

STRATFORD-ON-AVON DISTRICT

STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT

Summary of landscape and visual appraisal of fringes of main settlements

Introduction

- 1.1 This document provides a summary of the main findings of site work to examine the landscape and visual constraints to accommodating additional housing development on the periphery of nine main settlements within Stratford-on-Avon District as part of the SHLAA. The settlements have been identified by the District as being suitable for accommodating potential growth and include:

Alcester
Bidford on Avon
Henley in Arden
Kineton
Shipston on Stour
Southam
Stratford-upon-Avon
Studley
Wellesbourne

Methodology

- 1.2 Published information on landscape character has been sought. The county wide character assessment is now rather old (Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines; 1993). Whilst this provides useful background it is not sufficiently detailed to assist the understanding and examination of local landscape character at a level required that would benefit the SHLAA study.
- 1.3 There is no district-wide assessment although a study was undertaken to examine the fringes of Stratford (Stratford town's urban edge – a pilot study; May 2003 – hereinafter abbreviated to 'UES') and this formed part of the evidence presented at the inquiry into the District Local Plan Review (and informed policy SUA.1). This has been used to inform the examination of the fringes of Stratford as detailed below.
- 1.4 The fringes of the settlements have been subject to a detailed field work by an experienced landscape professional. This involved examining such factors as:
- Physical characteristics – landform; land cover; boundaries; field pattern; settlement form; building types and materials
 - Visual characteristics – nature of views; visual relationships; visual receptors; detracting elements; senses (sense of place, tranquillity, etc.)
 - Landscape condition.
- 1.5 The level of detail of the study is limited by the budget. The study is not intended to provide a detailed, field by field evaluation of sensitivity/capacity of the urban periphery, although the approach has been informed broadly by 'Landscape Character Assessment – Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity' (Countryside Agency; circa 2002).

- 1.6 The study has taken account of environmental constraints identified in the Adopted Local Plan. Areas that are subject to 'high level' constraints (such as flooding, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, SSSI's, etc.) have not been examined for their potential as it is considered that such constraints would preclude development opportunities.
- 1.7 It is noted some areas are designated as Special landscape Areas (SLA) – the Council's view on the status of this designation is to be sought in the context of paragraph 25 of PPS7 which notes that:
- 'planning authorities should 'rigorously consider the justification for retaining existing local landscape designations. They should ensure that such designations are based on a formal and robust assessment of the qualities of the landscape concerned'.*
- 1.8 For the purposes of this study the SLA status has been put to one side with the landscape being considered on its 'own merits'.
- 1.9 The following provides a summary of the analysis and findings.

2.0 ALCESTER

- 2.1 Alcester is a valley bottom settlement that is surrounded by Green Belt and land designated as a SLA.
- 2.2 The town is almost divided in two by the River Arrow floodplain. The River Alne joins the Arrow on the south side of the town and the southern fringes (and part of the town) are within a flood zone; as a consequence this part of the town's fringe has not been examined as part of this study.

Western quadrant (land between town and A435)

- 2.3 An area of land lies on the western side of the town between the town edge (former railway line) and the A435, which is in cutting and largely concealed within the wider landscape. This land is separated from the wider landscape by the road, and associated tree belts that flank it, and comprises, for the most part, a strong pattern of small hedgerow bounded pasture fields (some neglected), which create an intricate and small scale landscape. There are some urban fringe uses – notably horsiculture, with a number of (apparently) unofficial footpaths.
- 2.4 The area is divided roughly in to two by Monarch's Way (a single track lane). The land to the north is largely level and well concealed from wider view and the built up edge is well concealed except very locally due to vegetation.
- 2.5 The southern part falls very gently in a south westerly direction and part is locally more exposed from part of the A435.
- 2.6 The area is sensitive to change due to the prevailing landscape structure; even small scale development is likely to be disruptive of the intricate landscape pattern. However, it would appear that such effects would be localised and limited and contained principally within the existing town 'envelope'.

Northern quadrant (land north of Arden Forest Industrial Estate)

- 2.7 The B4089 serves a large linear industrial estate which forms the northern edge of the town. It is a low quality environment dominated by generally large 'sheds'. The estate is contained from the immediate flat agricultural landscape to the north by a strong hedgerow and a belt of emerging new woodland on the north eastern side. The landscape beyond is predominantly open with sweeping mid distance views.
- 2.8 This area is not considered suitable for residential development. Development would be difficult to integrate into the open agricultural landscape and there are no obvious alternative boundaries that exist further north that could form a more appropriate settlement edge.
- 2.9 The area near Beauchamp Court, west of the estate, provides the setting to this old (presumably listed) property and contributes to the immediate settlement approach.

Eastern quadrant (land beyond eastern edge of town)

- 2.10 The north eastern side of the town is defined by a broad ridge to the east of the industrial estate; the estate has extended into the foot slopes of the hill. The ridge extends, decreasing in elevation, southwards to Captains Hill (the B4089) and this contains the visual influence of the town from the agricultural landscape to the east. A small area of land lies below this ridge east of Kinwarton Farm Road (also the B4089) and there is an opportunity to accommodate a modest area of development in this location as long as the ridge line is respected. The adjacent existing settlement edge is quite harsh and there is an opportunity to improve this. This area is shown as being outside Green Belt and the SLA in the Local Plan.

- 2.11 Land alongside the settlement edge south of Captains Hill (east of Gerard Road) is occupied by playing fields (possibly part of the adjacent school facilities). This area and land to the east falls gently south and appears to be visually exposed. The outlying landscape is attractive and extends seamlessly towards the settlement contributing to its setting. Development in this location is unlikely to be acceptable.

3.0 BIDFORD ON AVON

3.1 Bidford on Avon is a valley bottom settlement adjacent to a river. The southern side of Bidford has lies within an extensive flood zone which effectively rules out development on the southern fringes. Part of this land also lies within an Area of Restraint.

3.2 The study has therefore focused on the other fringes of the settlement.

Western quadrant (land north of B439)

3.3 Marriage Hill forms an elongated ridge of higher land running north south to the west of the settlement and is an important containing feature; it provides a threshold when approaching from the west.

3.4 A ribbon of development has extended northwards along Victoria Road and this has been extended by infilling and new development. A group of small pasture fields occupies flat land below the hill, between the existing development and Marriage Hill Farm. These are contained and relate well to the existing settlement edge which, in places, is harsh. A field to the north is identified as open space (Policy BID.AB). This area is capable of accommodating a modest level of development without significant landscape harm and offers an opportunity to create a more satisfactory settlement edge and deliver the open space.

3.5 Further north the landscape is more open arable land, with large fields. It also falls within the tract of land that maintains separation between Broom and Bidford. It is unsuitable for development.

Northern quadrant (between Victoria Road and Grafton Lane)

3.6 A level area of arable land is located between the development along the eastern side of Victoria Road and the industrial estate off the B4085 Waterloo Road which provides an unattractive edge. There are a number of smaller fields, areas of scrub, and urban fringe activities along much of the southern part of the area. Landover is varied with the arable area being relatively featureless and the fringe areas containing scrub, hedgerows and some trees. The smaller parcels in the south eastern part are already allocated fro development and there is scope for more extensive development within this wider area. Structural planting would be needed to define the settlement edge along Small Brook.

3.7 An area of land forms an 'indentation' in the settlement south of the industrial estate, immediately west of Grafton Lane. This land is enclosed on three sides by development. Whilst it is apparent in local and mid distance views from the east the views are already compromised by existing development – notably the unattractive buildings of the estate. There is an opportunity for development in this area, and significant screening would be required to address the edge along Grafton Lane. The substantial belt of vegetation along the railway assists in breaking up views from the north east.

Eastern quadrant (north and south of B439 Stratford Road)

3.8 Due to the exposed, ridge top nature of the land immediately east of Grafton Lane (immediately north of the B439) development would inappropriate in this location.

3.9 Land on the northern flank of the Avon (south of the B439, east of Icknield Close/Icknield Court) is visually exposed to the south east and east (vegetation within the vicinity of the river to the south does provide some screening from the floodplain to the south). There is integrity to the valley side and development in this area is unlikely to be acceptable; it would also abut the eastern edge of the Conservation Area and could affect its attractive riverside setting.

4.0 HENLEY IN ARDEN

- 4.1 The town is a Valley Bottom settlement and a number of areas within and along the fringes lie within flood zones. It lies wholly surrounded by Green Belt and a SLA. A SAM covers a large tract of land at Beaudesert Castle on the north east side.

Western and northern quadrant (land west of railway and north of disused railway)

- 4.2 The town is very clearly defined by the existing and disused railway along these edges. Land to the west of the railway consists of strong pattern of small to medium sized pasture fields defined by a strong pattern of hedgerows. Combined with some gentle variations in topography the landscape is attractive and provides complete containment to the railway and the town beyond. The railway forms a strong threshold to the town.
- 4.3 However, to the north west the landscape pattern has been radically altered over an extensive area of a rounded hill to accommodate Henley Golf Club; little remains of the old pattern and the character of the area has undergone wholesale change. Its elevation within the local landscape enhances its impact. Related buildings are also locally prominent features in the local landscape.
- 4.4 To the north of the town, east of the railway lie within the vicinity of Beaudesert Park, the landscape has a slight parkland/estate character enhanced by the locally prominent siting of Beaudesert Park house. This area is contained by the higher land extending eastwards from the golf club towards the A3400. A belt of vegetation along the disused railway (parts of which are on embankment) provides strong containment to the northern edge of the settlement. The area, combined with the trees on the east side of the road contributes to the attractive approach to the settlement and development in this area is unlikely to be supportable in landscape terms.
- 4.5 Overall, whilst the landscape has undergone change within the vicinity of the golf course there is little scope for development in this quadrant. There is a slightly more contained area immediately north of the A4189, west of the railway, but development in this area would be unrelated visually to the town due to the screen provided by the railway embankment. It is therefore concluded that there is no opportunity for development in this quadrant.

Eastern quadrant (land east of the settlement, north of the A4189)

- 4.6 Development in the north eastern part of this area is precluded by the flood zone and SAM.
- 4.7 The eastern edge of the town, east of Chingley Bank, is defined by the steep slopes of the eastern valley side. This, combined with vegetation along it, contains the town from the east and development on this fringe would be wholly inappropriate. A ribbon of houses runs along Edge Lane to the east, beyond the valley side. This development is isolated physically and visually from the rest of the built up area; further development in this location would be unacceptable.

Southern quadrant (land south of A4189)

- 4.8 Opportunities for development in this area are precluded in part by the flood zone which extends south of the A4189 along the valley to the east. The remaining undeveloped areas on the settlement fringe appear to be entirely occupied by school grounds, college, and associated playing fields. To avoid these areas development would have to be located somewhat south of the settlement edge which would not be

acceptable in landscape terms. This area, with its many trees, forms an attractive approach to the settlement from the south.

- 4.9 It is apparent (although not verifiable on site) that there is a small area of land lying to the south of the houses fronting the southern side of the A4189. There may be an opportunity to accommodate a small area of development within this discreet location

5.0 KINETON

- 5.1 Kineton is a Hill Terrace settlement. Its southern fringe of Kineton lies within a flood zone, and the south eastern part is designated as a SAM (Edgehill Historic Battlefield) which covers a very extensive area. The southern fringe has not therefore been examined as these constraints preclude it as a potential location for development.

Western quadrant (land between dismantled railway and Lighthorne Road)

- 5.2 The landscape in this quadrant comprises a patchwork of small to medium sized mainly pasture fields overlaying a gently sloping landform which falls towards a small valley that runs from the west, where it is narrow and well defined, to the north west side of the town at Lighthorne Road, where it is less pronounced. A more defined ridge lies further from the settlement.
- 5.3 The landscape in this quadrant has strong rural characteristics. The periphery of the town is well concealed by the belt of vegetation that runs along the old railway, except at Brookhampton Lane where the industrial estate is locally prominent. However, its location within the deeper part of the valley, with Pittern Hill rising steeply to the north west, contains its wider influence on the adjoining landscape and views.
- 5.4 Any development in this area would involve extending the settlement beyond the well defined threshold that currently defines it; there is no alternative robust boundary that lies beyond which could form a new edge to the settlement. Any new development, whilst being contained from the wider landscape, would be locally intrusive, difficult to integrate satisfactorily, and have little visual relationship to the existing settlement and would have a detrimental impact on its setting.

Northern quadrant (land between Lighthorne Road and Southam Road)

- 5.5 The landscape in this area has some similar characteristics as the landscape in the western quadrant, although it has a less varied landform, field sizes are larger and there is a higher proportion of arable use. Whilst the landscape is slightly more open with less vegetation, the vegetation is thicker along the edge of the settlement with trees and the belt along the disused railway providing strong containment of the settlement edge. Development would be inappropriate here for similar reasons as the western quadrant.

Eastern quadrant (land between Southam Road and B4086 Banbury Road)

- 5.6 The landscape in this quadrant generally comprises large level arable fields with a poor structure of thin hedgerows, hedges, and sporadic boundary trees. The urban edge on the north east side of the settlement is stark and locally prominent features in this quite open landscape. There are distant views to rising ground several kilometres to the north east.
- 5.7 Playing fields occupy level land north of the school, with a slight ridge defining the land immediately north of Banbury Road. The road has sporadic development along both sides on the immediate approach to the settlement including a small recent housing development at Walton Fields; a redundant garage and adjoining land on the southern side is allocated for development in the Local Plan.
- 5.8 This quadrant appears to offer two distinct opportunities for accommodating new development. The land on the edge of the settlement east of Southam Road is featureless and the existing settlement edge is poor. New development would be visible but the impact could be mitigated with appropriate structural planting (including 'off site' hedgerow reinforcement/management) and a better more attractive edge could be created. The environs of the small cemetery on the edge of the settlement would need to be respected.

- 5.9 Land north of Banbury Road also provides an opportunity for accommodating some development; as long as it respects the shallow ridgeline that lies to the east of the school playing fields and the extent of the partially developed edge along the eastern side. Such development would consolidate the development pattern in this location.

6.0 SHIPSTON ON STOUR

- 6.1 Shipston is a valley bottom settlement located at the foot of the valley side. Its eastern side of Shipston is defined as a flood zone along the River Stour and Area of Restraint. This precludes development in this area and, for reasons of separation and poor accessibility; the land beyond the flood zone to the east has also not been examined.

Northern quadrant (land between Darlingscote Road and east of A3400)

- 6.2 Darlingscote Road crosses a ridge on the north west side of the settlement and this forms a strong, well defined threshold to the settlement, containing it from the wider landscape beyond. This higher land also wraps around the north western and northern parts of the town as a series of rounded ridges and hillocks, interspersed by small tributaries of the Stour; the impression is of a rolling topography which contains and contributes to the setting of the settlement.
- 6.3 North of Darlingscote Road the Tilemans Lane industrial estate has climbed up to the edge of an intermediate area of elevated land. The edge is partially evident on the approach from the north west, as the landscape is open and relatively featureless arable farmland with a poor structure. Attempts have been made to provide screening but the edge has a poor appearance and appears unresolved; this could be rectified by positive action. Further development is allocated on the northern side of the estate in the Local Plan. The higher ridge some 0.75 km to the north west provides principle containment from the wider landscape beyond.
- 6.4 The northern fringe has a slightly softer character in places where it benefits from belts of new planting which are beginning to reinforce the landscape pattern close to the settlement. Whilst these restrict inward views towards the settlement edge from lower positions the settlement edge (new housing and the industrial buildings) are very prominent in views from higher land to the north. Arable uses predominate and vegetation cover is sparse away from the settlement edge. There are visual connections between the land to the north and land to the north east, but all contained within the structure of the ridgeline beyond. Overall, this part of the settlement edge is poorly integrated and its influence is only contained by the elevated land some distance from the settlement edge.
- 6.5 A small rounded hillock defines the northern edge of the town immediately west of the A3400 and this is an important local landscape feature that defines the limit of the settlement and provides a threshold on the approach.
- 6.6 Land to the north of the river, east of the A3400 lies outside the flood zone. However, this land forms an integral part of the open valley landscape which is exposed in views from the east. Existing development on the edge of the town is prominent in views from the east. The land contributes to the setting of the settlement and development in this location would not be supportable in landscape terms, although a very small area of high quality development may assist in improving the appearance of, and create a better edge to the settlement in the area immediately north of the River Way.

Western quadrant (land along western/south western fringe of settlement)

- 6.7 Land to the west of the town is defined by the continuation of the ridge from the north west, through Waddon Hill, along the western side of the town. This ridge forms a backdrop in views from the east and a setting to the town. The town has extended on to the lower slopes of this rising land which comprises a pattern of regular medium sized mainly arable fields with a weak hedgerow structure and tree cover. In the south western part this higher land creates separation between the edge of the town and the valley of Pig Brook.

- 6.8 Waddon Hill creates a distinct feature which contains the college and leisure centres located south west of Darligscote Road, and urban area beyond, from the countryside beyond. The settlement edge is not very well defined in the area north of the B4035 and the Norgreen Social Club building is an unattractive local feature visible within this area; the edge remains contained from the wider landscape to the west by the ridge. There may be limited opportunity for modest development to occur in this area as long as it does not intrude onto rising ground and brings forward a more suitable defined edge to the town.
- 6.9 South of the B4035 the field pattern defines the edge of the settlement which, being set down from the ridge, fits into the landscape well. In views from the east the impression is of an appropriate balance being struck between the extent of development and the undeveloped east facing slopes of the ridge. Detailed analysis may indicate that it may be feasible to locate a limited amount of development along parts of the fringe within this area; however, great care must be taken to ensure that the comfortable balance between the town and undeveloped backdrop of the ridge is not compromised as this would affect the towns setting and the way that it 'fits' within the wider landscape when viewed from the east.

Southern quadrant (land at southern end of settlement)

- 6.10 The ridge that wraps around the western side of the town extends and fades out in the vicinity of the cemetery located alongside the A3400 at the southern end of the town. This rise, coupled with trees and other vegetation provides a well defined and distinctive edge to the town in this location, although it is most unfortunate how recent development has extended locally on to the ridge west of the cemetery leading to a stark prominent edge. Development in this location is considered to be inappropriate as it would extend the town beyond natural limits into open countryside beyond.
- 6.11 A small area of land lies between the flood zone and edge of the town to the east of the A3400. This area forms part of the attractive landscape of the Stour valley and any development in this location is likely to have an unacceptable impact on the valley landscape and the setting of this edge of the town. It is also likely to detract from the attractive setting of Barcheston located in the valley to the east.

7.0 SOUTHAM

- 7.1 Southam has developed substantially in all directions from its historic core; the lack of constraints (such as pronounced topography) has led to an amorphous form. The town's expansion has extended up to the arc of the A423 to the east, with a cluster of development located to the east of the road. Flooding is a constraint along the stream corridor (a tributary of the River Itchen which lies to the west) which runs east west through the town. A green 'finger' extends into the settlement along the stream valley from the western side.

Western quadrant (land between A425 Leamington Road and A423)

- 7.2 The western edge of the settlement has extended onto the valley slopes and ridges that define the course of the tributary. Expansion of the settlement westwards would be inappropriate and extend development beyond the threshold formed by this higher land. A westward extension of the industrial estate is allocated in the Local Plan and this will extend development to the ridgeline.
- 7.3 The valley is identified as an Area of Restraint which protects its integrity as a local feature which contributes to settlement form and provides recreational opportunity (some of the valley is allocated for recreational use in Local Plan).
- 7.4 The only opportunity that may exist for a modest expansion is in land to the north of the school playing fields. Whilst this land falls gently north west it may offer scope for a well planned development that would build upon the landscape pattern to create a more appropriate landscaped edge to this part of the settlement.

North eastern quadrant (land east of A423, north of A425)

- 7.5 The A425 cuts across the landscape but is quite well integrated within cutting and roadside vegetation. This vegetation, combined with hedgerows in the gently sloping level agricultural land beyond, creates a discreet edge to this part of the town. Development that would breach this threshold is likely to have a significant impact on the countryside and views within this quite open landscape and should therefore be avoided.

South eastern quadrant (land between A425 and A423)

- 7.6 A large area of residential development lies south of the A425. This rises up gentle slopes and appears poorly related to the main settlement. Its outer edges are defined by back gardens, hedges and hedgerows and the visual influence of the development consequently extends into the adjoining countryside. The landscape beyond is gently sloping with a limited structure. Further development in this location would not fit well with the principle nucleated structure of the main part of the settlement.
- 7.7 Land further south is principally in arable use with medium sized fields and is part of the wider quite open agricultural landscape that extends away to the south and east. The settlement edge is now quite well defined by the bypass which is in deep cutting and lined by significant belts of vegetation which integrate the edge. Further development in this location is undesirable due to exposure, the integrity of the wider landscape beyond, and the severance from the main part of the settlement by the busy bypass.
- 7.8 Land to the east of the A435, further to the south, accommodates a filling station and a care home (?), and small employment development. These are reasonably well integrated due to their location within smaller hedgerow bounded fields, beyond which lies a pattern of medium to large open arable fields which extend away from the settlement edge. Any new development in this area would inevitably have a significant impact on the landscape in this area and would not relate well to the settlement form.

Southern quadrant (land between A435 and B4451)

- 7.9 The land between the A435 and B4451, and the approaches along them, are dominated by the large industrial buildings on the estate that forms the southern edge of the town. Development in the fields to the south and east of the estate would offer an opportunity to improve this edge of the town and reduce the impact of this large development. Some of the fields to the west of the A435 are in recreational uses and there is the potential to relocate these less visually sensitive uses in the area east of the A435 where they could be accommodated without harming the well defined settlement edge. An extension of the settlement into this area would also be more in keeping with the general form of the settlement and easier to integrate with the main core of the settlement.
- 7.10 Any development in this area should seek to create a long term landscaped setting for the southern edge of the town.
- 7.11 A small area of land lies west of the B4451, abutting the southern edge of the industrial estate, could accommodate a small development as part of this wider development area.

8.0 STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

- 8.1 Stratford-upon-Avon is a valley bottom settlement that has expanded considerably away from the river, in some cases on to areas of more elevated land. As noted above the fringes of the town have been the subject of a detailed capacity study. This work (which informed the Local Plan Review) forms a sound basis for this study.
- 8.2 The study determined landscape character and extent of character areas around the town (Figure 1 in the Local Plan). At a more detailed level these character areas were broken into Landcover Parcels (LCP's) around the periphery of the town and their sensitivity (landscape, visual, ecological, cultural) to change from development (three scales; small – less than 5 dwellings; medium – 5-50 dwellings; large – more than 50 dwellings) was assessed.
- 8.3 On the basis of this work the appraisal for the SHLAA has focused on whether the assessment of capacity provided in the pilot study remains valid (for example if changes have occurred since that time) and that it is consistent with our overview appraisal of the settlement edge.
- 8.4 Our findings may be summarised in relation to each quadrant of the town:
- Northern quadrant (between A3400 and A439)
- 8.5 This area contains LCP's 2a, 2b, 3 and 4.
- 8.6 This quadrant lies within the Green Belt. Most of it is also designated as a SLA in the Local Plan and 2a is a Wildlife Area (adjoining a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Most of the land contributes to the overall setting of the northern edge of the town. In particular the land rises up to Temple Hill to the north of the town (LCP's 2a/b) this is a distinctive containing feature forming part of a prominent ridge that contains the periphery of the town. The eastern flank of the hill contributes to an attractive approach into the town along the A439). We agree with the UES that these parts are not suitable for development (although we note that there may be a local opportunity for a locally contained development in a small part of LCP 2b).
- 8.7 The area to the north east of the town falls in LCP 3 and is predominantly an open agricultural landscape with a poor structure and is visible from beyond the edge of the town. The town edge is poorly integrated. An area north of the A3400 (which is excluded from the Green Belt and SLA) appears slightly more contained and it would appear that this area could accommodate a modest level of development without substantial harm (UES indicates 'small to medium scale').
- Eastern quadrant (between A439 and A422)
- 8.8 This area contains LCP's 24 and 26.
- 8.9 The river valley which separates Tiddington and the eastern part of the town from the main part of the settlement is a flood zone and Area of Restraint and consequently the area has no development potential. Stratford-upon-Avon golf course precludes development in the tract of land separating Tiddington and Loxley Road.
- 8.10 This leaves land east of Tiddington (within LCP 26) and land on the eastern edge of the settlement north of the A422 (part of LCP 24). The UES notes that both areas are suitable for small to medium scale development.
- 8.11 Our appraisal supports this assessment. Land east of Tiddington does form part of a wider expanse of agricultural land stretching away to the east it is contained to some degree by gentle topography. The existing urban edge is not very well integrated and

land on the immediate eastern side of Tiddington offers some potential for modest development, with an opportunity to create a better settlement edge.

- 8.12 Land north of the A422 is also quite well contained by the ridge of Alveston Hill, although it is more exposed across the open landscape to the north east. Recent development has taken place on the edge of the settlement (as Local Plan allocation) and this forms a stark edge. There appears to be an opportunity for further limited development in this area.

Southern quadrant (between A422 and B439)

- 8.13 This area contains LCP's 15, 16, 20, 22, and southern tip of 12).
- 8.14 Most of the land south of the residential area located on the southern side of the A422 (either side of the new A4390) is defined as Community Woodland and some planting has already taken place. The only remaining land adjacent to the settlement edge is already allocated for residential development (Policy SUA.Y) and open space in the Local Plan.
- 8.15 A wide tract of land along the river, which bends around the southern edge of the town south of the racecourse is a flood zone and Area of Restraint, and development is therefore precluded. The UES also notes that these areas 16 and 20 are inappropriate for development due to high ecological sensitivity.
- 8.16 The land south of the B439 comprises a locally prominent shoulder of higher land (the southern edge of Bordon Hill in LCP 15), with a flatter area adjacent to the settlement edge Southern tip of LCP 12). The hill forms a well defined edge and attractive edge to the town in this location. Despite the UES view that the small scale development may be accommodated in LCP 15 we see no obvious opportunity and development would extend beyond a well defined threshold to the town. We also see no suitable opportunity within the southern end of LCP12 for similar reasons.

Western quadrant (between B439 and A3400)

- 8.17 This area contains LCP's 7-10, and 12.
- 8.18 LCP 12 covers land to the south of Shottery. The urban fringe is very well enclosed by Bordon Hill to the west. The existing urban edge is well defined by vegetation. The loose development pattern around Shottery is well integrated with mature trees which creates a distinctive sense of place and the character in the vicinity of Ann Hathaway's Cottage and the Conservation Area. The land lies within a SLA.
- 8.19 The UES indicates that land within LCP has potential to accommodate small to medium scale development and this is supported by our assessment. In particular the land within the southern part of this LCP is well contained by landform to the west and a block of woodland. The northern part is more sensitive due to its proximity, association and contribution to the character of Shottery and not considered suitable for development.
- 8.20 The edge of the town south of the A422 is defined by development, with recent development creating a very poor unsympathetic and intrusive edge. The higher land of Bordon Hill extends northwards through a shallow rounded ridge which does provide valuable containment of the urban area from the wider open agricultural landscape to the west. The landscape has lost much of its structure due to intensive agriculture and there is scope for creating a new and better defined edge which respects the ridgeline, although significant restructuring of the landscape with new planting will be required to create a well defined and more appropriate edge.

- 8.21 The Local Plan indicates some residential allocations between the B439 and A422 linked by a new road although detailed consideration needs to be given (when this land comes forward) to the definition of the northern parcel to ensure that the new development edge reflects the landscape and visual sensitivity of this area
- 8.22 A belt of land lies between the A46 and Bishopton Lane on the north west side of town. This land lies within LCP's 7 and 8 and is not within Green Belt and has a strong visual relationship to the edge of the town. All but the south western part is well contained from wider countryside by the establishing tree belts along the A46. This south western part (within LCP 8) forms part of a ridge of higher land that extends along The Ridgeway and is visually exposed (particularly to higher land beyond the town to the north/north east) and is more sensitive. The UES indicates that LCP 8 is unsuitable for development; we support this view despite the fact that development has extended onto the ridge along the southern end of The Ridgeway south of the A46.
- 8.23 The land within LCP 7, which is lower lying and more concealed, is suitable for modest development although the context and setting of the canal and adjoining listed property would need to be respected. The Local Plan indicates an area of proposed open space in the two smaller fields south west of the canal which would achieve this. Noise from the road may influence the potential developable area. This allocation suggests that the field west of Spa Farm is the most suitable location for development and this could deliver open space in LCP 8 (referred to above) which could accommodate planting to soften the appearance of the adjoining existing development.
- 8.24 A small area of land east of the park and ride at Bishopston is suitable for development and this is already an allocation in the Local Plan (Policy SUA.X).

9.0 STUDLEY

- 9.1 Studley is a Ridgetop settlement contained wholly within Green Belt and the surrounding countryside is also a SLA. It has a compact form with much of it being contained within a triangle formed by three roads.

Northern quadrant (land extending along northern fringe between A448 and A435)

- 9.2 The northern fringe of Studley has extended, rather unsympathetically, on to a ridge of higher land north of the B4092. The gap between this edge and the southern edge of development on the outskirts of Redditch is narrow (less than 1 km in places). The landscape is fragmented in places by different uses, sporadic development along Green Lane and contains urban fringe uses and activities (allotments, golf centre, playing fields) which have eroded its character. Glimpses of development are a reminder of the limited separation that exists between the two built up areas.
- 9.3 Nevertheless the landscape pattern of small to medium sized pasture fields, bounded by hedgerows, is reasonably intact and this assists in maintaining the rural characteristics of the area despite the intrusions. The northern side of Green Lane supports a belt of woodland which is very valuable in maintaining the visual containment of the southern edge of Redditch.
- 9.4 On this basis this landscape is sensitive to further development. Any development in this area is likely to erode this fragile gap further (with consequential potential impact on the viability of remaining agricultural land). If Studley is regarded as a 'significant town' under the terms of PPG2 – Green Belts then further development would conflict with the second purpose (preventing neighbouring towns from merging). Whilst new development may be able to retain a gap there would be an inevitable reduction in visual separation, and perception of separation. However, given the constrained nature of the settlement and the sustainable location of this land it is acknowledged that there may be strong arguments in favour of a reconsideration of its status as Green Belt.
- 9.5 The gap is even narrower in the area between the B4093 and A435, with only 0.5 km. separating the edge of the two built up areas; this gap also contains other development. This area of land is fundamental to maintaining separation.

Eastern quadrant (land east of A435)

- 9.6 The north eastern fringe of the settlement is abutted by the River Arrow flood zone and has not been examined as part of this study.
- 9.7 The A435 follows a straight line along the top of a ridge that forms the western flank of the River Arrow valley. The land falls away quite quickly to the east from the road into the open tree studded valley that has strong rural character; there are attractive distant views across the valley to higher land beyond. Development along the western side of the road forms a strong linear edge, with older brick properties contributing. Metal estate railings and a group of distinctive farm buildings at Holt Farm contribute further to the character of the approach along the road (and forming a limited perceived association with the characteristics of the route through historic Coughton to the south).
- 9.8 It is considered that development on the eastern side of the road would be inappropriate. It would erode the historic settlement pattern and detract from the approach; it also is likely to be widely visible.

South western quadrant (land south west of A448)

- 9.9 The A448 creates a well defined edge along this part of the settlement which is contained further at the northern end by the broad rounded profile of Node Hill. The area is divided by Middletown Lane. Apart from a few small fields located along the edge of the main road north of its junction with the lane, the landscape is dominated by a rolling arable expanse interrupted by a copse on top of the hill and other limited vegetation around the adjoining two houses. However, the existing urban edge is mostly well integrated and the area has strong rural characteristics with good variable views. As a consequence, development in this area would have a substantial impact on the wider landscape. There may be some scope for a small scale development at Littlewood Green although this would breach what is a strong defensible edge to this part of the settlement.
- 9.10 The land south of Middletown Lane appears to have greater scope for accommodating some development. In contrast to the area to the north west this area is fragmented by scattered development (including a caravan park) and comprises (except immediately south of Middletown Lane) a pattern of smaller fields, bounded by hedgerows; these are apparently contained by a belt of vegetation along the track south east of Middletown. Sporadic development along the A448 gives a partly developed frontage. Due to the greater degree of containment provided by vegetation in the southern part this area has the greatest potential to accommodate some development without wider harm to the more open landscape and views that exist in the area south and south west of the track.

10.0 WELLESBOURNE

- 10.1 Wellesbourne is located on the River Dene (a tributary of the River Avon), a stream that which runs through the centre of the settlement. Its course is prone to flooding and land on either side has been largely kept free of development essentially maintaining a narrow green corridor through the settlement characterised by small fields, copses, tree belts and other riparian vegetation. The northern edge is also defined by a flood zone following a small stream.

South western quadrant (the airfield)

- 10.2 Wellesbourne airfield, dominates the local landscape on the south western edge of the settlement. The area comprises a wide open expanse of grass, runways and taxiways, a hanger, and substantial employment development comprising large utilitarian 'sheds' which are highly prominent on the northern and eastern sides. A vehicle storage area lies on the south eastern side.
- 10.3 The airfield is active and it would appear that there is no opportunity to accommodate residential development within this area. A lane defines the western edge beyond which lies gently undulating farmland relatively featureless mixed farmland.

North western quadrant (land between B4086 Stratford Road and A429)

- 10.4 The bypass defines the edge of the village in this area and, with minor exceptions, planting associated with it forms a strong edge to the settlement that fits reasonably well within the landscape. As a consequence the visual influence of the built up area is well contained from the open flat farmland to the west. This land is in intensive use associated with the horticulture research facility to the north and the landscape lacks a defined structure. A sewage works is located north of the airfield and this facility would preclude residential development in the more secluded land that adjoins it.
- 10.5 This area has no potential capacity to accommodate development without 'jumping' the threshold formed by the A429 which would have an unacceptable impact on landscape and context of the settlement.
- 10.6 An area of land lies between the edge of the village and the A429; this is identified as an 'Area of Restraint' (Policy EF.3 refers) in the Adopted Local Plan, and forms an 'indentation' in the settlement edge, based along the course of the River Dene. An area of land following the watercourse is proposed as public open space. The eastern half of the area lies within the Conservation Area that covers the core of the village.
- 10.7 The area has generally attractive qualities, with generally small pasture fields and a parkland character engendered by the tree belts and mature trees. The area forms an attractive context to the stone church set amongst mature trees.
- 10.8 Housing along Charlecote Road to the north is locally intrusive in the western part; the land to the south of this road is also subdivided by fences for horses which creates a less attractive fringe character. The south western part, whilst relatively well contained from the roads by vegetation, does form an attractive edge to the settlement with the attractive church tower evident between the trees and tree belts. This vegetation contains the visual influence of the settlement edge beyond. A number of footpaths cross the area.
- 10.9 Despite the development of the vegetation alongside the bypass to the west there are local views into the western part from a section of the road, and the church is visible; the settlement beyond is obscured by the vegetation. Views from the area towards the countryside beyond are becoming restricted by the development of the roadside vegetation. The land within the eastern part contributes to the setting of the adjoining buildings within the conservation area.

- 10.10 The area is attractive and undoubtedly sensitive to change. It is difficult to foresee how any new development could be accommodated within this area without having a significant detrimental affect on the character of this area, and the setting and approach to the village, and the intrinsic characteristics of the Conservation Area.

North eastern/eastern quadrant (land between the A429 and River Dene)

- 10.11 The landscape north of the road is wide open arable land with little structure. The area is exposed to views from the ridge that runs further to the east. Whilst the existing edge of the settlement is only partially integrated and does influence the character of the adjoining land development in this location would be highly visible over considerable distance. Consequently the area is not considered suitable for development.
- 10.12 A small linear area of land lies south of the B4086. This forms the northern side of the shallow valley of the river and is bounded by a ribbon of development on the road that runs above the valley side. A small level of development may be accommodated in this location but should not extend the edge of the settlement further to the south east than the roadside houses. The flood zone may preclude development in the lower part of this land and screening would be required to reinforce the edge along the river and along the south eastern edge.

South eastern quadrant (land between the River Dene and A429)

- 10.13 An area of small fields and an area that appears to be redundant nurseries lies either side of Walton Road. Whilst these areas do have an affinity with the wider countryside beyond they are relatively discreet and relate reasonably well to the existing settlement edge and a modest scale of well designed development could be accommodated here as long as it delivers a well defined and appropriate edge.
- 10.14 Open arable land with a poor structure lies to the east of Ettington Road (A429) on the south eastern edge of the settlement. Due to its exposure development in this location is likely to be particularly prominent. However, if there was a need to find further land for residential development, substantial structural planting could create a suitable framework for modest level of development in the two fields adjoining the existing settlement edge (which is well defined by vegetation along Ettington Road).

Southern quadrant (land between A429 and Loxley Road)

- 10.15 A series of gently sloping fields lie along the southern side of the settlement extending southwards to the edge of Wellesbourne Wood (Ancient Woodland). Whilst these fields are generally discreet within the wider landscape they maintain a buffer and setting to the woodland and the prominent feature of Red Hill which forms an attractive backdrop to the southern edge of the settlement. The area is therefore sensitive to further development.
- 10.16 A small amount of development could be accommodated immediately to the west of the built up area, although the extent of this may be limited by the setting of Chadley House. Beyond this the fields that lie between Loxley Road and the wood provide an attractive setting and are not well related to the existing settlement edge (the airfield is well screened by a woodland belt along the northern edge of the road). Consequently, this is not a suitable location for development.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 This overview appraisal of the fringes of the various settlements indicates that opportunities for accommodating a significant amount of residential development on the periphery of the settlements appears to be relatively limited when considered from a landscape capacity perspective. This is principally a product of two main factors.
- 11.2 Firstly, many of the settlements have expanded up to their natural limits (such as enclosing topographical features, or well vegetated boundaries) – most environmentally less sensitive opportunities have by and large been realised. Secondly, in most cases the landscape around most of the settlements that have been examined is sensitive to further development. The land cover in some agricultural landscapes has become depleted and provides an inadequate structure within which to integrate new development without considerable and often extensive impact on views, landscape character, and the perception and setting of the settlements.
- 11.3 Many of the opportunities that have been identified are relatively small scale and are based on smaller pockets of land on the fringes of the settlements where the land is either discreet within the landscape, or the existing settlement edge is unsatisfactory and where well designed new development could deliver a more satisfactory long term edge and setting.
- 11.4 Depending upon the amount of housing that cannot be accommodated within the settlements, and therefore would need to be located on greenfield land, a more radical approach may need to be adopted by the Council. It is for the Council to decide upon the most appropriate distribution strategy for such development but if it is concluded that larger areas of land are needed to satisfy the housing delivery requirements more detailed comparative assessments of potential options should be undertaken. In particular this should consider the potential benefits/disbenefits of concentrating larger scale developments in targeted locations (which benefit from good accessibility for example) which may involve crossing significant landscape thresholds with resulting implications on landscape and visual impact. However, it is recognised that, if a longer term vision is developed new landscape structures can be created to ensure that the effects of development are moderated to an acceptable level. The advanced planting of landscape infrastructure as an integral part of potential development sites would be highly beneficial and is a strategy that should be encouraged.

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