

# ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL



# Introduction, Scope and Purpose

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The Site is located within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a nationally designated landscape. It comprises small pasture and amenity grassland fields divided by a mixture of dilapidated Cotswold stone walls and post and wire fencing. Its character is influenced by its location on the urban edge of the settlement edge of Minchinhampton, including the new Sanctuary development to the north. This means that while the land uses and appearance are agricultural in character, the perceived landscape – having regard to the noise, light and movement from nearby roads and urban areas – is not of a tranquil, intact rural landscape. The proposals have been informed by the landscape to be of an appropriate scale and nature and some dimensions of the landscape will be positively affected by the proposals. The masterplan includes the creation of additional woodland and tree planting, replicating characteristic features within the landscape and contributing to its visual appeal whilst softening the existing settlement edge.

The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) was appointed by Archstone Minchinhampton Ltd to provide technical inputs on a suite of environmental disciplines, including landscape and visual, archaeology, ecology and arboricultural matters to support a planning application in 2015. The Site is now being promoted for residential development.

EDP is an independent environmental planning consultancy with offices in Cirencester, Cheltenham, Shrewsbury and Cardiff. The practice provides advice in the fields of landscape, ecology, archaeology, masterplanning, arboriculture, rights of way and agricultural land matters.

This statement is a short summary of the landscape and ecological studies that have guided the evolution of the masterplan.

## This statement has three main objectives

1

To identify and present the environmental baseline conditions of the Site and its setting. These comprise the physical elements and attributes that characterise the Site and its role at the edge of the settlement and the countryside.

2

To identify the main landscape and visual and ecological resources of the Site by identifying important assets and detractors present in the baseline conditions.

3

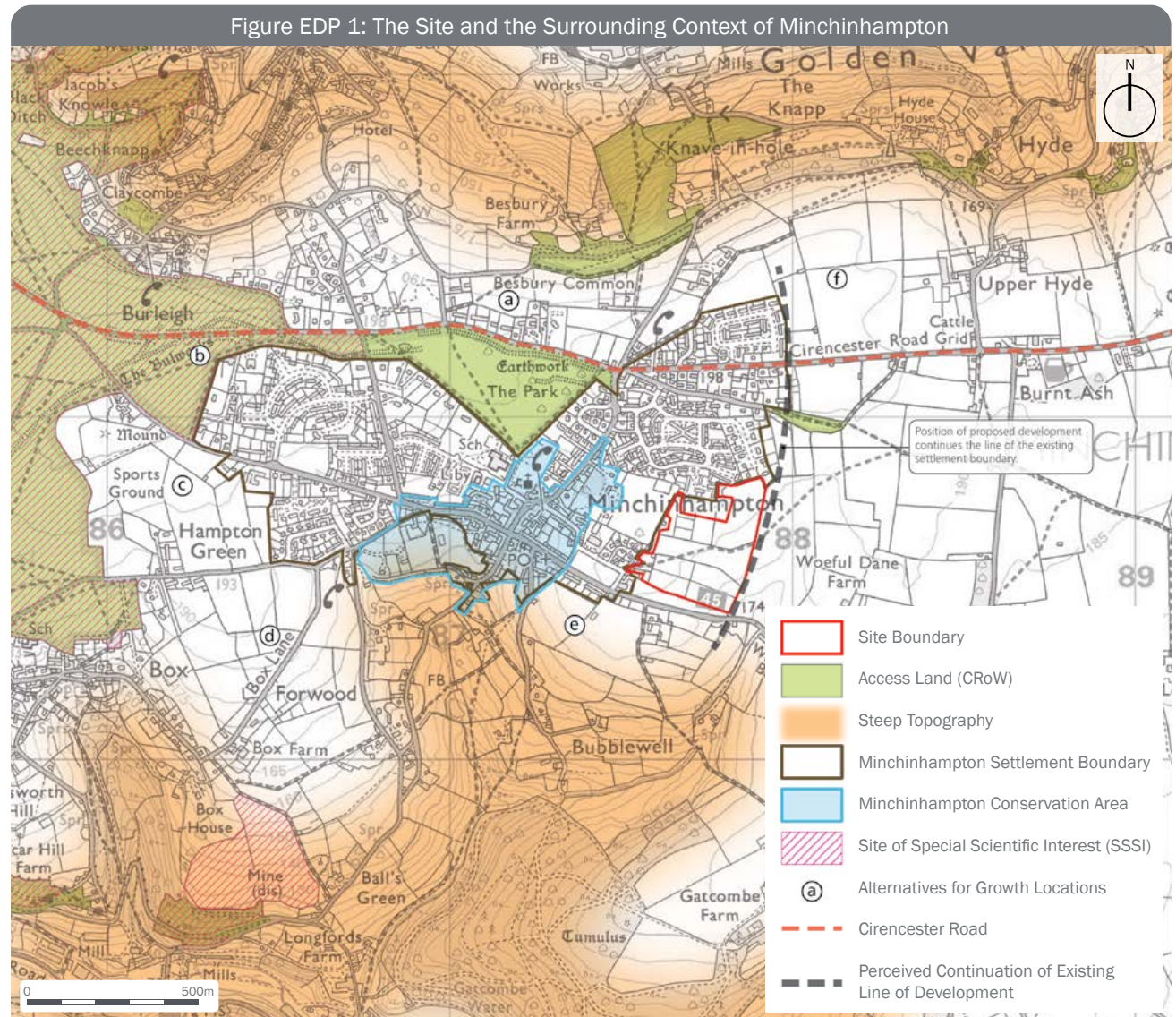
To apply the baseline analysis to the development proposals; although this stage has occurred via consultation prior to the formation of this statement, this document demonstrates the synergistic approach.

# The Site Context

Due to the heavy influence of the edge of Minchinhampton to the north and west, the course of Woefuldane Bottom to the south and the division of the Site from the fields further east by mature field boundary vegetation, the Site is not considered to make up part of the wider arable landscape to the east, which appears to contribute to the setting of the eastern edge of Minchinhampton.

The Site and the surrounding context of Minchinhampton can be summarised as follows:

- a) **To the north:** Further development would encroach upon, and have adverse effects upon transition into, the valley by altering the visual context experienced within. Side-slopes of the valley are too steep. Land is divided from the centre of the town by the main route of Cirencester Road;
- b) **To the north-west:** Tightly constrained by a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Access Land of Minchinhampton Common. Holy Trinity Church spire is an important landmark from this direction;
- c) **To the west:** The openness of Minchinhampton Common would be adversely affected due to the intimacy of the village edge. Scope to expand towards Hampton Green, but distant from the town centre;
- d) **To the south-west:** Development would increase sense of coalescence with Box;
- e) **To the south:** Development has already reached the edge of the plateau. Further development would encroach into the valley, divorcing it from the village and altering the edge of the Nailsworth settled valley. There is complex, steep topography that would be expensive and difficult to access; and
- f) **To the north-east:** Lack of hedgerows and proximity to the settled valleys accentuate the sense of openness.



# Environmental Planning Context

Minchinhampton and its surroundings, including the Site, lie within the Cotswold AONB, where 'great weight' should be afforded to the conservation of landscape interests.

The Site does not lie within or adjacent to any conservation areas and is not considered to affect, directly or indirectly, the Minchinhampton Conservation Area. However, it is acknowledged that any development on the edge of the town will affect its landscape setting.

No Registered Parks and Gardens (RPG) are located within or adjacent to the Site boundary. The proposed development is not considered to have an impact upon the closest RPG (Gatcombe Park at 815m south-east).

The Site has to date been subject to a heritage assessment that has determined that the Site does not contain any designated heritage assets where there would be a presumption in favour of their physical retention and/or preservation *in situ*. There are 101 listed buildings, 3 scheduled monuments, 1 Conservation Area and 1 RPG within a 1km radius of the Site, however there will be no adverse effects to these as a result of the development of the Site. The Site is however immediately adjacent to a scheduled monument, known as 'Banks and ditch at Glebe Farm' (SM1015422). An assessment of its setting established that this comprises a mix of elements dating from the 20th century, defined by playing fields, dense housing to the south-east, south, north and north-east, and a mix of housing and equestrian structures to the east that do not contribute to its significance as a heritage asset. There is very limited experience of the monument from the land within the Site, with the potential for improvement in the north-western corner. Despite this limited interaction, the masterplan has been developed to respond to the scheduled

monument, with a large area of space on the western boundary providing a stand-off from the proposed built form.

The Site contains a single record for a non-designated heritage asset comprising the site of a possible prehistoric long-barrow. In the wider area there is evidence for extensive human activity from the prehistoric period onwards. The recent geophysical survey, undertaken to inform the proposed development of the Site, recorded no evidence for the barrow but identified a single linear feature of possible archaeological origin, the date and nature of which remain unclear. This will require further investigation as it may be related to the scheduled remains to the west; equally it could be the remains from the post medieval period and of archaeological interest.

No Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) exist on the Site or its boundaries.

Published route Public Right of Way (PRoW) MMH145 passes within the Site boundary, crossing the Site centrally from east to west. A number of other PRoW are present within the surrounding context, forming a local footpath network.

There are no statutory nature conservation designations within the Site; however, the following statutory designations are located within the Site's potential zone of influence:

- Rodborough Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (c.2km north-east);
- Minchinhampton Common SSSI (c.1km west); and
- Box Farm Meadows SSSI (c.1.2km south-west).

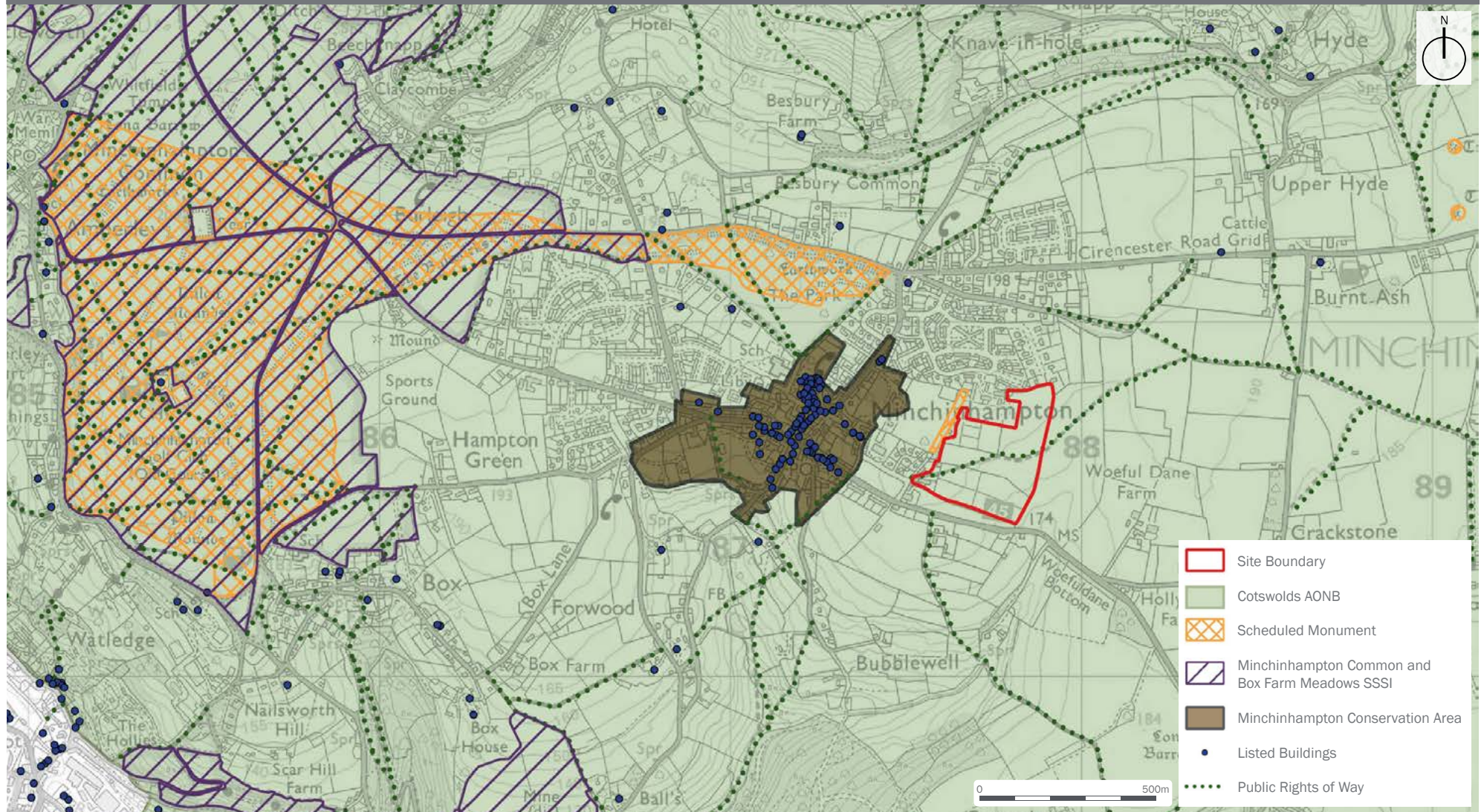
The Site lies within 3km of Rodborough Common SAC and, whilst it is unlikely that development at the Site would have

a significant effect on the SAC alone (owing to the provision of on-site greenspace, retention of an existing public footpath and links to the local footpath network, and the close proximity of alternative existing greenspaces) it could contribute to an overall increase in recreational pressure in combination with other developments in the District. The identified need for additional housing in the District over this plan period, some of which will inevitably fall within 3km of the SAC, will require the existing Interim Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy to be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure that no significant effects on the SAC arise. Providing that this strategic mitigation is put in place, any effects of development within the Site (either alone or in combination) would be suitably avoided or mitigated.

Minchinhampton Common SSSI is very well used for recreation (which is concentrated in areas of lower quality grassland habitat) and incorporates a golf course, it is therefore not at risk of significant harm from recreational pressure as a result of development at the Site. Indeed, Minchinhampton Common and the connected greenspace running into in the centre of Minchinhampton ('The Park') would provide more convenient alternative greenspaces for residents of any new development at the Site, thus reducing potential impacts on Rodborough Common.

Box Farm Meadows SSSI is relatively small and less accessible relative to the extensive commons described above and is unlikely to attract a significant number of additional visitors. Furthermore, the SSSI is a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve and access is encouraged but managed appropriately. The SSSI is therefore not at risk of harm from recreational pressure as a result of development at the Site.

Figure EDP 2: Environmental Planning Context



# Local Context



The Site predominantly comprises poor semi-improved grassland (horse paddocks) and amenity grassland (campsite), which are of limited and negligible nature conservation interest respectively. The Site's most notable habitat feature is the mature hedgerow/tree line running along the Site's eastern boundary, and small sections of defunct species-poor hedgerows are present on the northern and southern boundaries.

The Site and immediate surrounding context share some of the characteristics of the published landscape character assessment at the county and district levels, namely its undulating topography, stone walls, the network of tree belts dividing smaller pasture fields and large-scale arable with little tree cover. These features could readily be accommodated within the development proposals.

The character of the Site and near context is degraded by its visual relationship with the adjacent abrupt, intrusive late 20th-21st century development edge, which is clearly visible from within the Site.



Development would provide the opportunity to create a more integrated and softer settlement edge to the Sanctuary Housing Development and the southern edge of Minchinhampton.


It is considered that, due to the Site's small extent within the landscape, and the presence of detractors such as the residential properties of Minchinhampton, the Site and surrounding context would be able to accommodate some change without significant effects upon current on-site character features and those of the wider landscape.

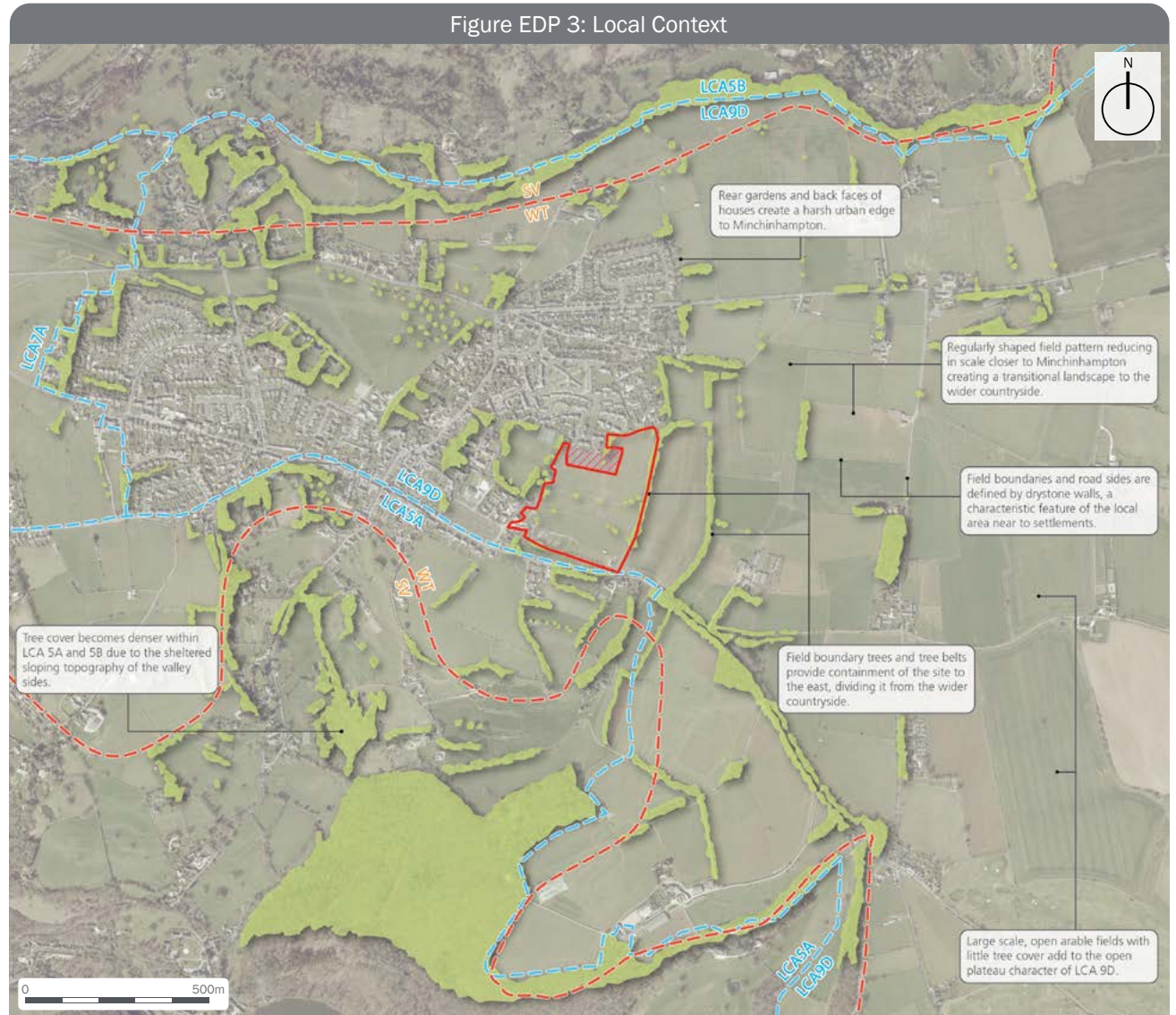
-  Site Boundary
-  Vegetation Pattern
-  Sanctuary Housing Development (Planning Ref: 512/1906/FUL) - abutts the northern boundary creating an obvious urbanising influence due to harsh edge

**The Cotswold AONB Landscape Character Assessment**

-  Landscape Character Area Boundary
- LCA5A** 'Nailsworth'
- LCA5B** 'Frome Golden Valley and Stroud'
- LCA7A** 'Nymphsfield and Kingscote Plateau, & Minchinhampton Common'
- LCA9D** 'Cotswold High Wold Dip-Slope'

**Stroud Landscape Character Assessment**

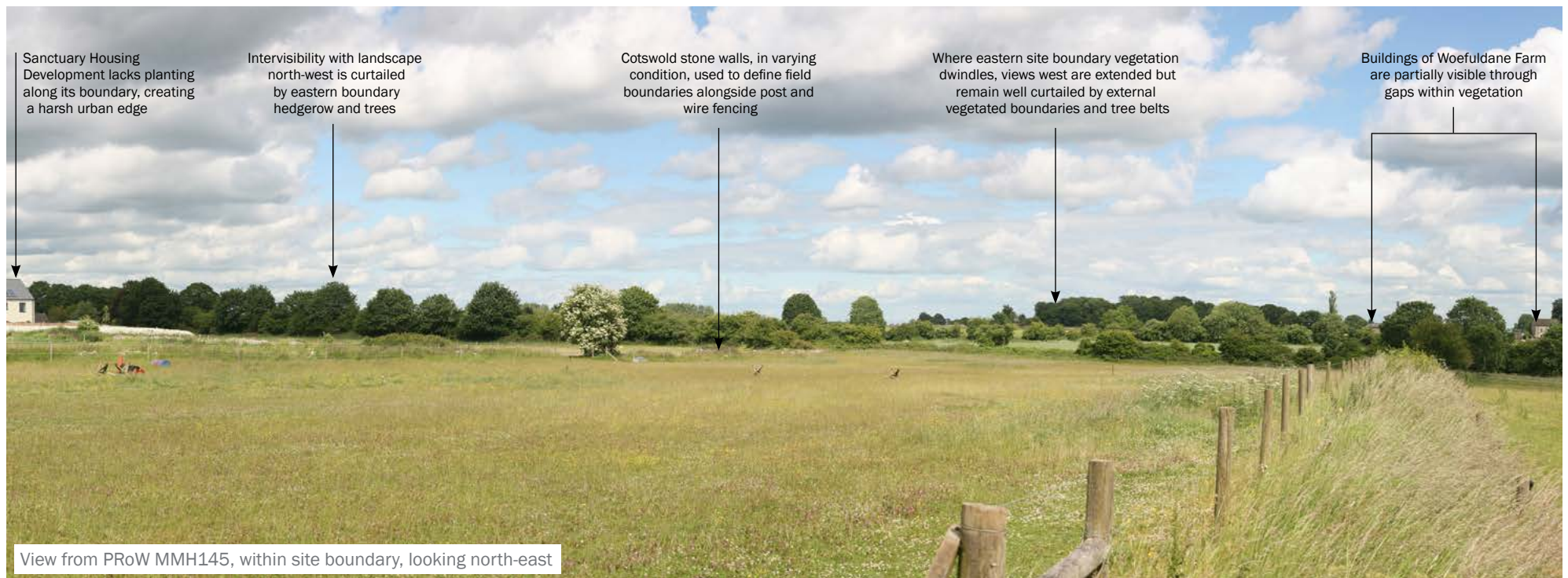
-  Approximate Landscape Character Type Boundary
- WT** 'Wold Tops'
- SV** 'Secluded Valleys'



# Visual Context

As illustrated on Figure EDP 4, the Primary Zone of Visibility is very limited, only extending briefly beyond the Site's boundar. Indeed, beyond the immediate boundaries of the Site, intervisibility is increasingly filtered and confined chiefly to the immediate south and briefly within the eastern fields, as illustrated by the Zone of Secondary Visibility. This is due to the presence of several features including boundary vegetation of the Site and surrounding fields as well as the location of the existing settlement. The receptors most likely to experience change can be summarised as follows:

- Road receptors with the clearest views to the Site including Woefuldane Bottom directly to the south and south-west and glimpsed views from the minor road off Woefuldane Bottom to the south-west;
- PRow receptors with the clearest views to the Site and therefore considered most likely to be affected are PRow MMH145, MMH144 and MMH115; and
- Due to their close proximity to the Site, the properties with the clearest views over the Site are those bordering the Site's northern and western boundaries and Woefuldane Farm to the south-east.

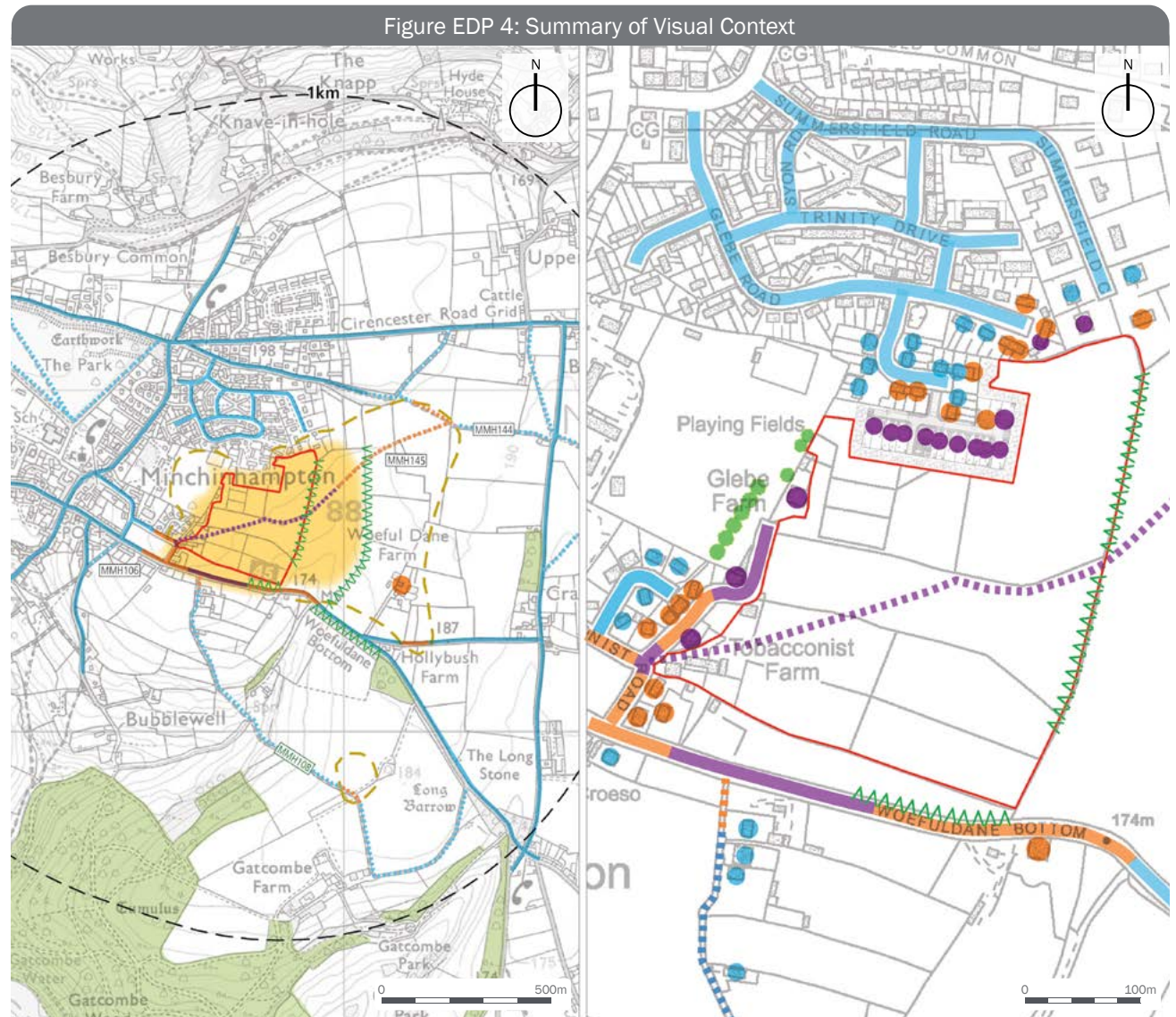




- Site Boundary
- 1km Range Ring
- Zone of Primary Visibility
- Zone of Secondary Visibility
- AAA Mature Hedgerow with Trees
- Individual Mature Tree Standards
- Woodland Cover

- |                        |                        |                    |                          |
|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| View from Right of Way | View from Road/Railway | View from Property |                          |
| ⋯                      | —                      | ●                  | Open View                |
| ⋯                      | —                      | ●                  | Partial or Glimpsed View |
| ⋯                      | —                      | ●                  | No View                  |

Figure EDP 4: Summary of Visual Context



# Environmental Strategy

Through meetings with officers from Stroud District Council (also attended by a representative for the Cotswold AONB Management Board), EDP have provided inputs from the start of the masterplanning process. Feedback from these meetings, as well as the findings of EDP's technical assessments, have fed into mitigation measures summarised overleaf.

The existing eastern edge of Minchinhampton is found to be locally 'raw' with limited landscape buffer to open countryside. To ensure the success of the new neighbourhood, several key objectives have fed into the masterplan process, the development of which is outlined below:

- The design responds to the host Landscape Character Area (LCA) 'Cotswold High Dip-Slope' by limiting tree planting within open spaces, to reflect the character of similar local spaces such as Minchinhampton Common;
- The south-east corner is recognised to be one of the more visually sensitive due to the potential for views on approach; an area of Public Open Space (POS) is recommended here including tree planting along the boundary;
- POS is included within the development to allow connectivity with the existing playing fields, this will retain the current route of the PRoW and feature scattered tree planting; and
- Boundary vegetation is to be retained, protected and buffered with additional tree planting and grassland wildflower to encourage species diversity.



# Proposed Masterplan

This statement and the development proposals overleaf demonstrate how careful analysis of the environmental context, and positive engagement has given rise to a masterplan that is sympathetic to the growth requirements of Minchinhampton whilst being respectful to its environmental context.

Out of all directions surrounding Minchinhampton, the least sensitive and most sustainable direction for growth is thought to be to the east of the town, where the proposal Site sits, for the following reasons:

- Land to the east presents no encroachment into any SSSI or Common Land designations;
- There would be very limited effects on principle public views of the town – as seen from Minchinhampton Common;
- There is scope to enhance and soften the currently ‘raw’ edge to recent development to the east of Minchinhampton;
- Available land to the east is in close proximity to the town centre, with potential scope to contribute towards community facilities;
- The landscape fabric is not especially strong or intact, and the topography is relatively flat atop the plateau. As a result, there are few physical constraints;
- The land to the east of the town is not especially visually prominent and is not visible from the most sensitive and well used common land;
- The assessment and survey undertaken to date have informed the masterplanning of the Site such that the scheduled monument and any associated remains have been fully considered and protected as required, and contain sufficient information on which to progress the site; and
- The proposals provide a generous quantum and quality of open space on-site for recreational use as an attractive alternative to those further afield, for the both the existing and new community.





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