of the valley, looking south-west towards the site. The sloping terrain would screen the proposals within the Northern Area of the site from view. Proposals within Parcel 3 of the Southern Area, adjacent to the Innovation Centre, may be visible above intervening trees, but would be seen in the context of existing development. The area beyond Fort Luton to the north-west would have little to no visibility of the proposals due to intervening woodland.

As discussed in section 3.3, it is quite normal for dwellings in close proximity to the site to have views of buildings similar to those being proposed, and as such dwellings are not assessed in further detail.

5.6.2. Key Routes

The following long-distance road, rail and recreational routes pass within the study area:

- A229 – site boundary, east
- National Cycle Route 17 – 30m, east
- M2 motorway – 50m, west
- HS1/CTRL Railway Line – 250m, west
- A230 – 360m, north-east
- North Downs Way National Trail – 1.4km, west
- Medway Valley Walk Long Distance Route – 1.4km, west

There are a number of routes listed above which are excluded from the detailed assessment.

- M2 motorway – within the study area, the majority of the route passes through a dry valley and cutting, preventing views towards the site. Further north, beyond the River Medway, there is potential visibility of the proposals but at distances greater than 3km, effects would be negligible
- HS1 Railway Line – The railway line follows a similar alignment to the M2 motorway, where views of the proposals would be prevented by the scarp separating the line from the site.

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- A230 – The A road would have little to no visibility of the proposals. Glimpsed views through trees along the A229 might be possible at the southernmost end of the route but effects would be negligible.
- Medway Valley Walk Long Distance Walking Route – The Medway Valley Walk would have little to no visibility of the proposals, other than where it coincides with the North Downs Way to the north-west of the site. Effects along the short stretch of route that coincides with the North Downs Way are assessed in further detail. For the rest of the route, effects would be negligible.

5.7. Landscape Designations and Value

5.7.1. Designated Landscapes

Kent Downs AONB

The site is located approximately 100m from the Kent Downs AONB. The ZTV study (Figure 3) indicates that there would potential visibility from isolated areas of elevated landform to the west of the site. Site observations have shown that from publicly accessible areas within parts of the AONB that fall within the study area, there would be limited visibility of the proposals, and these would be restricted to short stretches of the North Downs Way National Trail and within Nashenden Down Nature Reserve.

Despite the limited visibility of the proposals from within the AONB, given the site is located within the setting of AONB, effects of the AONB are assessed in Section 7.

Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI)

Beyond the Site to the both the east and the west are areas of land identified as Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) (Policy BNE34). ALLI are areas of landscape that enhance local amenity and environmental quality, providing an attractive setting to the urban area. The policy requires that the landscape character and function of the designated ALLIs is protected.

There are two ALLI within the study area: Horsted Valley and Nashenden Valley.

Horsted Valley

To the east, on the opposite side of the A229, is the Horsted Valley ALLI which is a finger of open space stretching to Luton and incorporating Coney and Daisy Banks. It provides a valuable open space that defines urban areas and helps communities maintain their separate identities. It is bounded by Fort Horsted Schedule Monument to the south and contains Fort Luton Scheduled Monument to the north.

The ALLI broadly coincides with Horsted Valley Landscape Character Area (LCA 30) and, for the same reasons the LCA is excluded from further assessment, so too is the ALLI.

Nashenden Scarp

To the west, on the opposite side of the Rochester Airport Industrial Estate, is the Nashenden Valley ALLI, which is a prominent, steeply sloping chalk scarp rising from the M2 motorway towards Borstal. It is considered to be an important landscape feature visible from the M2 and HS1 railway, and provides a landscape buffer between the urban area and the Kent

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Downs AONB to the west. To the north, within the ALLI, is Fort Borstal Scheduled Monument.

The ALLI broadly coincides with Nashenden Scarp Landscape Character Area (LCA 32) and, for the same reasons the LCA is excluded from further assessment, so too is the ALLI.

5.7.2. Local Landscape Value

Within the study area there are a number of features that contribute to the value of the local landscape and townscape, such as areas of high quality and historic townscape to the north, numerous landmarks, including historic buildings and Scheduled Monuments, parks and open spaces and the contrasting environments of the built-up area of Chatham and Rochester and their relationship to the Kent Downs AONB that acts as the backdrop to the urban area.

The Site, its immediate context, and the urban area within the study area, are considered to be of Community value; while they may contain features or landmarks of local interest (such as the airport itself), they have little or no wider recognition of their value.

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6.0 The Proposed Development

6.1 The Proposal

The proposed development will comprise the following elements as described in more detail in the Masterplan Statement:

- 1) The scheme proposes the creation of a mixed-use business park, featuring approximately 101,000 sqm of predominantly B1/B2 commercial uses. Within the Northern Area, a linear park is proposed to provide an area of publicly accessible landscape within the core of the development.
- 2) The Building Heights Parameter Plan for the Proposed Development is appended in Appendix 6 and has been used to form the basis of the assessment. It identifies building heights between 2 and 6 storeys. For the purpose of this assessment, the maximum height of each storey has been identified as follows:

Storey	Height
2	8m
3	11m
4	14m
5	17m
6	20m

- 3) Retention of existing vegetation to the north of the Northern Area and retention of the majority of trees, including those subject to a Tree Preservation Order, within the Southern Area. Those trees identified for removal are outlined in section 6.2 below.

6.2 Site Fabric

A number of landscape features, comprising parts of the site's physical fabric, would be modified or removed, as follows:

- Northern Area: Grassland associated with the airfield would be replaced with buildings and public realm associated with the Innovation Park.
- Southern Area: A number of Category B, C and U trees within the Woolmans Wood Caravan site would be removed to accommodate buildings and public realm, as reported in the Arboricultural Implications Assessment. None of the TPO trees have been identified for removal.

6.3 Design approach in respect of landscape and visual matters

Landscape and visual considerations have informed the design of the proposal from the outset. Early studies of the surrounding urban environment and the Kent Downs AONB guided the location of the proposed development plots and the building height parameters.

For the Northern Area, key considerations were as follows:

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- Ensure buildings are no higher than the BAE Systems buildings to the north (23 above ground level) to limit visual impacts on the Kent Downs AONB to the west and Horsted Valley to the east.
- Buildings of 6 storeys (or 20m) to be limited to a single plot (effectively a single building),
- Ensure buildings are variable in height, providing a staggered roofline.

For the Southern Area, key considerations were as follows:

- Ensure buildings to the southern part of Parcel 3 are no higher than 2 storeys, limiting the impact on the amenity of residential properties to the south.
- The northern part of Parcel 3 to accommodate buildings of a similar scale to Innovation Centre Medway (3 to 3.5 storey, approximately 12.5m above ground level at its highest point).
- TPO trees surrounding Woolmans Wood Caravan Park to be retained given they are of moderate condition (Category B). The canopy of the tree belt around the Caravan Park is estimated, on average, to be approximately 18m high or higher, and would therefore screen or largely obstruct views of 4 storey / 14m buildings, without undue consequences on the surrounding environment and the amenity of residential buildings to the south.

6.4. Construction

The Masterplan statement sets out an indicative phasing strategy for the development. Given the nature of the project, no timescale for construction can be identified at this stage.

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7.0 Landscape and Visual Effects

7.1. Introduction

This section sets out the effects that the proposed development would have on both landscape and visual receptors.

Key potential impacts during the construction phase might include the visual effect of site vehicles and construction traffic, within the application site and in surrounding areas; other components typical of construction activities, including workers' accommodation, stockpiles of materials, lighting of specific areas, such as construction compounds; and gradual modification of landscape character as part of a phased programme of works. Effects during construction would be temporary and Short term and would be of notably lower magnitude than those on completion, although more likely to be perceived as adverse.

Effects are assessed during the period following completion, when construction is complete, and are considered to be Permanent.

7.2. Effects on Landscape Character

7.2.1. Description of the site and its context

As described in Section 5.3, the site is located on a plateau of high ground within an urban area, beyond which to the west and south is a wooded ridge that constitutes part of the Kent Downs AONB. The AONB is separated from the urban area and the site by a steep valley within which runs the M2 motorway. To the north and east, the urban area extends across an undulating landscape with valleys that descend towards the River Medway.

The two areas of land (north and south) that constitute the site fall within an area of townscape characterised by Rochester Airport and its surroundings. As shown on Figure 1 and 5, this area of townscape is distinct from the residential areas to the north, east and south. The Rochester Airport character area comprises an open airfield and buildings of a larger grain and scale than the surrounding urban area, as described in section 5.3.

Parcel 1, within the northern area, is part of the wider airfield to the east. Parcel 2 is similar in character to numerous areas of hardstanding within the commercial areas surrounding the airfield. The northern area is open in character, which contrasts with the more enclosed and wooded character of the southern site. Parcel 3 of the southern site is an area of brownfield land and Parcel 4 is a caravan park surrounded by a dense tree belt. The area immediately to the south and east of the southern site is predominantly characterised by residential development, with occasional larger scale commercial uses, such as the ASDA to the east of the A229.

7.2.2. Extent of Landscape Effects

Given the site is located within the urban area and existing buildings exert a strong influence on the character of the site and its surroundings, there would be no Large scale effects arising from the development.

Medium scale effects would be limited to Parcel 1, where there would be a change from a grass airfield to a Innovation Park.

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Small scale effects would be limited to Parcels 2, 3 and 4, where previously open brownfield land would be occupied with buildings

Beyond this area, effects would rapidly decrease from Small to Negligible, as the proposals would not alter the pattern of development in the area and would be in keeping with the character of Rochester Airport and its surroundings.

7.2.3. Medway Landscape Character Assessment

Nashenden Valley (LCA33) – 300m, west

A full description of the Nashenden Valley (LCA33) as described in the Medway Landscape Character Assessment is presented in Appendix 7. Relevant key characteristics are as follows:

- *Series of rolling dry valleys set within dip slope of North Downs*
- *Large arable fields bounded by deciduous woodland blocks but few hedges*
- *M2 road corridor and CTRL – detracting features to north east but distance, topography and woodland lessens influence to south*
- *Good views from elevated areas of Medway Valley, Western Scarp and Downs*
- *Good accessibility along North Downs Way and west towards river*
- *A tranquil, complex and distinctive landscape with a strong sense of place*

The supporting descriptions notes that the north eastern edge, in proximity to the M2 and CTRL is less coherent and that boundary of the Kent Downs AONB is subject to urban fringe pressures. The assessment notes that the Condition of the LCA is Moderate and its Sensitivity High.

Despite the influence of major transport infrastructure within and bounding the character area, the character area remains largely undeveloped and, as such, is assessed to be of **High** susceptibility to the proposals. Given the character area is located within the AONB, a nationally designated, it is assessed to be of **National** value. Taking both value and susceptibility into account, the sensitivity of the LCA to the proposed development is assessed to be **High**.

As described above, beyond the area of the site itself, effects on landscape character would rapidly decrease from Small to Negligible. The influence of the proposals on the landscape character area is assessed to be of **Small-Negligible** scale, given the existing influence of buildings within the Rochester Airport employment area, and the limited visibility of the proposals, as illustrated by Viewpoints 6, 7 and 8. **Permanent** effects over a **Intermediate** area would therefore be of **Low-Negligible** magnitude and **Slight** significance and, on balance, **Neutral**.

7.2.4. Local Townscape Character

Rochester Airport Character Area - includes the site

As noted in Sections 5.5.1 and 7.2.1, the site and its surroundings, whilst identified in the Medway Character Assessment as part of a large urban area, is of a distinctly different character to the residential development to the north, east and south.

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The Rochester Airport Character Area comprises an open airfield and associated hangars and commercial/industrial developments of a much larger grain and scale than the surrounding urban area. The uses within the character area are described in section 5.3 and are of a similar scale to the proposed development.

As such, the character area is assessed to be of **Low** susceptibility to the proposals. As noted at Section 5.7.2, the character area is considered to be of **Community** value; while the airport may be a feature of local interest, the character area has little or no wider recognition of its value. Taking both value and susceptibility into account, the sensitivity of the character area to the proposed development is assessed to be **Low**.

As described above, **Medium** scale effects would be limited to Parcel 1, where there would be a change from a grass airfield to an Innovation Park. **Permanent** effects over a **Limited** area would therefore be of **Medium-Low** magnitude and **Slight** significance and, on balance, **Adverse**.

Beyond Parcel 1 and for the character area as a whole, effects would be of **Negligible** magnitude, **Minimal** significance and **Neutral**.

7.2.5. Effects on townscape

The proposed development would be located within part of the urban area where large scale commercial and industrial development is already present. The proposals would not encroach into neighbouring residential areas, and where buildings are proposed close to residential properties, they would either be screened by mature trees belts or be of a similar scale. The development would also have a positive influence on its immediate context, in particular Parcel 2 and Parcel 3, where the condition of the land is poor and restoration of the land could be seen as a benefit of the proposals.

7.3. Visual Effects

7.3.1. Visual Aids

Annotated photographs and visualisations are shown on figures supporting this LVIA. The method of visualisation selected for each viewpoint has been informed by Landscape Institute Technical Note 02/17 Visual representation. Visualisations have been produced for viewpoints 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 using TrueView augmented reality software, taken on an iPad. Viewpoints close to or within the site (1, 2 and 3) have not been presented using this method because the modelling is not detailed enough to show a realistic representation of the scheme at these close distances. Further detail about the visualisation methodology is provided in Appendix 4.

The viewpoint description, description of effects and scale of effect for each viewpoint (see Figure 3 and 6 for locations) is set out on the relevant photograph. The scale of effect at each viewpoint is summarised below:

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Viewpoint	Distance, direction	Scale of effect	Adverse, Neutral, Positive
1 – Laker Road	Site boundary, west	Medium	Adverse
2 – Maidstone Road (A229) South	30m, east	Medium	Adverse
3 – Maidstone Road (A229) North	230m, east	Medium	Neutral
4 – Horsted Valley (Snodhurst Avenue)	1.1km, east	Small	Neutral
5 – Horsted Valley (Public Footpath)	1.9km, north-east	Negligible	Neutral
6 – North Downs Way	1.4km, north-west	Small- Negligible	Neutral
7 – Nashenden Down Nature Reserve (Permissive Footpath)	1.5km, north-west	Small	Adverse
8 – Nashenden Down Nature Reserve (Permissive Bridleway)	1km, west	Small	Neutral

Each of the viewpoints is a ‘sample’ of the potential effects, representing a wide range of receptors – including not only those actually at the viewpoint, but also those nearby, at a similar distance and/or direction.

From these viewpoints it can be seen that:

There are no **Large** scale visual effects, where the proposed development would form a major alteration to key elements, features, qualities and characteristics of the view such that the baseline will be fundamentally changed. Even in locations immediately adjacent to the site, the proposals would be seen in the context of existing development of a similar scale and character.

The extent of **Medium** scale effects, where the proposed development would partially alter key elements, features, qualities or characteristics of the view such that post development the baseline situation will be noticeably changed, are confined to locations adjacent to the site, within approximately 250m.

Beyond approximately 250m, scale of effects reduce from **Medium** to **Small**, where the higher buildings within the development would be seen above rooflines or trees tops and would be seen in the context of the industrial areas surrounding the site.

Outside these areas, the development would either be screened from visual receptors by vegetation within the landscape, or the development would form a very limited change in views, being seen in the context of the existing urban area.

7.3.2. **Visual Receptor Groups**

This assessment focuses on effects on groups of visual receptors, incorporating effects on views from public spaces and streets within the urban area, and the routes and accessible landscape in the surrounding countryside. Residents and visitors within these communities are assessed to be of **High-Medium** sensitivity, except where stated otherwise. The assessment of effects on settlements focuses on the visual amenity of public spaces, though

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views from groups of dwellings will also be noted in the descriptions. Effects on private residential amenity are a separate matter, and only require assessment when a development is likely to be 'overwhelming' or 'overbearing' (as set out within section 3.4 and Appendix 3), which is not the case in respect of this development.

Laker Road (site boundary, west)

Laker Road lies immediately to the west of the northern site area and encompasses the industrial estate between Laker Road and Rochester Road. As it is primarily a place of work and people passing through the area are either travelling to work or visiting the businesses within the area, sensitivity is assessed to be **Low** rather than High-Medium.

Viewpoint 1 demonstrates the view from the footway, adjacent to the northern site area. The development is likely to be visible along the road and throughout most of the industrial estate, and from the roads and open spaces around the industrial units. Effects on workers or visitors to the Laker Road area would be **Medium** scale and would occur for a **Wide** extent of the visual receptor group, on a **Permanent** basis. Effects would be of **High-Medium** magnitude, **Moderate-Slight** significance, and on balance, **Adverse**, as the open view across the airfield would change to an enclosed view of built form, despite the proposals being seen in the context of existing employment areas and buildings of similar scale.

Maidstone Road / A229 (site boundary, east)

Maidstone Road lies immediately to the east of the northern and southern site areas. The receptor group encompasses the stretch of road between ASDA (to the south) and Horsted Park (to the north). It includes Horsted Park industrial estate located between the road and the site; the road itself; development to east of the road which largely comprises residential properties; and residential properties immediately to the south of the southern site area.

The majority of users to the west of the road, and the road itself, would be people passing through the area, either using the road to travel to work or to visit businesses within the area, and sensitivity is assessed to be **Low**. However, the few streets within the residential areas to the west are more sensitive and as such are assessed to be **High-Medium**.

Viewpoint 2 is located at the southern end of the receptor group and demonstrates the view from the footway to the east of Maidstone Road, looking across Parcel 3 of the southern site area towards trees surrounding Woolmans Wood Caravan Park that screen Parcel 4 from view in summer months. The proposals in Parcel 3 would be seen by users of the road and from residential properties immediately to the south and east of the site. These receptors already have views of commercial development, such as ASDA and Innovation Centre Medway.

Viewpoint 3 is located at the northern end of the receptor group and demonstrates the view from the footway to the east of Maidstone Road, adjacent to Horsted Park residential development, looking across the airfield towards the northern site area. From here, proposed buildings within the northern area would be clearly visible and seen in the context of BAE Systems.

Between Viewpoints 2 and 3, views of the proposals from the road and properties to the eastern side of the road would largely be interrupted by buildings within Horsted Retail Park and roadside vegetation. Effects on users of Maidstone Road and the residential area to the east of the road would be **Medium** scale where views towards the proposals are unobstructed,

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reducing to Small scale when seen in the context of road infrastructure and nearby development of a similar character. Effects would occur for a Localised extent of the visual receptor group, on a Permanent basis. Effects would be of **Medium** magnitude, **Moderate** significance. These effects also apply to the street within the residential area immediately to the south of Parcel 3. On balance, effects would be **Adverse** to the south of the receptor group, near viewpoint two, despite the proposals being seen in the context of similar development already occupying views within the receptor group.

From within the retail park to the west of Maidstone Road, the proposals within the northern site area would be clearly visible across the airfield and seen in the context of the existing Laker Road industrial estate and BAE Systems building. Effects on users of the retail park would be Medium scale and would occur for an Localised extent of the visual receptor group, on a Permanent basis. Effects would be of **Medium** magnitude, **Slight** significance, and on balance, **Neutral**, as they would be seen in the context of similar development already occupying views within the receptor group.

The proposals within Parcel 4 of the southern site area would be largely screened by intervening buildings and trees.

Horsted Valley South (240m, west)

This receptor group covers the area between A229 and Walderslade Road, and includes the public rights of way within the southern reaches of Horsted Valley, which area assessed to be of **High-Medium** sensitivity.

The proposals within the northern site area would be visible from the upper valley slopes near Snodhurst Avenue, as demonstrated by Viewpoint 4 and accompanying photowire overlay and photomontage (6278_VAR04) but would be largely obscured by residential development to the east of the A229 (Horsted Park). From the public footpath that passes to the south of Horsted Park, the proposals would be screened by intervening vegetation with the valley and along the A229. The proposals within the southern site area would be screened by intervening features.

Permanent visual effects on this receptor group would be, in the worst case, Small Scale, affecting a Localised extent of this receptor group. These effects would be **Low** magnitude, **Slight** significance and, on balance, **Neutral** as they would be seen beyond existing development that occupies wide extents of the view.

Nashenden Down Nature Reserve (560m, west)

Nashenden Down Nature Reserve lies to the west of the site, beyond the M2 and railway infrastructure corridor. The receptor group encompasses users of the North Downs Way national trail; and the nature reserve and its associated permissive rights of way, which are assessed to be of **High-Medium** sensitivity.

Viewpoints 6, 7 and 8 demonstrate views from rights of way, illustrating a journey across the receptor group, moving from lower ground in close proximity to the railway line overbridge (viewpoint 6), up the slope to the nature reserve (viewpoint 7) and from the highest point with the nature reserve (viewpoint 8). These viewpoints are representative of the most open views within the area and demonstrate that from lower ground, the proposals are largely screened by vegetation along the scarp, but as you rise up the slope within the AONB, views of the proposals become more readily available. However, where the proposals become more

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visible, so too does the existing development within the industrial and commercial areas surrounding the airport, reducing the visual effect of the proposed development, as illustrated in the photowire overlay and photomontage for all three viewpoints.

Effects on users the nature reserve and the nearby rights of way would be, in the worst case, Small scale and would occur over a Wide extent of the visual receptor group, on a Permanent basis. Effects would be of **Medium-Low** magnitude, **Moderate** significance, and on balance, **Adverse**, given that additional built form is introduced along the scarp slope, despite the proposals being seen in the context of similar development already occupying views within the receptor group.

7.3.3. Key Routes

Maidstone Road / A229 (site boundary, east) - This route is the main trunk road into Chatham from the south, passing through the study area to the east of the site on a north-south alignment. Road-users on this route, which is mostly travelled at relatively slow speeds but is not an identified scenic route, are judged to be of **Medium-Low** sensitivity.

The proposals would only be visible from sections of the route that pass in close proximity to the site, along a stretch of the route between Viewpoints 2 and 3. The most open part of the view is along Maidstone Road, near viewpoint 3, where there is little vegetation to interrupt the view.

Permanent effects on this route, in close proximity to the site, where there is little vegetation to interrupt the view, as illustrated by viewpoints 2 and 3, would be Medium scale along a Localised extent of the route. For other parts of the route, views of the site would be largely screened by intervening buildings and roadside vegetation, resulting in effects of Negligible scale. Taking these effects to together and considering the worst case; effects on users of this stretch of the route would be of **Medium** magnitude, **Slight** significance and on balance **Neutral**, given that do not drive the route for its scenic qualities. Overall, effects on the route as passes through the study are judged to be of **Negligible** magnitude and **Minimal** significance.

National Cycle Route 17 (site boundary, east) – This cycle route passes through the study area on a north-south alignment, connecting the urban area with the countryside to the south of the M2. Where it passes the site, it follows the route of Maidstone Road (A229). Users of the route are assessed to be of **Medium** sensitivity, as the route where it passes through the study area is not considered to be scenic.

The visibility of the proposals is as described above. Permanent effects in close proximity to the site, where there is little vegetation to interrupt the view, as illustrated by viewpoints 2 and 3, would be Medium scale and **Neutral** along a Localised extent of the route. For other parts of the route, views of the site would be largely screened by intervening buildings and roadside vegetation, resulting in effects of Negligible scale. Taking these effects to together and considering the worst case; effects on users of this route would be of **Medium** magnitude, **Moderate** significance and on balance **Neutral**, given this stretch of the route is not cycled for its scenic qualities and development of a similar character occupies the view. Overall, effects on the route as it passes through the study area are judged to be of **Negligible** magnitude and **Minimal** significance.

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North Downs Way National Trail (1.4km, west) – The North Downs Way is a national walking route that passes through the study area on a broadly north-south alignment to the west of the site, through the Kent Downs AONB. Given the route passes through an AONB which is valued for its special qualities and scenic views, it is assessed to be of **High** sensitivity.

As the trail passes through the study area from south to north, it passes through areas of mature woodland that prevent views outwards, as indicated by the ZTV study (Figure 3). The route is also bordered by vegetation for much of its length and in places is sunken, with high banks either side preventing views outwards.

To the north of Burham Hill Farm, on a similar latitude to Wouldham, occasional glimpsed views towards the site are possible, particularly in winter months where vegetation lining the route would be more permeable. From this stretch of the route (for approximately 400m), Permanent effects would be, at worst, Small scale along a Limited extent of the route. Effects would be of **Low-Negligible** magnitude, **Slight** significance and, on balance, **Neutral**, due to the elevation of this stretch of the route, resulting in the proposals being seen clearly in the context of adjacent industrial and employment areas, and through vegetation lining the route.

Further northwards, the route descends the ridge towards Nashenden Down Nature Reserve. Between Hill Road and viewpoint 7, intervening terrain and woodland would obscure views. From the entrance to the nature reserve (located near viewpoint 7) and as far as the railway overbridge, views of the proposals would be possible, and would be similar to those demonstrated by Viewpoints 6 and 7, and illustrated by photowire overlay and photomontage (6278_VAR06 and 6278_VAR07). From this stretch of the route (for approximately 550m), Permanent effects would be, at worst, Small scale along a Limited extent of the route. Effects would be of **Low-Negligible** magnitude, **Slight** significance and, on balance, **Adverse**, given that additional built form is introduced along the scarp slope, despite the proposals being seen in the context of development with similar characteristics.

Overall, effects on the route as it passes through the study area are judged to be of **Negligible** magnitude and **Minimal** significance.

7.4. Designated Landscapes

7.4.1. Kent Downs AONB

The goal of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan (2014) is to ensure that the natural beauty of the landscape and vitality of the communities of the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, valued and strengthened. Whilst Rochester Airport and the site are not located within the AONB, they are located within the setting of the AONB, and as such impacts on the AONB are considered in this assessment.

The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs natural beauty have been identified as:

- Dramatic landform and views
- Biodiversity-rich habitats
- Farmed landscape

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- Woodland and trees
- A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage
- Geology and natural resources

The management plan identifies eleven key themes, setting out several policies with regards to landscape and visual matters, that relate to the impact development may have on the setting of the AONB. As stated in the management plan, policies are needed to “*help stop or mitigate negative impacts on the Kent Downs*”.

Of the eleven themes set out in the Management Plan, under the heading ‘Special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB’ the following are of relevance to this assessment:

- Sustainable development
- Landscape and landscape character

Sustainable Development

The following policies are of particular relevance to this LVIA:

Policy SD2: *The local character, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, setting and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements which are adopted as components of the AONB Management Plan.*

Policy SD7: *To retain and improve tranquillity, including the experience of dark skies at night, careful design and the use of new technologies should be used. New developments and highways infrastructure which negatively impact on the local tranquillity of the Kent Downs AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.*

Policy SD8: *Proposals which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.*

In addition to the policies, ‘guiding’ and ‘recurrent’ themes are identified to assist in judging proposals for development which may affect the special qualities of the AONB.

‘Tranquillity and Remoteness’, ‘Setting’ and ‘Design and Materials’ are identified as recurrent themes.

Under ‘Tranquillity and Remoteness’ it is stated that “*the perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB.*” The management plan notes paragraph 123 of NPPF 2012, noting that planning policies and decisions should aim to “*identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for the recreational and amenity value for this reason.*”

Under ‘Setting’, the management plan states that the setting of the AONB is “*broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen.*” The plan notes that:

“Proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with

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their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions. This particularly applies to views to and from the scarp of the North Downs.”

The **Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement** (January 2018), reasserts the recurrent theme from the Management Plan, although it should be noted that the site and its surrounds are not identified as a location where changes to the setting of the Kent Downs AONB would be ‘more keenly felt’.

Under Design and Materials, the plan states that “*to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the scale and design of new development, redevelopment and restoration is critical.*” It also notes that the Kent Downs AONB Partnership has produced a series of design guidance documents, the **Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook** being of relevance to this LVIA.

In Section 2.2, New Built Development - Urban Edge Housing and Commercial Development, the Handbook notes that “*the siting, scale and design of much new housing and commercial development around urban edges can have an adverse impact on the AONB landscape through change in character of views in and out of the AONB, cumulative loss of landscape features, and erosion of character through use of standardised layouts and designs.*”

The handbook sets out several design principles of relevance to this LVIA. Whilst these relate to development within the AONB, they provide a useful guide for development within the setting of the AONB:

- The presumption should be against AONB edge developments where they impact upon views into and out of the AONB landscape.
- Where this is unavoidable ensure that buildings and infrastructure are located to avoid loss of important off-site views towards features such as church towers, fine buildings, or the wider landscape, as well as avoiding intrusion onto sensitive ridgelines, prominent slopes and damage to distinctive landscape settings.
- Avoid straight lines or regimented buildings on the settlement edge for new development.
- Integrate new development in keeping with local character, using open space and planting to provide a visual link to the countryside and an attractive backdrop/foil to development.
- Consider massing, form, height and colour, texture of buildings and structures, taking account of local distinctiveness and characteristics.

The special characteristics and qualities of the AONB, as outlined above, have informed the design approach in respect of landscape and visual matters. Proposed buildings are no higher than the BAE Systems buildings to the north of the site to limit visual impacts on the AONB; proposed tall buildings (6 storeys or 20m) are limited to a single plot (effectively a single building); proposed buildings across the two site areas are variable in height, providing a staggered roofline; and impacts on views towards the AONB from within the urban area are limited.

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In Section 7.3 of this report, the assessment of the development's visual impact is addressed, which includes various receptors within the AONB. Given the AONB is of **National** value, it is assessed to be of **High** sensitivity.

Localised effects are identified approximately 500m to the north-west of the site, where views of the proposals appear above the treeline along the scarp slope that defines the boundary between the AONB and the urban area to the east. From this part of the AONB, effects on views looking out towards development beyond the AONB, as one of the special qualities, would be **Small scale** and would occur over a **Limited** extent, on a **Permanent** basis. Effects would be of **Low-Negligible** magnitude, **Slight** significance, and on balance, **Adverse**, as the proposals would introduce additional built form above trees along the scarp slope, despite the presence of similar development already occupying views within this part of the AONB.

Effects on the tranquillity of the AONB would be **Negligible**, as the baseline in this area would be fundamentally unchanged and is already affected by the M2 and High Speed Rail infrastructure corridor.

Within the study area and the AONB as a whole, effects would be of **Negligible** magnitude, **Minimal** significance, and **Neutral** and would not undermine the special characteristics, qualities or reasons for designation of the Kent Downs AONB.

Landform and landscape character

'Landscape Character' is identified as a guiding theme under the heading Sustainable Development. The following policies are of relevance to this LVIA:

LLC1: *The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.*

LLC2: *The promotion, management, restoration and appropriate creation of prominent views and viewpoints will be supported.*

In the supporting text, the Management Plan identifies main issues, opportunities and threats, as follows:

a. Loss of and damage to the quality of views in and out of the AONB through development and occasionally obstructing tree growth and vegetation.

b. Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain Kent Downs landscape character areas through development, infrastructure, urbanisation and recreational pressure.

d. The importance of the setting of the Kent Downs has been emphasised in policy development management decisions which provides an opportunity to work with Local Planning Authorities to develop planning policy protection for the setting of the Kent Downs and to ensure that the setting is taken into account when Local Planning Authorities determine planning applications.

The management plan also notes the importance of Landscape Character Assessment to help inform the management of the Kent Downs AONB landscape. Impacts on landscape character are assessed in Section 7.2.

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7.5. Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects

Effects on the receptors assessed above are summarised in the table over page. For receptors where the significance of effects varies, the distribution of effects is summarised. Effects apply during once construction is a complete, and on a permanent basis.

Table 2: Summary of Effects

Only effects of greater than Negligible magnitude and/or Minimal significance are included in the summary table.

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Receptor	Comments	Distance/ Direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance	Positive /Neutral /Adverse
Landscape Character						
Nashenden Valley (LCA33)	Overall effects on the character area within the study area	300m, west	High	Low-Negligible	Slight	Neutral
Rochester Airport Character Area	Parcel 1	Includes site	Low	Medium-Low	Slight	Adverse
	Overall effects on the character area, beyond Parcel 1			Negligible	Minimal	Neutral
Visual Receptor Groups						
Laker Road		Site boundary, west	Low	High-Medium	Moderate-Slight	Adverse
Maidstone Road	Road and peripheries to the east	Site boundary, east	High-Medium	Medium	Moderate	Adverse
	Peripheries to the west (Horsted retail park)		Low	Medium	Slight	Neutral
Horsted Valley (South)		240m, west	High-Medium	Low	Slight	Neutral
Nashenden Down Nature Reserve		560m, west	High-Medium	Medium-Low	Moderate	Adverse

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Receptor	Comments	Distance/ Direction	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Significance	Positive /Neutral /Adverse
Key Routes						
Maidstone Road	Stretch of the route between viewpoint 2 and 3	Site boundary, east	Medium-Low	Medium	Slight	Neutral
	Overall effect on route			Negligible	Minimal	Neutral
National Cycle Route 17	Stretch of the route between viewpoint 2 and 3	Site boundary, east	Medium-Low	Medium	Slight	Neutral
	Overall effect on route			Negligible	Minimal	Neutral
North Downs Way National Trail	Stretch of the route between Burham Hill Farm and Hill Road	1.4km, west	High	Low-Negligible	Slight	Neutral
	Stretch of the route between viewpoint 7 and railway overbridge			Low-Negligible	Slight	Adverse
	Overall effect on route			Negligible	Minimal	Neutral
Landscape Designations						
Kent Downs AONB	Nashenden Down Nature Reserve Area (between 500m and 1.4km)	100m, west	High	Low-Negligible	Slight	Adverse
	Overall effect on Kent Downs AONB			Negligible	Minimal	Neutral