

The Town & Country Planning  
(Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000

Appeal by David Wilson Homes – East Midlands  
against refusal of planning application by  
Charnwood Borough Council

Proposal:

Outline application for up to 150 dwellings,  
together with new open space, landscaping,  
and drainage infrastructure, with all matters  
reserved except for access  
(as amended to include proposed junction  
improvement works at barkby road cross roads,  
received 20/05/2022)

At:

Barkby Road, Queniborough, Leicestershire

Proof of Evidence of:

Simon James Neesam

On behalf of:

Charnwood Borough Council

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023

Planning Inspectorate Reference:

P/20/2380/2

Planning Inspectorate Reference:

APP/X2410/W/23/3316574



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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Qualifications and experience**

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- 1.1.1 I am Simon James Neesam. I hold a degree and a post graduate diploma in Landscape Architecture. I became a fully qualified Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute in 1994. I joined The Landscape Partnership in 1991, and became an Associate with the practice in 2001, an Associate Director in 2004, a Technical Director in 2014, and a Director in 2022.
- 1.1.2 I have a wide range of experience in landscape architecture and landscape planning, and have undertaken projects for private clients as well as national, regional and local public-sector bodies throughout the UK.
- 1.1.3 Whilst with The Landscape Partnership I have carried out Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments for a variety of projects including major out-of-town retail facilities, highway schemes, renewable energy developments, landfill and mineral schemes, flood alleviation schemes and new housing, often within sensitive landscapes or at contentious locations. I was the Project Manager for the coordination of an Environmental Impact Assessment, and subsequent Environmental Statement, for a new link road that would provide improved access to the Port of Ipswich and which would be in close proximity to important wildlife habitats and designated landscapes. I have also prepared Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisals for use by local authorities and other interested bodies when planning the future direction of settlement growth, including appraisals of the ability of the settlement fringes of towns in Basildon and Braintree districts to accommodate new development.

- 1.1.4 I have acted as Project Landscape Architect for the design and implementation of a number of schemes including Heritage Lottery funded park restorations in Ipswich and Clacton, and urban regeneration schemes in Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, as well as new park and ride facilities incorporating sustainable design solutions.
- 1.1.5 I was the Project Manager for the design and implementation of a £4 million scheme to restore and revitalise Christchurch Park in Ipswich and was the Project Landscape Architect for a programme of significant urban realm enhancements in Ipswich town centre to improve pedestrian and cycle connections and links to public transport.
- 1.1.6 I have coordinated the production of a Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Haven Gateway Sub-region, and managed the production of a Design Code for Harwich Town and a Design Guide for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems in Cambridge. The latter won Project of the Year at the Landscape Institute Awards 2010.
- 1.1.7 The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this appeal in this proof of evidence, is true and has been prepared, and is given in accordance with, the guidance of my professional institution, and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

## 1.2 **Background**

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- 1.2.1 On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2018, David Wilson Homes submitted an application to Charnwood Borough Council for outline planning permission (considering access only) for up to 150 new dwellings at Barkby Road, Queniborough, Leicestershire, together with associated works including open space,



landscaping, drainage and access from Barkby Road and pedestrian link to Chestnut Close. The application was given the planning reference P/18/0309/2.

- 1.2.2 The application was refused on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018. The Reasons for Refusal [CD6.05] included:

*Notwithstanding the Council's Housing Land Supply and the reduced weight that can be attached to policies for the supply of housing (being policy CS1 of the Core Strategy and saved policy ST/2 of the Adopted Borough of Charnwood Local Plan 1991-2006), the Local Planning Authority considers that the significant adverse impacts of the development proposal outweigh the benefits arising from the development. ... The application site lies outside the limits on development of Queniborough ... The proposal is not small scale and the application site is not considered as infill. Concerns about the cumulative pattern of growth and the impact on the Area of Local Separation would have an impact on the individual identity of Queniborough and Syston and result in coalescence between the settlements and the proposals would not respect and maintain the separate identities of towns and villages ...*

- 1.2.3 On the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020, and again before The Landscape Partnership's commission, David Wilson Homes – East Midlands submitted an application to Charnwood Borough Council for outline planning permission for residential development at the Barkby Road site, referred to here as the appeal site. The

application was validated on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021 and given the reference P/20/2380/2. The proposals were described as:

*Outline application for up to 150 dwellings, together with new open space, landscaping and drainage infrastructure, with all matters reserved except for access.*

- 1.2.4 The application was amended on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022, to include junction improvement works at Barkby Road crossroads.
- 1.2.5 The application was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Golby & Luck Landscape Architects dated February 2018 [CD1.06]. To avoid confusion with subsequent documents, I refer to this assessment in my evidence as the G&L LVA.
- 1.2.6 Charnwood Borough Council refused planning permission for the reasons set out in the Decision Notice dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 [CD4.01].
- 1.2.7 On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023, an appeal against the refusal of Application P/20/2380/2 was made to the Secretary of State by David Wilson Homes – East Midlands and was given Planning Inspectorate Reference: APP/X2410/W/23/3316574.

### **1.3 Commission and scope of evidence**

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- 1.3.1 My association with the scheme commenced on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2023, when The Landscape Partnership was invited to support Charnwood Borough Council at a forthcoming public inquiry against its refusal of Application P/20/2380/2, and in particular with regard to the second Reason for Refusal, i.e. that the proposed development (including cumulatively with other development),

would result in a harmful impact upon on the character of the countryside and the Area of Local Separation (ALS) within which the site is located, so not protecting nor maintaining the separate identities of Queniborough and Syston.

1.3.2 I reviewed the application package, the committee report and the decision notice, and undertook a site visit, in order to satisfy myself that I could support Charnwood's decision in relation to the likely impacts of the proposed development on landscape and visual receptors, and on the function of the ALS.

1.3.3 The Landscape Partnership was subsequently instructed to provide expert witness services at a forthcoming public inquiry where the appeal for the application would be heard.

1.3.4 In preparing my evidence, I have reviewed the package of drawings and documents supporting Planning Application P/20/2380/2, including:

- Location Plan, dwg No. QUEN-LOCA-01 Rev C, Dominion Design Ltd, dated 14.03.2021 [CD1.02]
- Conceptual Plan, dwg No. QUEN-CONC-SK2 Rev G, Dominion Design Ltd, dated 14.03.2021 [CD1.03]
- Design and Access Statement, Pegasus, dated January 2018 [CD1.05]
- Arboricultural Assessment, FPCR, dated January 2018 [CD1.11]
- Barkby Road Junction, Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement, FPCR, dated August 2022 [CD2.01]
- Planning Statement, Pegasus, dated October 2020 [CD1.04]

- Transport Assessment Version 5, ADC Infrastructure, dated 18.06.2021 [CD1.08]
- Proposed Access Junction Layout, dwg No. ADC1659-DR-002 Rev P3, ADC Infrastructure, dated 26.04.2022 [CD2.07]
- Landscape & Visual Appraisal, Golby & Luck, dated February 2018 [CD1.06]

1.3.5 I have familiarised myself with the following documents specific to the planning application, including:

- Charnwood Borough Council – Conservation & Landscape, Senior Landscape Officer consultation response (update of previous comments of 14.12.2021), dated 07.11.2022 [CD3.21]
- Charnwood Borough Council Plans Committee agenda and reports for 23.11.2022 [CD4.04]
- Charnwood Borough Council Decision Notice for P/20/2380/2, dated 09.12.2022 [CD4.01]

1.3.6 Also, those documents specific to this appeal, including:

- Appellant’s Statement of Case
- Charnwood Borough Council’s Statement of Case

#### 1.4 **Independent summary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**

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1.4.1 The G&L LVA [CD1.06] was undertaken in February 2018, nearly 2 years before the application was submitted. As such, the baseline data is now over 5 years old.

- 1.4.2 Some of the figures within the LVA do not illustrate that the current baseline conditions. For example, reference to the mapping at Figures 1 and 4 shows that the full extent of Syston is not represented. As a result, the existing separation between Syston and Queniborough appears wider than it is.
- 1.4.3 The quality of the photographic reproduction in the G&L LVA for some views is not clear and they do not appear to have been prepared in accordance with the guidance set out in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 06/19, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019.
- 1.4.4 To this end, I have prepared my own viewpoint photographs to illustrate the baseline conditions. I have reproduced these at Appendix SJN 04.
- 1.4.5 In order to understand the likely effects of the appeal scheme on landscape and visual receptors in the surrounding landscape, I undertook my own independent high-level summary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The findings of my LVIA are presented in the form of summary tables. I refer to this document as the TLP LVIA. A copy of the methodology I followed is attached to my evidence at Appendix SJN 01. This methodology was based on the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), Third Edition, 2013.
- 1.4.6 In preparing the TLP LVIA, I undertook the necessary site assessments, whereupon I was able to consider the character and context of the appeal site and analyse the likely effects of the proposed development on it from various publicly accessible points in its environs. Likewise, I carried out the assessment of likely effects of the proposed development on landscape and visual receptors myself and presented my findings in a tabulated manner, see

Appendix SJN 02: Table A – Summary of landscape effects and Appendix SJN 03: Table B – Summary of visual effects.

1.4.7 My independent summary LVIA was based on the scheme illustrated within the package of drawings and documents supporting Planning Application P/20/2380/2, and in particular the Conceptual Plan [CD1.03] and the information in the Design and Access Statement [CD1.05].

1.4.8 Of particular relevance to the assessment of landscape and visual effects, para 5.4.1 of the Design and Access Statement notes that "*Scale is reserved at this stage and as such the application is required to establish a 3-dimensional building envelope within which buildings will be constructed*". Regarding building heights, para 5.4.3 states: "*Buildings of up to 2.5 stories could be proposed for the site. This reflects the general height and scale of buildings in the surrounding context. Bungalows are shown along the northern edge adjacent to the existing bungalows beyond*". Para 5.6.2 notes: "*Landscaping is reserved at this stage and so specific landscaping information is not required*".

1.4.9 I recognise that the application is in outline (save for access), and so the drawings accompanying the application are illustrative or indicative in nature; as such, they cannot be relied upon as necessarily conveying a fixed final scheme. This needs to be borne in mind when considering the findings of all the landscape and visual-related assessments, as the final scheme could differ from that currently promoted, with consequential variation to the recorded landscape and visual effects. Were the appeal to be allowed, the

detail of the scheme would be developed and discharged through future reserved matters applications.

1.4.10 I summarise the findings of my independent LVIA within my evidence at Section 3: Effects on landscape character and Section 4: Effects on visual amenity and draw on my conclusions when addressing the Reasons for Refusal at Section 5.

1.4.11 I visited the appeal site in April and May 2023. The weather was clear and bright on both occasions, and visibility was good; I was able to view the appeal site from adjacent roads, byways, public rights of way, and other publicly accessible land.

## 1.5 **Scope of evidence**

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1.5.1 In my proof of evidence, I will consider aspects of the development that relate to landscape character and visual amenity, and I will:

- provide an overview description of the landscape of the appeal site and its setting;
- summarise the findings of my independent LVIA; and
- address aspects of the reason for refusal that relate to landscape character and visual amenity, i.e. the harmful impact that the appeal scheme would have on the character of the countryside and on the Area of Local Separation (ALS).

1.5.2 In addressing the Reasons for Refusal, I will demonstrate:

- The harmful impact that the appeal scheme would have on the character of the countryside in which the site is located, both in itself and cumulatively with other development.
- How the proposal will erode the separation of Queniborough and Syston, and the predominantly open and undeveloped character the ALS seeks to protect, and thereby not protecting nor maintaining the separate identities of the town and village.

1.5.3 Aspects relating to planning policy context, planning balance, and other planning matters are addressed by Liam Ward, Principal Planning Officer, and Dr Michael Hopkins, Principal Planning Officer.

1.5.4 My Proof of Evidence is accompanied by a set of supporting figures and photographs that are reproduced at Appendix SJN 04.

## **2 Landscape context**

### **2.1 The landscape context of the appeal site**

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2.1.1 In the following paragraphs, I will describe the wider landscape setting of the appeal site.

2.1.2 The appeal site is located to the immediate south of the village of Queniborough in the county of Leicestershire, some 10km north-west of the city of Leicester. To the south is the town of Syston and to the north the village of East Goscote.

2.1.3 The landscape is influenced by the Rivers Soar and Wreake. The River Soar is a major tributary of the River Trent, which flows in a northward direction from its source between Hinckley and Lutterworth through Leicester, and then



Loughborough and Kegworth to meet the River Trent. The River Wreake flows in a generally south-westward direction through Melton Mowbray and to the west of Queniborough, to meet the Soar to the west of Syston.

- 2.1.4 The valleys of the Soar and Wreake accommodate the transport corridors of the A6 and A46 respectively, and also the railway.
- 2.1.5 Queniborough, Syston and East Goscote are located on relatively flat lands within the wide Wreake valley and their proximity to the city and the various transport routes has made them a focus for much expansion in recent times.
- 2.1.6 Queniborough developed to the east of Barkby Road, around Main Street, in what is now the Conservation Area. It subsequently expanded westward in the C20 and C21 to meet Melton Road.
- 2.1.7 The historic core of Syston is centred on Melton Road, at its junction with High Street and Barkby Road. The town has since expanded in a northerly and easterly direction. Further land to the north-east and east of Syston is allocated in the emerging Local Plan 2021-2037 [CD5.05] for residential development as sites HA2 and HA3. This would extend the town eastward to meet Barkby Road.
- 2.1.8 Syston is now separated from Queniborough by a corridor of farmland. This farmland comprises a mix of uses including arable cropping and horse paddocks. It also accommodates Homestead Farm.
- 2.1.9 East Goscote is also centred on Melton Road. It was developed from the 1960s onwards on the site of a former army supply depot. It is now separated from

Queniborough by Queniborough Brook and the A607, which is located on a raised embankment.

2.1.10 To the east of Queniborough, the landscape rises relatively steeply out of the vale to form an undulating series of ridges and valleys referred to as High Leicestershire. This is an under-settled landscape crossed by lanes and footpaths that frequently follow the ridges. It has rural character and a strong hedgerow pattern. From many points, views are available out over the lower lands to the west and the various settlements.

2.1.11 I consider the character of the landscape in the vicinity of the appeal site, and its particular sensitivities, in more detail at Section 3.

## **2.2 The landscape of the appeal site**

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2.2.1 The appeal site is located within the tract of countryside between Queniborough and Syston. It comprises two fields that together total c.5.84ha.

2.2.2 The greater length of the site's western boundary is formed by the buildings within the Queniborough Industrial Estate.

2.2.3 To the north, the site abuts the southern edge of Queniborough: Chestnut Close (where the properties front onto the site) and Avenue Road and The Ridings, which present rear gardens to the site boundary. These are a mix of single storey, one-and-a-half and two storey properties in a range of styles, often with relatively low roof pitches.

2.2.4 The eastern boundary of the site is defined by Barkby Road. Beyond this, is the recent Boonton Meadows development constructed in a more traditional

style and set behind a road frontage of mature limes and horse chestnuts, which afford the development a parkland-like character.

- 2.2.5 The fields to the immediate south of the site have been subdivided by tape fencing to create small paddocks for grazing horses. Further to the south-east, the fields are in arable production.
- 2.2.6 The western appeal site field has a grass cover and is also in use for horse grazing. The boundaries are defined by vegetation. A gate provides access to Chestnut Close, and another to the fields to the south.
- 2.2.7 The western boundary comprises a mix of relatively recently planted species (field maple, rowan, lime, Norway maple) and an outgrown hawthorn hedge which continues along the northern boundary. The southern boundary is a managed hedge (hawthorn, holly and elder) and on the inside of this a group of recent tree species (field maple, rowan, lime, Norway maple) including purple leaved varieties that afford a rather suburban character. The trees are in varying health and condition, and some appear to have failed.
- 2.2.8 The eastern field has a cereal crop. Again, the boundaries are defined by hedges. Access to this field is taken from Barkby Road.
- 2.2.9 The northern boundary comprises hawthorn, blackthorn, holly and elder, with some oak and occasional hedgerow tree, and the eastern boundary by a further managed hawthorn hedge with some elder, dog rose, holly and elm. Along the southern boundary is a hawthorn hedge and, similarly to the western field, tree species have been planted. Again, these are in varying condition and the purple leaves afford a more ornamental character.

2.2.10 The two fields are divided by a managed hawthorn hedge with some holly and elder.

2.2.11 Public footpath I84 follows a line from Avenue Road, along a narrow alley way between property plots, before crossing the eastern field of the appeal site. From here, it follows a corridor between the temporary fencing defining the horse paddocks to meet the northern edge of Syston and in particular Millstone Lane.

### **3 Effects on landscape character**

#### **3.1 Relevant published landscape character assessments and landscape capacity studies**

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3.1.1 To identify the key characteristics of the landscape in the vicinity of the appeal site, as a precursor to assessing the potential effects of the proposed development on its character, I have reviewed the findings of published Landscape Character Assessments: at the national level, the National Character Area profiles; and at the district level the Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment (July 2012). I have also considered the findings of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites for Charnwood Borough, prepared by LUC (March 2019) [CD5.09] and its subsequent addendum Charnwood Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Assessment Addendum, prepared by LUC (February 2021) [CD5.10].

3.1.2 I consider the findings of these documents in relation to the likely effects of the proposed development in the following paragraphs.

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**National Character Area profiles (2014)**

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- 3.1.3 Natural England has divided England into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs) that define the landscape at a national scale. The site lies within NCA 93 High Leicestershire, close to its boundary with NCA 69: Trent Valley Washlands (which encompasses the landscape to the west of Melton Road, NCA 74: Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds (north of Queniborough) and NCA 94: Leicestershire Vales (Leicester and the landscape south of Syston).
- 3.1.4 The High Leicestershire NCA rises out of the clay of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Vales above the lowland plains of the Soar, Wreake and Welland valleys and the Vale of Belvoir.

*This landscape of broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys has a quiet, remote and rural character with small villages and scattered farms. The predominantly rural character of the area comprises undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher, sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land. Fields are divided by well established hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow trees. A network of narrow country lanes, tracks and footpaths connect across the landscape interspersed by small thickets, copses and woodlands. Extensive views from the higher ground reveal a pattern of small attractive villages, hamlets and farm buildings set within an agricultural landscape, with traditional churches acting as distinctive features of the settlements.*

3.1.5 The profile notes that only a very small percentage of the NCA is classified as 'urban', and that such areas encompass the eastern edge of Leicester (including Thurmaston, Syston and Queniborough).

3.1.6 Whilst the landscape in which the appeal site is located displays many of the typical features of High Leicestershire, its location close to centres of population make it rather more settled and less remote than other parts of the NCA.

3.1.7 Recent trends and changes within NCA 93 are noted to include the following:

- *High Leicestershire has seen limited late 20th-century growth and development compared with other NCAs, much of the area remains remote and rural. Urban incursion into the area has occurred to the west with the eastern expansion of the city of Leicester, and to the north ...*

3.1.8 The National Character Areas provide a useful description of landscape character at a regional level and the pressures and drivers for change that it faces. Since NCA 93 covers a large area, it encompasses a variety of landscape types; so, for the purposes of my outline LVIA I used the finer grain and more specific district level character assessment, together with my own local landscape character assessment, to assess the likely effects of the proposed development, rather than the national level assessment.

***District level – Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment (2012)***

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3.1.9 The Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment was commissioned by Charnwood Borough Council to provide an evaluation of its landscape including a strategy with guidelines for the protection, conservation

and enhancement of landscape character, to inform development management decisions and development of plans for the future of the borough.

- 3.1.10 Part 1 divides the borough into six distinct character areas. It describes the key characteristics, strength of landscape character and landscape condition of each area and prescribes a list of guidelines to protect its character.
- 3.1.11 Part 2 contains a landscape sensitivity and capacity study for the areas that adjoin the urban edges of Leicester, Loughborough and Shepshed, to broadly assess the capacity of these landscapes to accommodate development. The appraisal places each study area into one of five categories, which are graded according to the landscapes capacity to accommodate new development.
- 3.1.12 Since the publication of the Charnwood of the Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment in 2012, Charnwood has undertaken more detailed landscape sensitivity and capacity studies in 2019 and 2021 in association with SHLAAs and I do not consider the findings of Part 2 further here.

### **Wreake Valley LCA**

- 3.1.13 The appeal site falls within the Wreake Valley LCA, which is noted to have the following key characteristics:
- *River Wreake meanders in a flat bottomed river valley with gently sloping sides. The valley experiences flooding*
  - *Rural character to east of Broome Lane, East Goscote*
  - *Leicester City and Syston have an urbanising influences in the west*

- *Limited valley crossings, with the A46 and A607 roads on engineered embankments*
- *Area of mixed arable and pasture farming*
- *Some neglected and lost hedgerows and hedgerow trees*
- *Restored mineral workings*
- *Settlements are on the valley slopes, with churches marking villages*
- *Main settlements are Ratcliffe on the Wreake, Thrussington, Rearsby, East Goscote, Queniborough and Syston.*

3.1.14 This landscape is dominated by the River Wreake, which flows in an eastward direction along a flat bottomed and broad valley floor with gently sloping sides.

3.1.15 The portion of the LCA to the east [perhaps better described as to the north-east] of Broome Lane, East Goscote is noted to have a rural quality and to retain a "*remote countryside appearance and agricultural character*". The western portion, where the River Wreake joins the Soar and in which the appeal site is located, is influenced by the urban settlements of Syston and Leicester and their associated industry, housing and roads.

3.1.16 Farmland is a mix of arable and pasture. Smaller hedged fields closer to the settlements contrast with the later larger and more regular-shaped fields created by parliamentary enclosure. Intensification of agricultural land in the C20 has result in a loss of hedgerows due to field enlargement; where hedges remain they have typically been mechanically trimmed and are very low. In recent times there has been a trend from grasslands to arable production.



- 3.1.17 Pastureland is predominantly cattle-grazed and generally well hedged; however, there has been some conversation to horse paddocks. Where equestrian uses have become established, fields are frequently subdivided into smaller paddocks that interrupt the sweep of the pastoral landscape. In the later part of the C20, a number of horticultural nurseries were established near Syston, Queniborough and East Goscote.
- 3.1.18 The Wreake Valley itself has a network of wetland habitats and there are extensive sand and gravel workings that have been subsequently restored to grazing or recreational uses such as lakes, ponds and golf courses, often in well wooded settings.
- 3.1.19 Woodland is described as a "*minor component of the landscape, consisting mainly of small areas of semi-natural broad-leaved wet woodland dotted along the River Wreake*". Occasional trees are present within hedgerows associated with pastures. Ash is the most abundant tree although willow common alder dominate close to water courses.
- 3.1.20 Major transport routes, e.g. the A46 and A607, pass through the valley floodplains on elevated on embankments and can be highly intrusive in this flat landscape. There are few cross-valley routes linking the villages.
- 3.1.21 Settlements are typically sited on the gravel terraces on either side of the valleys. Villages are typically nucleated. It is noted that "*Village edges with red brick dwellings often blend well in the landscape. However, the demarcation is harsher where buildings have been refurbished with white window frames or white rendered walls*" and "*Often the use of standardised*

*materials in newer housing can present a harsh appearance at the countryside edge, such as at Syston and East Goscote”.*

3.1.22 The historic cores of many of the settlements, including Syston and Queniborough are recognised by their Conservation Area status and contain many listed buildings. It is noted that *“Churches and their towers and spires often draw the view towards the villages from some distance across the landscape”*. The tower of St Peter & St Paul, Syston and the spire of St Mary, Queniborough [Grade 1 listed] are visible from public footpath I84. Indeed, the character assessment notes: *“The church spire in Queniborough, at 49m (162 ft), is the second highest in Leicestershire and is clearly visible from the surrounding countryside”*.

3.1.23 Syston and the surrounding area has a long tradition of manufacturing, now typically distribution warehouses, engineering workshops and food manufacturing. More recent large industrial estates have tended to concentrate on the outskirts of settlements, e.g. to the south-west of Queniborough, and can often be prominent in a valley landscape.

3.1.24 The Wreake Valley LCA is assessed as having a Moderate strength of character and a Moderate landscape condition.

3.1.25 It is my view that the landscape of the appeal site and its environs is typical of the Wreake Valley LCA and, in particular, the character of the western portion, in that it displays the broad lower valley side topography, comprises a mix of farming uses, within smaller-scale and hedged fields, has a limited tree cover beyond the hedgerows and is influenced by the proximity of the urban edges. I consider it to less influenced by the rivers themselves or the

transport routes and restored mineral workings that follow the valleys than are other parts of the LCA.

3.1.26 A set of guidelines for the Wreake Valley LCA are cited. Those relevant to the appeal site and scheme include:

- *New development should preserve the open character of the Wreake valley, and have regard for the views across the valley*
- *Enhance the Wreake Valley landscape character around the fringes of the existing larger settlements by increasing tree cover*
- *Conserve the integrity of features of historic interest typical of the Wreake Valley such as ... retain views of the village churches. Protect the setting of these features in the landscape*
- *Preference will be given to the use of tree and shrub species locally native to the Wreake Valley character area in planting schemes*
- *Where safety allows retain dead wood to benefit invertebrates*
- *Seek opportunities for the creation and enhancement of the following habitat types typical of the Wreake Valley: ... Hedgerows and hedgerow trees.*

#### ***Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites***

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3.1.27 In August 2018, Charnwood Borough Council commissioned LUC to provide landscape capacity and sensitivity evidence to inform the preparation of its new Local Plan to 2036. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites (LSASS) was published in March 2019 [CD5.09].

3.1.28 The objectives of the LSASS were:

- *To provide Charnwood Borough Council with a clear and robust evidence base to inform the Sustainability Appraisal process and the associated decision making process on site allocations; and,*
- *To provide broad guidelines for the development of potential site options which may have the potential to impact on landscape.*

3.1.29 The LSASS used a combination of desktop and fieldwork to assess the landscape sensitivity of the SHLAA sites (as identified through the Charnwood Borough Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2017) to residential development. It was assumed that dwellings would be 2-3 storeys with gardens, and further assumptions were made regarding density based on the site size.

3.1.30 A set of criteria were defined, *"based on the attributes of the landscape most likely to be affected by development, and considers both 'landscape' and 'visual' aspects of sensitivity"*. A five-point rating from Low to High landscape sensitivity was used to score the sensitivity of each of the criteria and to illustrate overall levels of landscape sensitivity, *"i.e. how susceptible the character and quality of the landscape would be to change"*.

3.1.31 The appeal site is identified in the LSASS as SHLAA site PSH316.

3.1.32 For the purposes of the assessment PSH216 was grouped with other SHLAA sites around the edge of Queniborough, i.e. SHLAA sites PSH42, PSH221, PSH287 and PSH446. Since these sites have differing baseline conditions (e.g. the appeal site is an agricultural field, whereas PSH221 is part of the Queniborough Industrial Estate), the resultant combined sensitivity scores might be considered to an across-the-board average, with some sites scoring

higher or lower than the moderated average derived when the sites are considered as a group.

- 3.1.33 In the following paragraphs I summarise the LSASS's findings in relation to each of the criteria.

**Physical character (including topography and scale)**

- 3.1.34 The CLSASS judged the physical character attributes of the SHLAA sites to have a Low landscape sensitivity to development of the type proposed, noting that SHLAA sites occupied a gravel terrace to the south of Queniborough Brook, located at the settlement edges of Queniborough village.

**Natural character**

- 3.1.35 The CLSASS assessed the natural character attributes of the SHLAA sites to have a Low-Moderate landscape sensitivity. It notes that PSH316 comprises "*an arable and pastoral field, divided by a hedgerow field boundary*". It then notes that portions of the land dividing the settlements of Queniborough and Syston are characterised by horticultural nurseries and that "*PSH316 is typified by this land use*". It is not clear how this judgement is made (in a document published in 2019), since reference to historic aerial photography on Google Earth suggests the site was in arable or grassland use as least as far back 1999. Other sites have very differing characteristics, e.g. PSH221 (the industrial estate) has a wholly urban land use, whilst others contain farm buildings.

**Historic landscape character**

- 3.1.36 The CLSASS judged the SHLAA sites to have a Low landscape sensitivity regarding historic landscape character. It is noted that none of the sites are within the Queniborough Conservation Area. The Historic Landscape Classification noted that Site PSH316 is *"strongly influenced by the wider agricultural setting, lying within land use defined as Planned Enclosure"*.

**Form, density, identity and setting of existing settlement/development**

- 3.1.37 The CLSASS judged the SHLAA sites to have a Moderate landscape sensitivity regarding form, density, identity and setting. PSH316 is noted to *"lie within land defined as a New Area of Local Separation and play a positive role in maintaining the separation and identity of Syston and Queniborough"*.

**Views and visual character including skylines**

- 3.1.38 The CLSASS assessed the visual attributes of the SHLAA sites to have a Low-Medium landscape sensitivity. It noted *"The lack of topographical variation at PSH316 affords south westerly views from PSH316 across to residential properties on the settlement edge of Syston and industrial units at Queniborough Industrial Estate"* and that *"Vegetation within private gardens at residential properties on Avenue Road softens the northern boundary of PSH316"*.

**Access and recreation**

- 3.1.39 The CLSASS judged the SHLAA sites to have a Low-Moderate landscape sensitivity with respect to access and recreation. It is noted that a public

footpath crosses PSH316, linking Queniborough with Syston. The other sites are devoid of public access.

### **Perceptual and experiential qualities**

3.1.40 The CLSASS judged the perceptual and experiential attributes of the SHLAA sites to have a Moderate landscape sensitivity. It is noted that PSH316 retains its rural characteristics, despite its close association with existing development.

### **Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to development scenarios**

3.1.41 The SHLAA sites around Queniborough were found to have a Moderate landscape sensitivity to 2-3 storey residential development.

### **Key landscape sensitivities**

3.1.42 The "*special landscape qualities and key features/attributes that would be sensitive to change as a result of residential development*" at the SHLAA sites are noted as:

- *Rural character of the river valley landscape, agricultural land forming the settlement edges.*
- *Linear settlement pattern of Queniborough centred on the corridor of Main Street.*
- *The well wooded nature of the river valley.*
- *Views towards the historic core of Queniborough, designated as a Conservation Area.*

**Opportunities for mitigation or landscape enhancement**

3.1.43 Noted guidance and opportunities to consider for any future development within area included:

- *Retain and enhance the linear settlement pattern of Queniborough and respect the rural setting to the settlement.*
- *Maintain the broad open aspect of views towards the village, including vistas towards the spire of St. Mary's Church.*
- *Increase tree cover at the settlement edges to enhance the well wooded character of Queniborough village and self-contained character of the Wreake Valley.*

3.1.44 Given this assessment combines a number of SHLAA sites around Queniborough, often with different landscape attributes, I have found the findings of the assessment to be of limited use when considering the landscape effects of the appeal scheme.

***Charnwood Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Assessment Addendum***

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3.1.45 In February 2020, Charnwood Borough Council commissioned LUC to provide an addendum to the LSASS. The Charnwood Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Assessment Addendum (CLCSAA) was published in February 2021 [CD5.10]. The text notes "*This document builds upon results obtained in the 2019 'Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites' and forms an addendum to the previous study.*"

3.1.46 The objectives of the CLCSAA were as the LSASS, save that it assessed sites identified through Charnwood Borough Council's Local Plan review process.



The CLCSAA also consider development scenarios other than residential for some of the SHLAA sites, e.g. a primary school. Since these scenarios are not related to the appeal scheme, I have not considered them further here.

3.1.47 The appeal site falls within the SHLAA site referenced as *Land between Barkby Road and Melton Road*. This site extends southward from the edge of Queniborough to Syston; in doing so, it encompasses part of the emerging local plan allocation HA2. Its eastern boundary is defined by Barkby Road and western boundary by Melton Road.

3.1.48 As with the LCASS, a five-point scale was used to score the landscape sensitivity of each SHLAA site against a set of defined criteria and a judgement made regarding their overall landscape sensitivity.

#### **Physical character (including topography and scale)**

3.1.49 The CLCSAA judged the physical characteristics of the SHLAA site to have a Low-Moderate landscape sensitivity to development of the type proposed, noting that the fields "*are medium-sized and regular; however, the relatively flat landform and low-cut hedgerow boundaries create a more expansive and larger-scale landscape.*" It is my view that the conditions at the appeal site would accord with this judgement.

#### **Natural character**

3.1.50 The CLCSAA judged the natural character of the SHLAA site to have a Low-Moderate landscape sensitivity. The assessment noted that most fields are under arable cultivation but that some fields in the north had been subdivided into horse paddocks. Hedgerow boundaries were typically hawthorn and in mixed condition with some being low-cut or removed altogether, whilst

others are more established. Mature trees were infrequent. I consider the appeal site and its immediate environs reflects these judgements.

### **Historic landscape character**

3.1.51 The CLCSAA judged the historic landscape character had a Low-Moderate landscape sensitivity. The Heritage Landscape Classification identified most of the fields within this SHLAA site to be reorganised piecemeal enclosure, with some fields to the north being planned enclosure. It is noted that there are no known heritage features within this SHLAA site, and that it does not make a significant contribution to any heritage features within the wider landscape. I consider the appeal site and its immediate environs reflects these judgements.

### **Form, density, identity and setting of existing settlement/ development**

3.1.52 The CLCSAA judged the form, density, identity and setting of existing settlement/ development characteristics of the SHLAA site to have a High landscape sensitivity. The assessment notes that the *"site has an important role in the perception of a gap between Queniborough and Syston. Development of this site would result in the loss of the rural gap between Syston to the south-west and Queniborough to the north-east."* It goes on to note that the SHLAA site is undeveloped, although it is adjacent to dense urban development in Syston and Queniborough. Further, the edges of both settlements are prominent from points with the SHLAA the site and the SHLAA site itself provides an undeveloped setting to the existing settlements.

3.1.53 I concur with this judgement. It is my view that the appeal site plays an important role in maintaining the physical and perceived separation of Queniborough and Syston, and that it provides a key part of the Queniborough's undeveloped setting.

### **Views and visual character including skylines**

3.1.54 The CLCSAA judged the views and visual character including skylines of the SHLAA site to have a Moderate landscape sensitivity. It found that hedgerow boundaries create some semi-enclosed areas, although much of the SHLAA site has an open character, and that the open parts of the SHLAA have some intervisibility with the surrounding landscape (including views to agricultural land to the south-east). Skylines are largely undeveloped, although the site does not form a distinctive undeveloped skyline and rooftops of the adjacent development are visible to the north and south-west. Church spires in Queniborough and Barkby are visible from within the SHLAA site.

3.1.55 I concur with these judgements. The appeal site has some sense of semi-enclosure and the edge of Queniborough (and Syston) is visible from within, as is the church spire at Queniborough (and the tower at Syston).

### **Access and recreation**

3.1.56 The CLCSAA judged SHLAA site's access and recreation attributes to have a Low-Medium landscape sensitivity. It noted that the site is crossed by a public footpath connecting Syston and Queniborough. As I note previously, this footpath crosses the appeal site and it is my view that this element of the appeal site is particularly sensitive to change, and of greater sensitivity than the SHLAA site as a whole.

### **Perceptual and experiential qualities**

- 3.1.57 The CLCSAA judged the perceptual and experiential qualities of the SHLAA site had a Low-Medium landscape sensitivity. It noted that the SHLAA site has *"an intact rural character despite the proximity to settlement due to the agricultural land uses and frequent hedgerow boundaries. Some fields are sub-divided into horse paddocks which can detract from the structure of the landscape"*. Also, that distant traffic noise, and *"intervisibility with the existing settlement edge of Syston and Queniborough detract from the rural character"*. I concur with this judgement, although I was not particularly aware of traffic noise on my visits.

### **Overall assessment of landscape sensitivity to development scenarios**

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- 3.1.58 Overall, the parcel was assessed to have a landscape sensitivity of Medium-High to 2-3 storey residential development.
- 3.1.59 Reference to Figure 2.2 of the CLCSAA shows that a judgement of Moderate-High equates to *"The key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are sensitive to change"*:

### **Key landscape sensitivities**

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- 3.1.60 The assessment included a summary of the *"special landscape qualities and key features/attributes that would be sensitive to change as a result of new development"* in the SHLAA sites between Barkby Road and Melton Road. I have listed these below and provided commentary, where appropriate, of their relevance to the appeal site.

*The role the [SHLAA] site play[s] in retaining the sense of separation between Syston and Queniborough to the northeast, Barkby to the south-east and Thurmaston to the south.*

- 3.1.61 As I note above, I consider that the appeal site plays an important role in maintaining the sense of separation between Syston and Queniborough.

*The open and expansive character of some [SHLAA] sites, which are likely to have localised visual prominence if developed.*

- 3.1.62 Whilst the appeal site itself forms a relatively small part of the wider SHLAA site and has some sense of containment on two sides, the open nature of the wider SHLAA is such that were the appeal site to be developed, it would have local visual prominence, particularly to the south.

*Well-developed hedgerow boundaries often containing mature hedgerow trees which enforce the structure of the landscape. Some [SHLAA] sites also include areas of deciduous woodland, adding to the landscape diversity.*

- 3.1.63 Whilst the appeal site is hedged, its boundaries do not include mature hedgerow trees. Some young trees have been planted in recent years and these are now in varying condition. Many are of more ornamental species that do not reinforce the countryside character.

*Long distance views across the relatively flat and open agricultural landscape to surrounding settlements and some key skyline features including church spires in Queniborough and Barkby.*

3.1.64 Views are available from and across the appeal site to the edges of Queniborough and Syston. The church spire at Queniborough is visible in views across the appeal site from its southern approach along public footpath 184.

*The undeveloped setting the landscape provides to surrounding settlement, public rights of way and open access areas.*

3.1.65 As I note above, it is my view that the appeal site plays a key role in providing a landscape setting to the adjacent Queniborough. It also accommodates the route of public footpath 184, which provides an accessible and well-used route between Queniborough and Syston and the key means for pedestrians to experience the countryside of the SHLAA site and the separation of the two settlements.

*The rural working agricultural character, with of some [SHLAA] sites having little association with existing development.*

3.1.66 The appeal site retains a working agricultural character. It has greater association with existing development than do some of the other SHLAA sites.

### ***Opportunities for mitigation or landscape enhancement***

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3.1.67 The CLCSAA includes "*Guidance and opportunities to consider for any future development within area*". I consider how the appeal scheme accords with such guidance when I summarise the effects of the proposed development on landscape character at Section 3.2.

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## 3.2 Local landscape character assessment

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### *Study area*

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- 3.2.1 Published landscape character assessments provide a useful description of the key features of a landscape, but frequently they are too broad brush to pick up all of the characteristics that make it special. Conversely, an appraisal of the landscape features of the appeal site alone would not take account of the character of its setting.
- 3.2.2 To this end, I have undertaken my own local landscape character assessment (LLCA) that builds on the findings of the various landscape studies set out above. In the following paragraphs, I summarise what I consider are the key characteristics of the appeal site and its setting and describe how they would be affected by the development proposed.
- 3.2.3 In defining my study area, I have taken account of the likely visibility of the appeal scheme and I have also been mindful of the requirement to assess the effects of the proposed development on the identities of Queniborough and Syston and on the sense of openness within the ALS. My study area, broadly, is limited to the north by the southern edge of Queniborough and to the east by Barkby Road and the outer edge of the new housing. It extends southwards to the northern edge of Syston and to the arable fields to the east of the town. The western boundary is largely defined by Queniborough Industrial Estate. As such, it approximates to the eastern portion of the ALS, which I discuss in more detail later.
- 3.2.4 The topography of the study area is generally flat, being at or around 60m AOD. It forms part of the lower shallow valley side of the broad River Wreake

valley to the west and north-west. Beyond the study area and Barkby Road, the land rises relatively steeply to a series of ridges typical of High Leicestershire.

- 3.2.5 The land use of the study area is agricultural. It comprises small to medium field units that, in the north-western portion, have been sub-divided with temporary fences as horse paddocks. The remainder is arable agriculture.
- 3.2.6 The northern fields are largely bound by native hedges but the land to the south is more open with less sense of enclosure. There are no woodlands or significant groupings of trees within the study area.
- 3.2.7 The study area is devoid of settlement apart from Homestead Farm to the west and some relatively isolated dwellings set in well vegetated plots fronting Barkby Road. However, the edges of Queniborough and Syston exert an urbanising influence the north and south. Further containment is provided by Homestead Farm and Queniborough Industrial Estate to the west and, the Boonton Meadow development and associated mature trees to the east.
- 3.2.8 The study area exerts a relatively contained visual influence on the wider landscape, longer distance views are available to the rising ground to the south-east and there are views across the study area to the church tower of Syston and the spire of Queniborough. However, within its bounds, the lack of taller features and relatively flat topography results in a sense of openness across the area.



3.2.9 Despite the proximity of the adjacent settlements and the subdivision of some of the fields into horse paddocks, the study area retains a countryside character.

3.2.10 The study area currently provides the landscape setting for both the southern edge of Queniborough and the northern edge of Syston, separating and maintaining the separate identity of the two settlements.

### ***Landscape sensitivity of the LLCA study area***

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3.2.11 I judged the landscape of my study area to have an overall sensitivity to change of Medium. Sensitivity is derived through a combination of the perceived value of a landscape, combined with its susceptibility to change from the type of development proposed.

### **Landscape value**

3.2.12 In evaluating the landscape's sensitivity value, I considered the findings of the previously cited landscape studies and the advice contained in Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21, which sets out a range of factors that can be considered when assessing landscape value.

3.2.13 My LLCA concluded that the study area had a Medium landscape value. I made my judgement having regard to the following factors.

3.2.14 *Natural heritage.* The study area forms part of the lower valley sides of the River Wreake. Much of the study area is cultivated but there is some ecological interest in the hedgerow networks.

3.2.15 *Cultural heritage.* The study area does not contain any features with a heritage designation. The study area has been in agricultural use for many

years. Views are available across the study area to the spire of Queniborough Church and the tower of Syston church, which denote the cores of the historic settlements.

- 3.2.16 *Landscape condition.* The landscape is in a moderate condition. It retains its agricultural use and a relatively extensive network of hedges; however, some of the field units are devoid of hedges and others have been subdivided to create horse paddocks.
- 3.2.17 *Associations.* I am not aware that the study area has any connections with notable people, events or the arts
- 3.2.18 *Distinctiveness.* The study area, as corridor of farmland between two settlement is a recognisable feature with its own sense of identity, distinct from the urban areas that abut it. Further, there is a clear delineation between the two characters. The character of the study area is typical of farmed agricultural landscapes in the wider countryside.
- 3.2.19 *Recreational.* The study area accommodates a well-used public footpath that provides easily accessible access between the settlements of Queniborough and Syston, and an opportunity to enjoy the countryside.
- 3.2.20 *Perceptual.* The study area presents a farmland landscape, typical of this part of Leicestershire, with occasional views to the lands beyond. This is a working landscape and there is limited sense of tranquillity. There is no sense of wilderness. I was also mindful of the visual influences afforded to the study area from the existing settlement edges at Queniborough and Syston.

3.2.21 *Functional.* The arable land within the study area contributes to food production. Other parts of the study area provide equestrian facilities that could only be accommodated in the countryside. Importantly, the study area also provides a landscape setting to Syston and Queniborough, separates the two settlements and helps to maintain their individual identity.

### **Susceptibility to change**

3.2.22 I assessed the study area to have a Medium susceptibility to change from development of the type proposed, i.e. residential development with associated infrastructure on the edge of Queniborough. In making this judgement, I considered the following matters:

- The presence and proximity of the existing settlements of Queniborough and Syston and the character of the existing settlement edges.
- The nature of the existing land uses within the study area, and the potential loss of agricultural countryside.
- The potential effect of urbanisation extending into the study area.
- The potential change to the landscape setting of the public footpath and the experience of those using it.
- The potential loss of views towards church towers and spires.

### ***Effects on the LLCA study area***

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3.2.23 My summary LVIA found that the effects the appeal scheme would have on the character of the LLCA study area would not be limited to the appeal site

itself, but that a perceptible change in character would also be experienced from various points in the surrounding landscape.

3.2.24 I consider that the proposed development would have the following physical adverse effects on the characteristics of the LLCA study area, as well as on the appreciation of such factors from points in the surrounding landscape:

- Extension of the southern edge of Queniborough into the countryside.
- The wholesale change in land use at the site and the effect of introducing dwellings up to 2.5 storeys high, which (contrary to the Appellant's Design and Access Statement [para 5.4.3]) does not reflect the character of adjacent residential areas.
- The loss of an area of farmland that currently forms part of a wider continuum of countryside.
- The loss of sections of the hedgerow that divides the eastern and western parts of the appeal site.
- The adverse effects on the landscape setting of Queniborough.
- Decrease in the sense of openness currently afforded within the LLCA study area, despite the proximity of settlements.
- The effects the proposed development would have on the experience of users of public footpath 184, both passing through the development and on the northward approach to the development.

3.2.25 In undertaking my LLCA, I was also mindful of the following factors:

- The appeal scheme's location on the edge of an existing settlement and the appearance of this existing edge, where many properties afford a rear elevation to the wider landscape.
- The opportunity to largely retain the existing hedgerows that surround the site.

3.2.26 In future years, the LLCA study area will likely serve a greater function in maintaining the openness between Queniborough and Syston if the housing allocations in the emerging local plan are built out.

3.2.27 When considering the effects the appeal scheme might have on the landscape, I considered the CLCSAA's guidance for future development, were any of the SHLAA sites built out.

*Retain the sense of separation between Syston and surrounding settlements and seek to ensure they retain their unique identities.*

3.2.28 It is my view that the appeal scheme would compromise the sense of separation between Syston and Queniborough and would not retain their identities. I discuss this in more detail at Section 5.3.

*Seek to screen development when positioned in open and exposed areas which may have localised visual prominence.*

3.2.29 It is my view that the appeal scheme would be locally prominent in views from the public footpath as it approaches the site. I explain below why I do not consider there is sufficient space within the appeal scheme to screen the development.

*Conserve existing hedgerow boundaries, mature hedgerow trees and deciduous woodland to protect the structure of the landscape, help screen new development and enhance habitat networks.*

- 3.2.30 The appeal scheme would conserve the bounding hedges, but sections of the dividing hedge would be removed to facilitate the development.

*Where possible ensure development does not breach boundary features containing the existing settlement edge. Where this is unavoidable new planting of boundary features should be considered to preserve the existing settlement form and soften the new settlement edge.*

- 3.2.31 I do not consider the proposed development would breach boundary features that currently contain the existing settlement edge.

*Preserve views to distinctive skyline features including church spires and ensure new development does not block them from public rights of way or open access areas.*

- 3.2.32 The proposed scheme would block views to Queniborough church tower in views from the public footpath.

*Seek to retain the rural agricultural character of the landscape.*

- 3.2.33 The appeal scheme, and the loss of working agricultural land, would erode the rural character of the LLCA study area.

#### ***Landscape mitigation measures***

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- 3.2.34 In undertaking my assessment, I also took into account the effectiveness of the proposed landscape mitigation measures.

- 3.2.35 The planning application was accompanied by a Conceptual Plan that illustrates how the appeal scheme might be built out. The plan shows that if 150 units are to be accommodated at the site, there would be space for only a narrow band of planting on the most exposed frontages, e.g. the southern and eastern boundaries. It should also be noted that the outline nature of the application means that such measures are not currently secured in the proposed scheme.
- 3.2.36 For the southern boundary, the Conceptual Plan suggests that the existing hedge would be retained and that there would be a row (or a double staggered row) of trees along part of its length. No dimensions are provided but the planting is perhaps 5m wide. I do not consider such a feature constitutes the "*Strong Landscape Buffer to Southern Boundary*" as annotated on the plan.
- 3.2.37 The G&L LVA [CD1.06], para 5.7, notes that the existing recently planted trees on the southern boundary would be retained. As I have noted previously, these trees are not in a good state of health and many are of a species type that would not help reinforce a countryside character for the retained section of the LLCA study area.

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***Summary of effects on the LLCA study area***

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- 3.2.38 Taking all the above factors into account, I judged that there would be an effect on the character of the LLCA study area of Medium-High magnitude and Major-Moderate significance at year one, and that the effect would reduce to Medium magnitude by year 15 as the proposed planting starts to establish, leaving a residual effect of Moderate significance.

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***Comparison with findings of the G&L LVA***

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- 3.2.39 The G&L LVA [CD1.06] also included an assessment of the effects of the proposed development on the appeal site and its local landscape context.
- 3.2.40 I note that both assessments record a landscape value judgement of Medium for the appeal site and its environs.
- 3.2.41 In assessing the landscape's susceptibility to change, the G&L LVA makes reference to Part 2 of the Charnwood of the Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment. This study was undertaken at a broad scale and the appeal site falls within Zone 21, which extends between Syston and Queniborough on both sides of Melton Road.
- 3.2.42 Zone 21 was considered to have Medium High capacity to accommodate development "*due to the degraded condition of the appearance of the landscape and its low degree of tranquillity*". The study went on to note that development is likely to have a significant impact on the coalescence of Syston and Queniborough.
- 3.2.43 As I note above at Section 2, this study was undertaken in 2012 and, subsequent to the preparation of the G&L LVA in February 2018, finer grained sensitivity and capacity studies have been undertaken in March 2019 and February 2021 as part of the SHLAA studies to support the emerging local plan, and it is my view that these studies provide more specific baseline information regarding sensitivity.
- 3.2.44 Notwithstanding the above, I note that both the G&L LVA and the TLP LVIA record a landscape susceptibility to change judgment of Medium.



- 3.2.45 Similarly, both assessments give an overall sensitivity judgement of Medium.
- 3.2.46 The G&L LVA describes the changes to landscape character that would occur at the appeal site and concludes: *"This change in landscape terms will be of significance to the planning decision making process."* I concur with this judgement.
- 3.2.47 Regarding the effects of the appeal scheme on the wider landscape (the farmland between Queniborough and Syston), the G&L LVA concluded there would be an effect of Medium magnitude of change, leading to a short-term adverse landscape effect of Moderate significance. I believe these judgements place too much emphasis on the containment afforded by the existing settlement edge and give insufficient weight to the reduction in the sense of openness that would be experienced at and beyond the site. My LVIA concluded there would be a slightly higher magnitude of change and an effect of Major-Moderate significance in the early years of the development.
- 3.2.48 The G&L LVA concludes that *"In the long-term, the structural landscaping measures will have matured to soften to the settlement edge, and likewise the landscaping within the site and its associated open spaces will have matured limited any likely adverse landscape effect to moderate/minor significance."* It is my view that such judgements give too greater weight to the effectiveness of the mitigation planting, and my LVIA assessed the residual change to be of Medium magnitude and Moderate significance.

## **4 Effects on visual amenity**

### **4.1 Visual context**

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- 4.1.1 My summary LVIA found that the appeal site affords a relatively limited zone of visibility, but that a number of visual receptors (i.e. people) are currently able to experience clear, open and close-proximity views of the site from publicly accessible points and residential dwellings.
- 4.1.2 Views from the north are limited by the urban edge of Queniborough. However, there are views into the site from at least first floor windows of properties that front on to (e.g. Chestnut Close) or back on to (e.g. Avenue Road and The Ridings) the site along the entire length of this boundary.
- 4.1.3 From Barkby Road, views are available over the bounding hedge into the appeal site. Views from points further east are partly blocked by mature trees but occasional views remain from upper floor windows of properties on the edge of the Boonton Meadow development.
- 4.1.4 From various points on the northern edge of Syston, publicly accessible and residential, there are views out over the farmland towards the appeal site and the southern edge of Queniborough.
- 4.1.5 Views from the west are limited by the intervening presence of Queniborough Industrial estate and Homestead Farm, leaving only a very short section of Melton Road where visual receptors might experience views of the site.
- 4.1.6 From public footpath I84, which links Queniborough and Syston, clear open views are available where it crosses the site, and from the section that approaches the site from the south.

- 4.1.7 Despite the presence of the existing settlement edges, the views are still generally of farmland character. Views from Syston have a more urbanised foreground, and the taped paddocks and equestrian paraphernalia introduce some non-traditional countryside uses. However, the appeal site nonetheless visually forms part of a swath farmed countryside that provides the landscape setting to Queniborough and Syston.
- 4.1.8 For my independent summary LVIA, I selected a series of viewpoints to illustrate the likely visual effects of the proposed development. The viewpoints are similar to those considered in the G&L LVA [CD1.06]. I supplemented the G&L LVA viewpoints [i.e. Viewpoints 1 to 11] with additional viewpoints [Viewpoints A to G] that I considered useful to fully illustrate the effects of the proposed development when travelling in both directions on public footpath I84.
- 4.1.9 The selected viewpoints are all publicly accessible in nature and encompass a range of geographical locations and receptor types at varying distances from the site. It is important to note that many of the viewpoints are on public footpaths, and that the view described is frequently representative of that experienced from many other places on the route.
- 4.1.10 Photographs taken from each of the publicly accessible viewpoints considered in my evidence are reproduced at Appendix SJN 04, along with a plan extract showing the viewpoint location(s).
- 4.1.11 Table B of my LVIA (see Appendix SJN03) references each of my representative viewpoints, along with a judgement as to its visual value and its susceptibility to change as a result of the introduction of the proposed

development, which together provide an assessment of each receptor's overall visual sensitivity.

## **4.2 Visual effects during the construction phase**

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4.2.1 I consider that effects on views during construction would be a gradual progress towards those views experienced on completion, as the proposed development is progressively constructed and built-out, and new features appear. The main visual variation within the construction phase would be the presence of moving construction machinery (particularly taller equipment and/or that working at height), contractor's compounds, scaffolding, hoarding, temporary material stockpiles, raw and exposed earthworks to create new landforms, and delivery vehicles.

4.2.2 The majority of these elements are likely to be transient in nature and would be unlikely to be present for the full construction period, and thus would have only limited visual influence on the surrounding viewpoints, over and above the emerging development.

4.2.3 Consequently, with the exception of the introduction of any cranes or similar lifting equipment, I judged that there would be little or no greater influence on surrounding visual amenity during the construction phase than that predicted upon completion.

## **4.3 Visual effects at completion**

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4.3.1 In the following paragraphs, I have chosen a selection of the representative viewpoints considered in the G&L LVA to describe the key visual effects that are likely to arise from the proposed development. Further details can be

found at Appendix SJN 03 Table B, and photographs illustrating the composition of the existing view at Appendix SJN 04.

***Close-distance views from the southern edge of Queniborough (see Viewpoints 3 and 4, and also Viewpoint A)***

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- 4.3.2 From the properties in Chestnut Close, the site's boundary hedge provides some screening from ground level views, but there remains a sense of an open landscape beyond the hedge. Similarly, from the rear elevations of properties in Avenue Road and at the southern end of The Ridings, lower-level views are largely held by garden vegetation and boundaries but a clear sense of an open landscape beyond remains. Views from first floor windows are open and expansive, and encompass the appeal site, its countryside setting and the northern edge of Syston.
- 4.3.3 The fence and the existing boundary hedge would be retained and would screen lower elevations of proposed development but there would be a sense of lost openness in the airspace above the appeal site. From higher vantage points and from points further back (e.g. the approach into Chestnut Close, close proximity views would be available over the hedge into the proposed development, and from upper floor windows there would be a loss of longer-distance views across the landscape. The Design and Access Statement notes that units on the northern boundary would be single storey to minimise visual influence.
- 4.3.4 There is limited opportunity to mitigate these views, although the Conceptual Plan illustrates the built form adjacent to Chestnut Close as being set back from the boundary.

4.3.5 I consider that a change of High magnitude to a visual receptor of High sensitivity, so that an effect of Major-Moderate adverse significance would be experienced from these points; such effects would persist to year 15.

4.3.6 I note that the G&L LVA records residual effects of Major-Moderate significance at Viewpoints 3 and 4.

***Close-distance views from Barkby Road (see Viewpoints 1 and 2)***

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4.3.7 From points along Barkby Road to the east of the site there are clear views over the bounding hedge into the appeal site. Not dissimilar views are available from points further south on this road, where the appeal site is experienced beyond an intervening field and hedge. The composition of these views includes (to varying degrees depending on the location of the viewpoint) the edge of Queniborough to the right and the edge of Syston to the left. In future years, the view would also include the housing in the emerging local plan allocation HA2, were it to be built out. The central portion of the view includes glimpses of taller vegetation within the valley beyond and a higher landscape in the distance.

4.3.8 The recent Boonton Meadow development on the eastern side of Barkby Road is separated from the road by a line of mature trees. From within the development, this vegetation would filter views into the appeal site, especially in summer months.

4.3.9 The proposed development and the new entrance would be a clearly visible in views from Barkby Road, especially those from points in the immediate vicinity of the site. The development would be up to 2.5 storeys and would

foreshorten the view and block any views of the landscape beyond the appeal site.

- 4.3.10 The Conceptual Plan shows the developed area set back from the eastern edge of the site and a line of trees on the planted along this boundary beyond the retained hedge. In future years, when they become established, these trees would start to filter some views of the new development, but they could not mitigate for the loss of views over farmland.
- 4.3.11 I found there would be a residual change of Medium magnitude and thus an effect of Moderate significance.
- 4.3.12 I note that the G&L LVA considered the effect would be greater, recording a residual effect of Major-Moderate significance.

***Views from public footpath I84, connecting Syston and Queniborough (see Viewpoints 5 and 6)***

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- 4.3.13 Public footpath I84 crosses the appeal site and so affords clear and open views into the eastern field. Views to the western field are blocked by the intervening hedge, but there is a sense of undeveloped landscape beyond.
- 4.3.14 For pedestrians leaving the edge of Syston and travelling along the footpath in a north-eastern direction, the appeal site becomes increasingly visible in the view. The intervening hedges provide some baffle to lower views but there is a clear sense of the airspace above the site and, increasingly, views of the edge of Queniborough beyond the site.
- 4.3.15 On completion of the proposed development, there would be clear and open views into the proposed development from the section of footpath that

crosses the site. The new development, which would be up to 2.5 storeys high, would become increasingly dominant in the view for pedestrians travelling along the footpath from Syston.

4.3.16 The Conceptual Plan illustrates a line of the trees along the southern edge of the site; however, for the reasons I explain at Section 3.2, it is my view that this would be insufficient to mitigate the views from the footpath in a meaningful manner.

4.3.17 My summary LVIA judged that there would be a visual change of High and Medium at Viewpoints 5 and 6 respectively, which would equate to effects of Major-Moderate adverse significance. It is my view that this change would decrease to between Medium and Medium-Low by year 15, which would equate to effects of Major-Moderate and Moderate adverse significance.

4.3.18 The G&L LVA found the effect at Viewpoint 5 would be higher, recording an effect of Major adverse significance. By year 15, the effects are considered to be of Moderate significance for both views. It is my view that the judgement for Viewpoint 5, at year 15, places too greater a weight of the effectiveness of the proposed planting on the southern boundary in assimilating 2.5 storey dwellings into the landscape.

#### ***Views from the northern edge of Syston (see Viewpoint 7)***

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4.3.19 From the northern edge of Syston, in the vicinity of Ridgemere Close, the appeal site is experienced as part of the town's landscape setting, beyond intervening arable fields.



- 4.3.20 The view also encompasses glimpses of the edge of Queniborough and a more vegetated landscape beyond.
- 4.3.21 The appeal scheme would encroach into the farmland and bring development at Queniborough closer to the viewer. Hedges would screen the lower elevations but the proposed development, up to 2.5 storeys, would be visible above. As I have explained previously, I do not consider there is sufficient space reserved in the Conceptual Plan to mitigate these visual effects.
- 4.3.22 I concluded that there would be a residual effect of Moderate adverse significance. The G&L LVA recorded a residual effect of Minor significance.

***Middle-distance views from Barkby Road (see Viewpoint 8)***

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- 4.3.23 From points further south on Barkby Road, some views of the appeal site are blocked by foreground vegetation and, in particular, individual residential plots set in well well-vegetated gardens. Where the site is visible, so is the edge of Queniborough beyond. From these points, the higher land beyond the Wreake valley is visible as a backdrop.
- 4.3.24 I judged that the introduction of the appeal scheme would have limited effect on the composition of the view and would result in a residual effect of Minor adverse significance. The G&L LVA concluded there would be a residual effect of Minimal significance.

## **5 Consideration of the landscape-related Reasons for Refusal**

### **5.1 Overview**

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5.1.1 In this section of my proof or evidence, I consider aspects of the Reason for Refusal that relate to landscape and visual matters. In doing so, I will address the harmful impact the appeal scheme would have, in itself and cumulatively with other development, on:

- the character of the countryside, and
- the Area of Local Separation.

### **5.2 The harmful impact the appeal scheme would have on the character of the countryside**

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5.2.1 I explain at Section 3.1 of my evidence how the appeal site falls within the Wreake Valley LCA of the Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment 2012. I have described the characteristic features of this LCA and explained why I consider the landscape of the appeal site and its surrounds shares many of the typical features of the Wreake Valley, particularly the western/south-western portion of this LCA.

5.2.2 To test the likely effects of the proposed development on the character of the appeal site and its environs, I undertook my own Local Landscape Character Assessment (LLCA). I set out my findings at Section 3.2 and summarise my conclusions below.

5.2.3 I found the appeal scheme would exert the following adverse effects on the character of the landscape and its appreciation from surrounding points:

- Extension of the edge of Queniborough southward, into what is currently countryside.
- The loss of farmland that currently forms part of a wider continuum of countryside, and so the loss of and change to the landscape setting of the village of Queniborough.
- The wholesale change in land use and character at the site, and introduction of up to 150 dwellings up to 2.5 storeys high and associated infrastructure.
- The loss of sections of the hedgerow that divides the eastern and western parts of the appeal site.
- The loss of views to the spire of St Mary's church, Queniborough.
- The decrease in the sense of openness currently experienced within the LLCA study area, despite the proximity of settlements.

5.2.4 I was also mindful of the following factors:

- The appeal scheme's location on the edge of an existing settlement and the appearance of this existing edge, where many properties offer a rear elevation to the wider landscape.
- The opportunity to largely retain the existing hedgerows that surround the site.

5.2.5 In undertaking my assessment, I took account of the effectiveness of the proposed landscape mitigation measures, as illustrated on the Conceptual Plan [CD1.03]. I concluded that the space available on the site's southern boundary was insufficient to establish robust mitigation planting that would

provide a meaningful new vegetated edge to Queniborough to assimilate the proposed development into the landscape. Rather, the new edge would have an urbanised character by nature of the new buildings that would be visible through it.

5.2.6 I concluded that there would be an effect on the character of the LLCA study area of Medium-High magnitude and Major-Moderate significance at year one, and that the effect would reduce to Medium magnitude at year 15 as the proposed planting starts to establish, leaving a residual effect of Moderate adverse significance.

5.2.7 Therefore, I conclude that the development would cause harm to the character of the countryside by reason of adverse effects on the landscape character of the appeal site, on the appreciation of features in the surrounding landscape, and on the landscape setting of Queniborough.

### 5.3 **The harmful impact the appeal scheme would have on the Area of Local Separation**

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5.3.1 Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028, Core Strategy, adopted 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015 [CD5.03], Policy CS11 seeks to protect, amongst other things, the separation of settlements through the allocation of Areas of Local Separation (ALS).

***Policy CS11: Landscape and Countryside notes:***

*We will support and protect the character of our landscape and countryside by: [amongst other things] ...*

- requiring new development to maintain the separate identities of our towns and villages; ...*

*We will protect the predominantly open and undeveloped character of Areas of Local Separation unless new development clearly maintains the separation between the built-up areas of these settlements.*

5.3.2 The supporting text reinforces the aims of ALS and notes [my emphasis]:

*Our towns and villages are concentrated along the river valleys of the Soar and the Wreake and around the edge of Leicester City. As these towns and villages have grown the space between them has got smaller because of this landscape. Our communities have increasingly become concerned about their identities as separate places. 'Areas of Local Separation' have been used successfully to guide development in areas between our towns and villages. The policy has maintained the character and identity of individual settlements and prevented their coalescence.*

[para 7.13]

*We will continue to use Areas of Local Separation. We will retain the following Areas of Separation, the boundaries of which will be reviewed through the Site Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document: ...*

*j. Queniborough/Syston ... [para 7.14]*

*The retention of Areas of Local Separation will be balanced against the need to provide new development, including new homes, in the most sustainable locations. [para 7.15]*

5.3.3 Areas of Local Separation are defined in the Glossary accompanying the Core Strategy as:

*An area of open countryside that separates two neighbouring settlements, whose main purpose is preserving settlement identity, and which is based on landscape character and visual appearance of the area.*

- 5.3.4 The footprint of the ALS between Queniborough and Syston is illustrated on the local plan proposals map at [CD5.02].
- 5.3.5 Its north-eastern boundary abuts the settlement edge of Queniborough and is defined by the rear gardens of properties in New Zealand Lane, the edge of the Queniborough industrial Estate, Chestnut Close, and the rear gardens of properties in Avenue Road and The Ridings.
- 5.3.6 The eastern boundary is formed by Barkby Road.
- 5.3.7 The southern boundary follows Syston's settlement edge, being defined by the outer edge of emerging local plan allocation HA4, Wallace Healey Close, the new play area, Barkby Road Cemetery, and the outer edge of allocation HA2.
- 5.3.8 To the north-west, the ALS continues to the railway line and is then contiguous with the ALS between Queniborough and East Goscote.
- 5.3.9 As such, it encompasses land in a variety of uses, including arable, grazing and horticultural, and also the various buildings at Homestead Farm and the greenhouses at Bourden Farm, west of Melton Road.
- 5.3.10 The Queniborough Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2028: Referendum, February 2021 [CD5.06] reinforces the aim of maintaining the separate identities of

Queniborough and Syston. The objectives of Policy CS11 are reflected in Policy Q6.

***Policy Q6: Countryside and Landscape***

*We will support and protect the character of our landscape and countryside (the area outside Limits to Development) by applying the requirements of Policy CS11 of the Charnwood Local Plan 2011- 2028 Core Strategy or equivalent landscape or countryside policy. In respect of complying with the requirement for new development to maintain the separate identities of our town and villages, the Area of Local Separation between Queniborough and Syston and East Goscote shall be as shown on this Neighbourhood Plan's Countryside Map unless the land is allocated for development in a development plan document.*

5.3.11 The supporting text describes the value placed on the village's separate identity by the community and notes:

*As Syston, Queniborough and East Goscote have grown, the space between them has got smaller. Our community has increasingly become concerned about the separate identity of Queniborough. 98% of respondents to our 2019 Questionnaire Survey agree that there should be open countryside between Queniborough, Syston, East Goscote and Barkby. [para 6.14]*

*'Areas of Local Separation' between Queniborough and Syston and East Goscote have been used successfully to guide development and maintain the character and identity of the village and prevent coalescence. [para 6.15]*

*The boundaries of the 'Areas of Local Separation' were reviewed by Charnwood Borough Council in 2016 and this has formed the basis of their definition in the Queniborough Neighbourhood Plan. The boundaries also reflect the recommendations of the Queniborough Neighbourhood Plan Examiner. [para 6.16]*

5.3.12 Having regard to the tests within Policy CS11 and the wording within the supporting text, I have described the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the landscape between Queniborough and Syston (including the influence afforded to it by the adjacent settlements) at Section 3 of my Proof of Evidence, and explained at Sections 3 and 4 why its character would be comprised by the development proposed at the appeal site.

5.3.13 In the following paragraphs, I explain how the appeal scheme would:

- (a) diminish the physical and perceived separation between Queniborough and Syston, and
- (b) compromise the function of the ALS in regard to protecting the separate identity of the two settlements and the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the land within.

***Effects of the appeal scheme on physical and perceived separation***

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5.3.14 My starting point is to consider whether the appeal scheme would diminish the physical and/or perceived separation between Queniborough and Syston.

5.3.15 It is agreed that the appeal scheme would extend wholly into the ALS.

5.3.16 I understand that the Areas of Local Separation policy became an established part of planning policy in Leicestershire in the 1980s. They were retro-fitted



to the landscape in a bid to maintain existing separation between settlements from being eroded. As a result, the width of the ALSs varies, for example:

- to the west of Melton Road the ALS is c.330m wide
- along Melton Road the ALS is c.175m wide
- between Queniborough Industrial Estate and the edge of Syston it is between c.220m and c.260m wide
- between the southern edge of Queniborough and the edge of the edge of Syston it is c.370m wide
- between the southern edge of Queniborough and emerging local plan allocation HA2 it is c.630m wide

5.3.17 Were the appeal scheme to be built out, the width of the ALS between the southern boundary of the appeal site and the northern edge of Queniborough would be c.220m, and between the appeal site and allocation HA2 would be c.500m.

5.3.18 It follows that there would be a material reduction in the width of the ALS between Queniborough and Syston of up to 40% (where the introduction of the appeal site reduces the width of the ALS from 370m to 220m). I acknowledge that this would not be the narrowest part of this ALS, e.g. the width along Melton Road is c.175m.

5.3.19 It is my view that the degree of effect cannot be quantified by a simple mathematical calculation alone; it is the contribution of the land that is lost to the overall sense of separation and openness that is most important, not the quantity lost.

- 5.3.20 Whilst the appeal scheme would clearly compromise the physical separation of Queniborough and Syston, it is clear that the appeal scheme would cause greater harm to the perceived separation of the two settlements. The ALS seeks to safeguard the perceived separation by maintaining the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the land within.
- 5.3.21 Queniborough and Syston have developed, historically, as two separate settlements, separated from each other by a tract of farmed countryside. Over the years, this gap has been reduced as both settlements have expanded outwards. This pressure would increase were the sites allocated in the emerging local plan also built out.
- 5.3.22 The sense of an open and undeveloped character is weaker in the portion of the ALS to the west of Melton Road. Here, greenhouses and other buildings associated with its horticultural uses, break up the more open areas. These uses likely pre-date the allocation of the ALS. The introduction of the appeal scheme would have no effect on the sense of openness of here.
- 5.3.23 To the east of Melton Road, the ALS is largely devoid of built form, save the buildings associated with Homestead Farm, which again likely predate the allocation of the ALS. It is my view that this part of the ALS has been successfully in maintaining the predominantly open and undeveloped character of this tract of farmland, and so has played an important role in safeguarding the separation and separate identity of the two settlements. In the following paragraphs I explain how these functions and the perceived separation of Queniborough and Syston would be compromised by the introduction of the appeal scheme.

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***Appreciation of the separate identity of the two settlements***

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- 5.3.24 In terms of appreciating the separation and the separate identity of Queniborough and Syston, I believe that it is important there is a visual and neutral break when travelling between the two settlements, so that there is a perception that travellers are leaving one settlement, passing through open countryside without strong affinity to either settlement, before arriving in a new settlement.
- 5.3.25 There are two main routes connecting Queniborough and Syston where changes at the appeal site could influence the perceived separation of the two settlements: Barkby Road to the immediate east of the appeal site and public footpath I84 that crosses the appeal site. I will consider each in turn below.

**Barkby Road**

- 5.3.26 When travelling southward along Barkby Road, there is a sense of leaving the main urban core of Queniborough and its associated built forms and passing into a section of the road with a different streetscape. Views to the arable land to the right signifies the presence of undeveloped farmed countryside, and a sense of travelling along the edge of the village. The Boonton Meadow development to the left is set back behind retained mature trees which provide a new vegetated edge to this part of Queniborough.
- 5.3.27 At present, there is little sense of arrival at Syston as the farmland and the sense of openness continues on the right-hand side and, further along the road, on the left side too. The presence of the Syston is experienced only as views across arable land to the town's settlement edge.

- 5.3.28 The various individual properties that front Barkby Road, typically set within well vegetated plots, do little to erode the open character of this tract of countryside.
- 5.3.29 In future years, were allocation HA2 built out, the new development would meet Barkby Road and there would be sense of arrival at Syston.
- 5.3.30 Moving in the reverse direction, there is currently little sense of leaving Syston, since its presence has limited visual influence on road travellers. However, there would be a stronger effect were allocation HA2 built out.
- 5.3.31 Views on the central section of the road are similar to those experienced when travelling in the opposite direction with regard to the farmland. As travellers reach Queniborough, the edge of the village (Avenue Road) becomes increasingly visible as a backdrop to views.
- 5.3.32 Development of the appeal scheme would create a very different character for the section of Barkby Road closest to Queniborough. Urban forms would be visible on both sides of the road, and the sense of leaving the village and passing through countryside would be pushed southward to beyond the appeal site. My LVIA concluded that receptors on this part of Barkby Road would experience a residual visual effect of Moderate adverse significance; whilst the G&L LVA concluded Major-Moderate adverse significance.
- 5.3.33 it is my view that the appeal scheme would have an adverse effect on the sense of openness of the ALS, as experienced in views from Barkby Road in the vicinity of Queniborough. It would also have a small adverse effect on the

sense of separation of Queniborough and Syston. This effect would be reinforced were allocation HA2 built out.

### **Public footpath I84**

- 5.3.34 I have used a series of photographs to illustrate views from the public footpath (see Appendix SJN 04, Viewpoints 5, 6 and A to G) and arranged these to illustrate the experience of pedestrians travelling south from Queniborough on public footpath I84 at Appendix SJN 04, Figure 2.
- 5.3.35 Pedestrians travelling southward along public footpath I84 emerge from the narrow alleyway that links back to Avenue Road on the northern boundary of the appeal site. From here, the footpath affords open views across the eastern field; views to the western field are largely blocked by the central hedge.
- 5.3.36 In the centre of the view, the northern edge of Syston is visible above the intervening hedge lines. The build-up of hedges and the lack of views of the ground plane beyond the appeal site mean that it is difficult to ascertain a sense of distance. To the right, Homestead Farm and then the edge of the Queniborough Industrial Estate are visible. To the left the view is more distant, although in future years allocation HA2 would also be visible, were it to be built out. See Appendix SJN 04, Viewpoint A.
- 5.3.37 Despite the presence of the built features in the background of the view, there is a strong sense of leaving the urban settlement of Queniborough and entering into an agricultural landscape with a sense of openness and a clear and distinct definition between developed and undeveloped land. It is my view that this character continues for most of the length of the footpath between the settlements.

- 5.3.38 Continuing along the footpath, the user crosses the appeal site and through the hedge of the site's southern boundary. The central section of the route passes along a corridor bordered by a series of horse paddocks defined by temporary fencing. See Viewpoint C.
- 5.3.39 From this section of the route, the edge of Queniborough becomes increasingly prominent, being the dominant feature in the central section of the vista. To the left, the longer distance views out to the south-east and across Barkby Road are clearer; as previously, part of these views would be obscured by allocation HA2, were it built out. To the right, Homestead Farm is less obvious, and there are occasional glimpses into the corridor of land between the farm and Syston.
- 5.3.40 As the user travellers further south, Queniborough becomes ever dominant in the view. See Viewpoint D.
- 5.3.41 Upon arrival at Syston the edge of the town is clearly delineated by a hedge, and the route of the footpath continues past and along a recently planted tree-lined corridor through the settlement to meet Millstone Lane. There is a strong sense of arrival at the destination.
- 5.3.42 I have also illustrated the experience of pedestrians travelling in the opposite direction, i.e. north from Syston on public footpath I84, at Appendix SJN 04, Figure 3.
- 5.3.43 The user leaves Syston via the tree-lined avenue that connects with Millstone Lane. Views to the appeal site and the edge of Queniborough are largely blocked by a native hedge in the foreground. See Viewpoint E.

- 5.3.44 The pedestrian then passes through the native hedge. There is a clear sense of leaving Syston and entering a different landscape. The foreground of the view now comprises the aforementioned paddocks and an intervening hedge. The southern boundary of the appeal site is visible, albeit filtered by the intervening vegetation. The edge of Queniborough is largely filtered by intervening trees. It is noticeable that the housing on this edge of Queniborough is slightly lower and has shallower pitched roofs than does that on the edge of Syston, and so it is less prominent in the landscape. See Viewpoint 6.
- 5.3.45 As the traveller passes through the second hedge and approaches the appeal site, the site becomes ever clearer in the view, as does the settlement edge of Queniborough. See Viewpoint 5. From within the appeal site, Queniborough is clearly visible as the backdrop. To the left, views of the western field are blocked by the central hedge, but there is a clear sense of an undeveloped land within. See Viewpoint F and G.
- 5.3.46 The narrow alleyway on the edge of Queniborough is a less successful destination arrival point; nonetheless, there is a clear delineation between the farmed landscape and the urban one.
- 5.3.47 In summary, it is my view that there is a clear sense of leaving Queniborough and passing through a more neutral and predominantly open and undeveloped landscape (despite the presence of the edge of Syston in the background of the view) before arriving at the edge of Syston. As such, I consider that the separate identities of the two settlements can be clearly appreciated.

- 5.3.48 Further, I believe a similar experience is gained when the route is travelled in the opposite direction, i.e. from Syston to Queniborough.
- 5.3.49 Were the appeal site to be developed in the manner proposed, there would be clear changes to the experience of using public footpath I84.
- 5.3.50 When travelling south, the appeal site would appear as part of Queniborough. The Conceptual Plan illustrates the footpath passing through a corridor of open space but this would not have the sense of undeveloped openness that is currently afforded by the appeal site.
- 5.3.51 The portion of the footpath from which the largely open and undeveloped character could be experienced would decrease significantly, from c.530m to c.290m, a 45% reduction in length. Further, for this remaining length, users would be clearly aware of the presence of Syston in the background and the section that currently exhibits the greatest qualities of openness when travelling southward (i.e. the appeal site) would be lost.
- 5.3.52 These distances are illustrated in Mr Ward's Proof of Evidence.
- 5.3.53 It is my view that a distance of 290m is an insufficient length to be considered neutral, particularly when the prominent edge of Syston is an ever-present backdrop in the view and thus it would not maintain the separate identity of the two settlements.
- 5.3.54 When travelling in the opposite direction, from passing through the hedge on the edge of Syston, the new edge of Queniborough would be increasingly prominent in the view. The new houses on the edge of the development would be up to 2.5 storeys high, and so taller than the houses that currently provide



the village's edge. As I discuss at Section 3.2, I do not consider that the Conceptual Plan allows sufficient space to implement a mitigation scheme that would assimilate the new edge into the landscape and start to mitigate its influence on the remaining portion of the ALS.

5.3.55 The same arguments about the reduction in length of footpath passing through undeveloped land apply when travelling northwards, and similarly the concerns regarding the prominence of the destination urban edge and the influence it would afford on the remaining section of footpath. In this direction, its influence is likely to be greater since it would be up to 2.5 storeys high, whereas the edge of Syston is generally 2 storeys.

5.3.56 Again, I consider that the separate identity of Syston and Queniborough would not be maintained.

### **Effects on individual and separate identities of Queniborough and Syston**

5.3.57 Having regard to my findings of my assessment of the appreciation of separation, I conclude that the appeal scheme would unacceptably compromise the separation and separate identity of Queniborough and Syston. The proposed development would change the appeal site from agricultural farmland to an urbanised development, shorten the physical distance between Queniborough and Syston and adversely harm the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the remaining portion of the ALS that reinforces the separation between the two settlements, particularly as experienced from the popular and well used public footpath I84.

5.3.58 In future years, the ALS will likely serve a greater function in maintaining the open and undeveloped land between Queniborough and Syston, as a result of the cumulative effects that would arise were the housing allocations in the emerging local plan built, and which would introduce increased urbanising influences on the edge of the ALS.

## **6 Summary and Conclusion of Proof of Evidence**

### **6.1 Background**

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6.1.1 My association with the appeal scheme commenced in April 2023, when The Landscape Partnership was approached by Charnwood Borough Council with a view to providing evidence in support of its refusal of application P/20/2380/2 [CD4.01].

6.1.2 The Landscape Partnership was subsequently instructed to provide expert witness services at a forthcoming public inquiry.

6.1.3 In my Proof of Evidence, I have drawn on my knowledge of the site and the findings of my own summary LVIA and have:

- summarised the landscape context of the site and its setting;
- considered the likely effects of the proposed development on the landscape character of the appeal site; and
- addressed landscape and visual aspects of the Reason for Refusal: the harmful impact that the appeal scheme would have on the character of the countryside and on the Area of Local Separation (ALS).

6.1.4 In addressing the Reasons for Refusal, I have demonstrated:

- The harmful impact that the appeal scheme would have on the character of the countryside in which the site is located, both in itself and cumulatively with other development.
- How the proposal would erode the separation of Queniborough and Syston, and the predominantly open and undeveloped character the ALS

seeks to protect, thereby not protecting nor maintaining the separate identities of the town and village.

6.1.5 Planning Application P/20/2380/2 was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) [CD1.06] prepared by Golby & Luck Landscape Architects, which I refer to here as the G&L LVA.

## 6.2 **Site context**

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6.2.1 The appeal site is located within the tract of countryside between Queniborough and Syston in Leicestershire. It comprises two fields that together total c.5.84ha.

6.2.2 The western appeal site field has a grass cover and is also in use for horse grazing. A gate provides access to Chestnut Close, and another to the fields to the south. The eastern field has a cereal crop and access is taken from Barkby Road. The outer boundaries of the two fields are defined by hedges.

6.2.3 To the north, the appeal site abuts the settlement edge of Queniborough and to the east Barkby Road. The western boundary is largely defined by the Queniborough Industrial Estate.

6.2.4 To the south are further agricultural fields, those to the immediate south have been subdivided by tape fencing to create small paddocks for grazing horses and those further to the south-east are in arable production. As such, the appeal site forms a part of a wider continuum of farmland.

6.2.5 A Public footpath I84 follows a line from Avenue Road, along a narrow alley way between property plots, before crossing the eastern field of the appeal site. From here, it follows a corridor between the temporary fencing defining

the horse paddocks to meet the northern edge of Syston and in particular Millstone Lane.

### **6.3 Effects on the character of the countryside**

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6.3.1 To test the likely effects of the proposed development on the character of the appeal site and its environs, I undertook my own Local Landscape Character Assessment (LLCA).

6.3.2 In defining my study area, I took account of the likely visibility of the appeal scheme and I was also mindful of the requirement to assess the effects of the proposed development on the identities of Queniborough and Syston and on the sense of openness within the ALS.

6.3.3 I assessed my LLCA study area would have a Medium sensitivity to change, a similar view to that in the G&L LVA.

6.3.4 I found the appeal scheme would exert the following adverse effects on the character of the LLCA study area:

- Extension of the southern edge of Queniborough into the countryside.
- The wholesale change in land use at the site and the effect of introducing dwellings up to 2.5 storeys high, does not reflect the character of adjacent residential areas.
- The loss of an area of farmland that currently forms part of a wider continuum of countryside.
- The loss of sections of the hedgerow that divides the eastern and western parts of the appeal site.

- The adverse effects on the landscape setting of Queniborough.
- Decrease in the sense of openness currently afforded within the LLCA study area, despite the proximity of settlements.
- The effects the proposed development would have on the experience of users of public footpath 184, on the northward approach to the development.

6.3.5 In undertaking my LLCA, I was also mindful of the appeal scheme's location on the edge of an existing settlement and the opportunity to largely retain the existing hedgerows that surround the site.

6.3.6 When considering the effects the appeal scheme might have on the landscape, I also took into account the effectiveness of the proposed landscape mitigation measures.

6.3.7 The planning application was accompanied by a Conceptual Plan [CD1.03] that illustrates how the appeal scheme might be built out. The plan shows that if 150 units are to be accommodated at the site, there would be space for only a narrow band of planting on the most exposed frontages, e.g. the southern and eastern boundaries. Since the application is in outline, such measures are not currently secured in the proposed scheme.

6.3.8 For the southern boundary, the Conceptual Plan suggests that the existing hedge would be retained and that there would be a row (or a double staggered row) of trees along part of its length. No dimensions are provided but the planting is perhaps 5m wide. I do not consider such a feature constitutes the "*Strong Landscape Buffer to Southern Boundary*" as annotated on the plan.

- 6.3.9 It is my view that the space available on the site's southern boundary would be insufficient to establish robust mitigation planting that would provide a meaningful new vegetated edge to Queniborough to assimilate the proposed development into the landscape.
- 6.3.10 Taking all the factors into account, I judged that there would be an effect on the character of the LLCA study area of Medium-High magnitude and Major-Moderate significance at year one, and that the effect would reduce to Medium magnitude by year 15 as the proposed planting starts to establish, leaving a residual effect of Moderate significance.
- 6.3.11 In future years, the LLCA study area will likely serve a greater function in maintaining the openness between Queniborough and Syston if the housing allocations in the emerging local plan are built out.
- 6.3.12 The G&L LVA [CD1.06] describes the changes to landscape character that would occur at the appeal site and concludes: *"This change in landscape terms will be of significance to the planning decision making process."* I concur with this judgement.
- 6.3.13 The G&L LVA concludes that *"In the long-term, the structural landscaping measures will have matured to soften to the settlement edge, and likewise the landscaping within the site and its associated open spaces will have matured limited any likely adverse landscape effect to moderate/minor significance."* It is my view that such judgements give too greater weight to the effectiveness of the mitigation planting.

6.3.14 In summary, I concluded that the development would cause harm to the character of the countryside by reason of adverse effects on the landscape character of the appeal site, on the appreciation of features in the surrounding landscape, and on the landscape setting of Queniborough.

## 6.4 **Effects on visual receptors**

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6.4.1 My summary LVIA found that the appeal site affords a relatively limited zone of visibility, but that a number of visual receptors (i.e. people) are currently able to experience clear, open and close-proximity views of the site from publicly accessible points and residential dwellings.

6.4.2 I considered the effects of the appeal scheme on a variety of visual receptors and found that the proposed development would be visible by users of public footpath I84 and Barkby Road, and by receptors on Barkby Road.

6.4.3 In assessing visual effects, I took into account the effectiveness of the proposed landscape mitigation measures. From many viewpoints, I found that the proposed development would remain clearly visible, even when the proposed mitigation planting was established.

6.4.4 I judged there would be effects of Major-Moderate adverse significance at year 15 from points on public footpath I84 that cross the appeal site, and I note that the G&L LVA reached similar conclusions.

6.4.5 From points in the section of Barkby Road closest to the appeal site, I assessed there would be residual effects of Moderate adverse significance. The G&L LVA concluded such effects would be of Major-Moderate significance.



6.4.6 I concluded that the development would cause harm to visual receptors in the vicinity of the appeal scheme, through the introduction of new housing, the loss of longer distance views across farmland and, from localised points, the loss of views to the spire of Queniborough church.

## 6.5 **Effects on the separation and separate identity of Queniborough and Syston**

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6.5.1 Charnwood Local Plan 2011 to 2028, Core Strategy, adopted 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015 [CD5.03], Policy CS11 seeks to protect, amongst other things, the separation of settlements through the allocation of Areas of Local Separation (ALS).

### ***Policy CS11: Landscape and Countryside notes:***

*We will support and protect the character of our landscape and countryside by: [amongst other things] ...*

- requiring new development to maintain the separate identities of our towns and villages; ...*

*We will protect the predominantly open and undeveloped character of Areas of Local Separation unless new development clearly maintains the separation between the built-up areas of these settlements.*

6.5.2 This objective is reinforced by the Queniborough Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2028: Referendum, February 2021 [CD5.06], where Policy Q6 reinforces the aim of maintaining the separate identities of Queniborough and Syston by reflecting Policy CS11.

6.5.3 In my proof I have described, having regard to the tests within Policy CS11 and the wording within the supporting text, the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the landscape between Queniborough and Syston, including the influence afforded to it by the adjacent settlements, and why its character would be comprised by the development proposed at the appeal site.

***How the appeal scheme would affect the physical and perceived separation between Queniborough and Syston***

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6.5.4 It is agreed that the appeal scheme would extend wholly into the ALS. In my evidence I note the material reduction in the width of the ALS at various points.

6.5.5 Were the appeal scheme to be built out, the width of the ALS between the southern boundary of the appeal site and the northern edge of Queniborough would be c.220m. Therefore, there would be a material reduction in the width of the ALS between Queniborough and Syston of up to 40%. I acknowledge that this would not be the narrowest part of this ALS, e.g. the width along Melton Road is c.175m.

6.5.6 It is my view that the degree of effect cannot be quantified by a simple mathematical calculation alone; it is the contribution of the land that is lost to the overall sense of separation and openness that is most important, not the quantity lost.

6.5.7 Whilst the appeal scheme would clearly compromise the physical separation of Queniborough and Syston, it is clear that the appeal scheme would cause greater harm to the perceived separation of the two settlements. The ALS

seeks to safeguard the perceived separation by maintaining the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the land within.

6.5.8 Queniborough and Syston have developed, historically, as two separate settlements, separated by a tract of farmed countryside. Over the years, this gap has been reduced as both settlements have expanded outwards. This pressure would increase were the sites allocated in the emerging local plan also built out.

6.5.9 To the east of Melton Road, the ALS is largely devoid of built form, save the buildings associated with Homestead Farm. It is my view that this part of the ALS has been successfully in maintaining the predominantly open and undeveloped character of this tract of farmland, and so has played an important role in safeguarding the separation and separate identity of the two settlements. However, I consider that these functions and the perceived separation of Queniborough and Syston would be compromised by the introduction of the appeal scheme.

***How the appeal scheme would affect the appreciation of the separate identity of the two settlements***

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6.5.10 In terms of appreciating the separation and the separate identity of Queniborough and Syston, I believe that it is important there is a visual and neutral break when travelling between the two settlements, so that there is a perception that travellers are leaving one settlement, passing through open countryside without strong affinity to either settlement, before arriving in a new settlement.

6.5.11 I considered the effect of the appeal scheme on the appreciation of separation from two routes connecting Queniborough and Syston: Barkby Road to the immediate east of the appeal site and public footpath I84 that crosses the appeal site.

### **Barkby Road**

6.5.12 In my evidence I describe the experience of travelling south out of Queniborough, where there is a sense of leaving the urban core and travelling along the edge of the village, with the Boonton Meadows development to the left and farmland to the right, and I explain how the sense of arrival at Syston is experienced by views of the settlement edge across arable fields, and how this would become more defined were allocation HA2 built out. Similarly, I describe the experience of those travelling in the opposite direction.

6.5.13 I found that development of the appeal scheme would create a very different character for the section of Barkby Road closest to Queniborough. Urban forms would be visible on both sides of the road, and the sense of leaving the village and passing through countryside would be pushed southward to beyond the appeal site. My LVIA concluded that receptors on this part of Barkby Road would experience a residual visual effect of Moderate adverse significance; whilst the G&L LVA concluded Major-Moderate adverse significance.

6.5.14 it is my view that the appeal scheme would have an adverse effect on the sense of openness of the ALS, as experienced in views from Barkby Road in the vicinity of Queniborough. It would also have a small adverse effect on the

sense of separation of Queniborough and Syston. This effect would be reinforced were allocation HA2 built out.

### **Public footpath I84**

- 6.5.15 Likewise, my evidence describes the experience of pedestrians travelling in both directions between Queniborough and Syston along the well-used public footpath I84, and I illustrated this visual journey at Appendix SJN 04, Figures 2 and 3.
- 6.5.16 I explain how pedestrians travelling in both directions experience a clearly defined break between urban areas and farmland. I also describe how despite the proximity of the existing settlement edges of Queniborough and Syston being frequently present in the background of views from the public footpath and across the ALC, the land within the ALS retains a predominantly open and largely undeveloped character.
- 6.5.17 In summary, it is my view that there is a clear sense of leaving Queniborough and passing through a more neutral and predominantly open and undeveloped landscape (despite the presence of the edge of Syston in the background of the view) before arriving at the edge of Syston, and vice-versa in the opposite direction. As such, I consider that the separate identities of the two settlements can be clearly appreciated.
- 6.5.18 Were the appeal site to be developed in the manner proposed, there would be clear changes to the experience of using public footpath I84.
- 6.5.19 When travelling south, the appeal site would appear as part of Queniborough. The Conceptual Plan illustrates the footpath passing through a corridor of

open space but this would not have the sense of undeveloped openness that is currently afforded by the appeal site.

- 6.5.20 The portion of the footpath from which the largely open and undeveloped character could be experienced would decrease significantly, from c.530m to c.290m, a 45% reduction in length. Further, for this remaining length, users would be clearly aware of the presence of Syston in the background and the section that currently exhibits the greatest qualities of openness when travelling southward (i.e. the appeal site) would be lost.
- 6.5.21 It is my view that a distance of 290m is an insufficient length to be considered neutral, particularly when the prominent edge of Syston is an ever-present backdrop in the view and thus it would not maintain the separate identity of the two settlements.
- 6.5.22 When travelling in the opposite direction, from passing through the hedge on the edge of Syston, the new edge of Queniborough would be increasingly prominent in the view. The new houses on the edge of the development would be up to 2.5 storeys high, and so taller than the houses that currently provide the village's edge. I do not consider that the Conceptual Plan allows sufficient space to implement a mitigation scheme that would assimilate the new edge into the landscape and start to mitigate its influence on the remaining portion of the ALS.
- 6.5.23 The same arguments about the reduction in length of footpath passing through undeveloped land apply when travelling northwards, and similarly the concerns regarding the prominence of the destination urban edge and the influence it would afford on the remaining section of footpath. In this

direction, its influence is likely to be greater since it would be up to 2.5 storeys high, whereas the edge of Syston is generally 2 storeys.

6.5.24 Again, I consider that the separate identity of Syston and Queniborough would not be maintained.

### **Effects on individual and separate identities of Queniborough and Syston**

6.5.25 Having regard to my findings of my assessment of the appreciation of separation, I conclude that the appeal scheme would unacceptably compromise the separation and separate identity of Queniborough and Syston. The proposed development would change the appeal site from agricultural farmland to an urbanised development, shorten the physical distance between Queniborough and Syston, and adversely harm the predominantly open and undeveloped character of the remaining portion of the ALS that reinforces the separation between the two settlements, particularly as experienced from the popular and well used public footpath I84.

6.5.26 In future years, the ALS will likely serve a greater function in maintaining the open and undeveloped land between Queniborough and Syston, as a result of the cumulative effects that would arise were the housing allocations in the emerging local plan built, and which would introduce increased urbanising influences on the edge of the ALS.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

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6.6.1 I consider that the proposed development, in itself and cumulatively with other development, would result in a harmful impact upon on the character

of the countryside in this location and the Area of Local Separation within which it is located. In turn, I believe this would impact on the individual identity of Queniborough and Syston.

## 6.7 **Summary of residual effects on key landscape and visual receptors**

6.7.1 The following table provides a summary of my judgements regarding the residual effects (i.e. post year 15) of the appeal scheme on key landscape and visual receptors and the Area of Local Separation.

***Table 6.1: Summary of the effects of the appeal scheme on landscape and visual receptors***

Landscape receptor	Residual effect
Character of the appeal site and its local context	Moderate adverse significance
Visual receptor	Residual effect
Viewpoint 1	Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 2	Moderate-Minor adverse significance
Viewpoint 3	Major-Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 4	Major-Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 5	Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 6	Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 7	Moderate adverse significance
Viewpoint 8	Minor adverse significance



Viewpoint 9	Minor adverse significance
Viewpoint 10	Minor adverse significance
Viewpoint 11	Negligible significance

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