

# **Landscape And Green Belt Appraisal**

for

Cuffley Hill, Goffs Oak

on behalf of

Countryside Properties PLC

Issue

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Quality Control

**Landscape and Green Belt Appraisal**

for

**Countryside Properties PLC**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by The Landscape Partnership Ltd (TLP) on behalf of Countryside Properties PLC, hereafter referred to as Countryside. The purpose of the report is to assess the suitability of the proposed residential development on land to rear of 90a – 102 Cuffley Hill, Goffs Oak (hereafter to referred to as the Site) in relation to the potential effects it would have on the landscape, views and the Green Belt. The assessment is based on the sketch Opportunities and Constraints plan and Layout Design Proposals prepared by Countryside (refer to Appendix 2).
- 1.2 The Appraisal provides a strategic overview of the key factors that should be considered in the decision making when determining the suitability for residential development and the potential number of properties that could be accommodated within the Site. The Appraisal is not intended to provide a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment i.e. detailed assessment of effect on landscape character and views. The following is covered within this report:
- ♦ description of relevant designations and the existing landscape features within the Site and immediate vicinity;
  - ♦ key characteristics of the local landscape character, how these relate to the Site, and likely effects arising from any future residential development;
  - ♦ landscape guidelines and strategies relating to development;
  - ♦ main views and likely effect on these views; and
  - ♦ appraisal of the Green Belt reviews undertaken for the Borough of Broxbourne and the likely effect on the five purposes of the Green Belt.

## 2 SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

### Local Context

- 2.1 The Site is located to the north-western edge of Goff's Oak, a large village lying between the town of Cheshunt to the east and the large village of Cuffley to the west (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 01). Cheshunt has expanded on a north-south axis along the A10, but also to the west, with the establishments of the suburbs of Rosedale, Flamstead End and Hammond Street, collectively known as West Cheshunt. Hammond Street forms a projection extending further west than the rest of West Cheshunt, with an unnamed satellite residential development further to the west. This follows an east-west ridgeline to the north of Goff's Oak, which connects with a north-south ridgeline that projects southwards, upon which much of Goff's Oak lies, and further extends along Goff's Lane.

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This effectively creates a bowl landform between Goff's Oak and West Cheshunt, within which lies the Rags Brook valley and the new settlement of St James's Village.

- 2.2 The Rags Brook valley and landscape around St James's Village has become fragmented and segregated from the wider rural context that lies beyond the bowl landform. In contrast, the local setting to the south and west of Goff's Oak retains a more cohesive rural character. Defined respectively by the Theobalds Brook valley and Cuffley Brook valley, the landform is well defined, with a predominantly arable land use. The Cuffley Brook valley forms a strong landscape feature that separates the two settlements of Goff's Oak from Cuffley, with the relatively steep valley slopes forming a notable feature. The Site lies at the top of the gentler upper valley slope and edge of the plateau ridgeline.

### **Historic Settlement Context**

- 2.3 At the time of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Goff's Oak was a hamlet set around the intersection of Newgatestreet Road, Cuffley Hill and Goff's Lane. The settlement of Cuffley was formed of a small hamlet on Plough Hill, with several farms set along Cuffley Hill. Little had changed by the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, except for the introduction of a new rail line, which now forms the Hertford Loop Line. In the 1930s Cuffley notably expanded with much of the existing residential areas being developed up to the rail line, and partly extending beyond the railway to the east, as The Medway (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 01). Some sporadic development of houses occurred along Cuffley Hill in Goff's Oak, including some of the properties to the south of the Site, as well as a number of commercial nurseries along Cuffley Hill and Newgatestreet Road. The latter has defined the character and nature of the Site and its immediate setting. In the 1960's the nurseries continued to provide a strong influence on land use in Goff's Oak. In the 1960s and 1970s much of the existing residential development was built, with a number of the nurseries being removed and replaced by housing in the 1970s. Development included extending the settlement in a westerly direction along Cuffley Hill towards Cuffley.
- 2.4 The settlement character of Goff's Oak, consequently reflects its history. Houses are typically semi-detached or detached two storey houses, constructed of red, yellow or multi 'London stock' brick, with clay or concrete roof tiles. Building styles are relatively uniform and ubiquitous with little fenestration, some use of weather boarding, tile hanging and render. Size and style of houses are particularly mixed along Cuffley Hill, set within a wide and leafy street scene, incorporating a number of large mature trees. Housing density along Cuffley Hill vary from low to high, with medium housing densities to the north of Goff's Oak.

### 3 DESIGNATIONS

- 3.1 There are no landscape and visual designations covering the Site or surrounding adjacent land. The Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB) forms the main related designation that covers both the Site and the adjoining land to the north-west of Goff's Oak (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 02). An assessment of this part of the Green Belt in relation to its five functions and reference to the Green Belt reviews that have been undertaken by Broxbourne Borough Council, are set out in Section 8.
- 3.2 The other main related designation is the Tree Preservation Order (TPO), which covers 37 trees within the Site. The accompanying plan to the TPO No. 10 provides an indicative location for the protected trees. However, these trees do not relate well with the location of the trees surveyed as part of the topographical survey prepared by the Survey Association in February 2013 and tree survey prepared by James Blake Associates in June 2016. Consequently, confirmation will be required as to which trees the TPO relate to and whether the TPO needs updating. It is also understood that a provisional blanket TPO has recently been put in place that covers the Site. The tree survey sets out the quality and condition of the trees within the Site, based on BS5837: 2012, and defines Root Protection Areas (RPAs) for each tree. The categorisation provides an important guide as to the relative value of the tree and need for retention.
- 3.3 Cheshunt Common provides an important local amenity that dates back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and extends from the north-eastern corner of Goff's Oak to the north of Hammondstreet Road. However, this is sufficiently remote from the Site and separated by the intervening built ridgeline that forms the northern part of Goff's Oak, that any changes within the Site would not affect the Common. There are a few scattered listed buildings and a scheduled monument within the wider setting, but these are located to the east and south of Goff's Oak and again are sufficiently distant, with other intervening modern built development, that they would not be affected by any future development on the Site.

### 4 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 4.1 The Site as a whole is approximately rectangular in shape and approximately 3ha in size and is illustrated by Viewpoints 1-7 in Appendix 1 (refer to Figure 01 for Viewpoint locations). The land falls relatively gently from east to west, with the land falling from approximately 101m AOD in the north-east corner of the Site to approximately 91m AOD in the north-west corner of the Site. The most noticeable variations in landform occur within the north-western and south-western corners of the Site, otherwise there is little evidence that the Site is located at the top of the upper valley slope of Cuffley Brook.
- 4.2 The Site comprises two plots of land. To the east is a relatively narrow linear section of land that formed part of the former Fairmead Nursery. This is now sub-divided into an extended garden for

90 Cuffley Hill to the south and an area of nursery buildings, together with grassland, brambles, scrub and trees to the north. The former is composed of a rectangular area of lawn and the latter is an area of unmanaged land characterised by an area of hardstanding, sheds, portacarbins, storage containers, abandoned cars (refer to Viewpoint 1) and overgrown grassland with bramble and scrub natural regeneration (refer to Viewpoint 2).

- 4.3 The remaining larger portion of the Site, lies to the west. This land formed part of Rosemead Nursery, with the majority of the operations and former buildings appearing to have been located within the southern half of the land. The main physical evidence comes from the concrete foundations, reinforcing bars and walls that are still present on the Site, which are all located within the southern part. It would appear from this evidence that the northern part was not used for the nursery operations and was allowed to establish as a natural area of grassland, scrub and trees.
- 4.4 Due to the land having been left unmanaged (until recently) it has become overgrown with bramble, nettles, and natural regenerating scrub, with remaining parts of the redundant nursery buildings making the Site inaccessible and potentially dangerous. The land has recently been cleared of rubble, reinforcing bars and groundcover vegetation to enable safe access to the Site.
- 4.5 The trees form an important element within the Site that define much of its character. As set out in James Blake Associates' tree survey, they consist mainly of English oak and Common ash, with some Silver birch, and a few sycamore, whitebeam, crab apple, lime, willow, copper beach, yew, spruce, Lawson cyprus, false acacia, cherry and pear. The oak provide the most dominant species both in terms of numbers and visual presence. They are typically of early maturity with heights of approximately 14-18m, with a moderate or low quality and value. Ash are typically semi-mature to mature and of approximately 9-14m height, with a low quality and value.
- 4.6 The western part of the Site (former Rosemead Nursery site) is a composition of individual and groups of trees set within an area of predominantly neutral grassland. However, the quality, condition and their relative importance varies depending on the location, which appears to reflect the historic land use. The trees are primarily located within the northern part of this plot, with a scattered group of trees within the south-western corner and a small group towards the centre on the eastern boundary, leaving an open area towards the centre and south-east of the western plot. The trees within the northern half are of greater landscape value (refer to Viewpoints 3 – right of view; Viewpoint 6; and Viewpoint 7), both in terms of the Site and the contribution they make to the neighbouring landscape of Cuffley Brook valley. Most are oak trees, which were assessed by James Blake Associates as being mainly of moderate to low quality and value, and a few as being in irreversible decline or dead. Due to the lack of management on the land, some are affected by defects, misshapen, suppression and crown asymmetry due to the close proximity of adjoining trees. The trees generally provide a greater landscape role and visual contribution as groups, rather than

individually, although where growth has not been affected by adjoining trees, individual oaks provide the best form and appearance. The larger groups of trees create a wooded character within the most northerly section (refer to Viewpoint 7). Careful consideration should be given as to how this part of the Site is developed, with TLP's recommendation that this is primarily used for open space provision. Some limited removal of trees will be required where trees are in irreversible decline and to provide the most suitable management for the trees within this area. It is also consider that some limited tree removal of lower quality trees would be appropriate to enable the most suitable development layout, without causing detrimental harm to the landscape character of the Site or wider landscape.

- 4.7 The trees within the south-western part of the Site are composed of varied species, form and appearance, reflecting the location of the former nursery buildings (refer to Viewpoint 3 – left of view; and Viewpoint 4). These provide a discordant mixture of tree species and forms, and offer fairly limited landscape or visual function within the Site, and no contribution to the wider landscape setting to the north, although they do give some screening function for the adjoining rear of residential properties along Cuffley Hill. James Blake Associates have assessed these trees as a mixture of mainly low quality and value or in irreversible decline or dead. Other than four trees on the southern boundary, there are only three trees assessed as moderate quality and value. These are all oak. One oak (T114) is of good form and appearance and should be retained. A further oak (T113) is of relatively poor form and appearance and provides limited landscape value. The remaining oak is located in very close proximity to a large spreading ash (left part of Viewpoint 5). The two trees provide a notable feature, but the ash is mult-stemmed with past limb failure and likely future failure, whilst the oak is heavily deformed due to the close proximity of the ash. If it is necessary to remove the ash for arboricultural reasons, there would be little benefit to retaining the oak tree.
- 4.8 Woody vegetation within the eastern plot is limited to peripheral groups of scrub, which has limited value as a landscape feature, although do provide a partial screening function along the eastern boundary for the rear of the adjoining residential properties along Robinson Avenue.
- 4.9 The boundaries of the Site and adjoining land use, provide a mixed setting and character that largely enclose the Site. These are as follows:
- ♦ **Eastern:** lie the two storey semi-detached properties and rear gardens of 1-51 Robinson Avenue (refer to Viewpoint 2). Fragmented lengths of hedges and garden fencing define the Site boundary, with garden sheds, outbuildings, shrubs and trees further influencing the peripheral character of the Site.



- ♦ **Southern:** the rear gardens and detached properties of 90A-102 Cuffley Hill are located to the south of the Site, with the boundary demarcated by garden fences (refer to left of Viewpoint 4). A gap between 92 and 94 Cuffley Hill links the Site to a loop road off Cuffley Hill, with associated trees.
- ♦ **Western:** lies the land of C G Edwards, a landscape construction business with associated land use and storage facilities. The land is primarily occupied by an extensive area of hardstanding and storage of materials, a number of warehouses and other associated infrastructure and containment. This is surrounded by an area of woodland that lies mainly to the west, but also extends to the north and south of landscape construction business.
- ♦ **Northern:** a further wooded area, composed of group of trees, scrub, brambles and grassland, lies to the north of the Site. Beyond this land, lies open arable farmland on the upper slopes of the Cuffley Brook valley.

## 5 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

### National

- 5.1 At a national and regional context, the Site is located within the National Character Area 111 'Northern Thames Basin'. This covers an extensive area to the north of London, extending from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east. This incorporates a large and diverse landscape that comprises much of southern Hertfordshire, and is typified by a series of plateaux, which are locally well wooded, incorporating a mixture of pasture and arable farm land. Urban expansion has been a consistent feature since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the Hertfordshire area due to the demand for housing on the outskirts of London. The landform is varied with a wide plateau divided by river valleys. The plateau areas are divided by the major broad valleys of the rivers Ver, Colne and the Lea, the latter forming the main focus of development and communication in the vicinity of the Cheshunt. These river valleys have been heavily modified by humans in various ways, which has significantly influenced their character. The plateau areas and river valleys differ in character, with the latter being more heavily influenced by human activity, both in terms of urban development and agricultural land use. The landscape is characterised by mixed farming, with arable farmland predominating in Hertfordshire, with parts of Hertfordshire also being heavily wooded. Market towns and commuter settlements have expanded over time, with the creation of new settlements. Brick built buildings form the primary built character from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

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## County

- 5.2 At a county level, the Hertfordshire landscape is divided into 6 regions with the Site lying within South Herts Plateau region. Within this region the landscape is further sub-divided into a number of Landscape Character Areas, of which Area 56: Cheshunt Common covers the landscape beyond the Site, immediately to the north-west of the Site and extending further to the south-west. The Site is located outside of the Landscape Character Areas, within the Goff's Oak settlement. Area 57: Thunderfield Ridges covers the landscape to the north and east of Goff's Oak, extending further to cover the landscape to the north of Hammond Street, and Area 55: Theobalds Estate covers the landscape to the south-east and south of Goff's Oak (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 03).
- 5.3 **Area 56: Cheshunt Common** is formed by a landscape of strongly undulating open arable farmland set within the valley of Cuffley Brook and squeezed between the two urban areas of Cuffley and Goff's Oak. The railway to the west extends the urban edge of Cuffley creating a very strong western boundary. The Area was formerly common land, with few field boundaries and little evident field pattern. Where present, it is geometric and of medium scale with some irregular fields. There are a few scattered woodland blocks, but otherwise the landscape is open, with a couple of farms and a cottage. The only road of note is the B156 (Cuffley Hill) which provides extensive views of the area from the north and the south (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 01 and Viewpoint 14). The Area provides an unusual landscape within the context of Hertfordshire, being more open, unwooded, unified and simple landscape with strongly defined boundaries to the east and west. The Site is outside of Area 56, within Goff's Oak, and partially contrasts with this character. It is characterised by a treed or wooded character, with much greater extent of enclosure, and the former nursery use and proximity of residential properties linking its character more with the urban setting of Goff's Oak. Area 56 is defined as having a **Poor** condition and **Moderate** strength of character, with an objective of **Improve and Restore**. Relevant strategy and guidelines for managing change include encouraging more public access into the landscape, especially from the adjoining urban settlements.
- 5.4 **Area 57: Thunderfield Ridges** is well contained with very limited views, except from ridges, and has small scale and very rural character. The exception is within the southern part of the Area i.e. between West Cheshunt and Goff's Oak, where there is an evident impact from built development. Distinctive features include: horsiculture; sharply right-angled narrow lanes with tall hedges; older settlements in the valley; and loss of nurseries to housing. The southern part is linked to the adjoining very urban area, highlighting the rarity and condition of the northern part i.e. north of Hammond Street. As a whole Area 57 is assessed as being of **Moderate** condition and strength of character, with a strategy of **Improve and Conserve**. There is a clear division in sensitivity within the Area, in which 'Conserve' is applied to the northern part and 'Improve' to the southern part. The strategy includes: hedgerow and woodland management and replanting, where necessary; buffer strips for watercourses; and expand local footpath network.

5.5 **Area 55: Theobalds Estate** has established through a complex layer of history, with mixed farmland and parkland forming the dominant character. A strong pattern of discrete woodland blocks and open arable fields creates an unusual patchwork of ecologically rich and sterile areas over an undulating landform. Isolated settlements are typically limited to higher ground, with small farms scattered across the Area. The Area is defined as having a **Strong** condition and **Moderate** strength of character and a strategy of **Conserve and Strengthen**.

### **District**

5.6 The Broxbourne Landscape Character Assessment (BLCA), produced by Chris Blandford Associates in October 2008, provides a District scale level of description of landscape character that is based on the units in the County based study. The BLCA forms an evidence study for The Broxbourne Local Plan 2016-2031<sup>1</sup> and provides guidance in terms of formulating emerging policy, including guidance for conserving, enhancing and/or restoring locally distinctive landscape characteristics. Broxbourne is divided into a number of constituent Landscape Character Types (LCTs), of which the landscape to the west of Cheshunt and surrounding Goff's Oak falls within Type B: 'Plateau Ridges and Slopes: Wooded Farmland' (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 04).

5.7 LCT B is sub-divided into three sub Landscape Character Areas of which the Site is located on the periphery of the eastern edge of LCA B3: Theobald's Estate. The landscape to the north-east and east of Goff's Oak falls within LCA B2: Goff's Oak and Hammond Street.

5.8 The character of LCA B3 is defined by a strong pattern of regular, medium to large scale fields, interspersed with discrete medium sized woodland blocks. Land use varies, with large open arable fields to the west i.e. west of Goff's Oak, and predominantly pasture to the east. The LCA has been strongly influenced by the Theobald's Estate and the historic building of Theobald's Park. However, this part of the LCA relates to a more distant section of the landscape that is unrelated to the Site. The landscape to the north-west of the LCA that relates to the Site, is a relatively broad valley of the Cuffley Brook with extensive views across the patchwork of fields.

5.9 LCA B2 is largely encapsulated by suburban housing, with separate blocks and periods of modern housing dominating the landscape pattern. Beyond these urban areas, the landscape is defined by a mixture of small pastoral fields, delineated by mature hedgerows, small pockets of woodland and groups of glasshouses. Fields are mainly grazed by horses and characterised by associated horticiculture.

5.10 Landscape changes within LCT B identify the past losses and dereliction of glasshouses associated with the local horticultural industry. The current condition of LCT B is considered **Moderate**, but

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<sup>1</sup> The Broxbourne Local Plan 2016-2031, Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation Document

variable across different parts of the LCT. Condition is good within LCA B3, but poorer elsewhere. The LCT is also considered to have a **Moderate** visual sensitivity, due to the variable sense of enclosure and intervisibility between LCTs, and a **Moderate** landscape character sensitivity. Consequently, LCT B is defined as having some capacity to accommodate change without compromising key characteristics. There is recognised pressure arising from the need for residential development on the edges of Hoddesdon, Broxbourne, Cheshunt, Goff's Oak and Hammond Street. The objectives and guidelines for LCT B include: maintaining the open space between Goff's Oak and Hammond Street; reduce the impact of nursery sites on the landscape; conserving and enhancing hedgerows; retaining ancient lanes, field boundaries, and woodland blocks; design of developments are consistent with the local landscape character and historic landscape pattern; screening of harsh urban edges; planting of locally indigenous trees and shrubs; and establishment of buffer strips along watercourses.

## 6 VIEWS

- 6.1 Due to the nature and character of the Site and the surrounding land uses, views into and out of the Site are largely limited to the rear of the residential properties overlooking the Site along the eastern and southern boundaries. This is illustrated by the approximate Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) shown on Figure 01 (refer to Appendix 1). The woodland further to the west of the Site i.e. beyond C G Edwards site, prevents views from this direction, including along the eastern edge of Cuffley, Cuffley Hill road, Brook Farm and the Hertford Loop Line railway. The latter is also largely enclosed by mature tree belts and scrub. Burleigh Cottage, a large individual property with various outbuildings, is set within an isolated location to the north-west of the Site, but is also enclosed by woodland and trees.
- 6.2 There are no Public Rights of Way within the vicinity of the Site (refer to Appendix 1, Figure 01). In particular, there is no form of public access to the landscape to the north and north-west of the Site. The main public roads, that of Cuffley Hill to the south and south-west (refer to Figure 01, and Viewpoints 14), Newgatestreet Road (also part of Hertfordshire Chain Walk long distance path) to the east (refer to Viewpoint 13), and Darnicle Hill (approximately 1.5kms to the north) have no views of the Site, due to the presence of intervening houses, mature woodland, tree belts and hedges. The only exception is in the immediate vicinity of the Site along Cuffley Hill (refer to Viewpoints 8, 9 and 10). From Viewpoints 8 and 10, the Site is barely discernible or apparent, with the existing trees within the Site having little influence on the street scene. The Site is only evident from Viewpoint 9, where it is visible within the existing gap between houses, within an otherwise built up street frontage. Trees within the Site are clearly evident but not significant to the street scene. Views of the Site are very limited from the adjoining residential streets to the east. The tops of trees to the north of the Site are visible from the end of Woodland Way (refer to Viewpoint 12) and tall scrub on the eastern Site boundary is visible between narrow gaps within houses along Robinson Avenue

(refer to Viewpoint 11), but have very limited influence on the street scene. Consequently, there are very limited public views into the Site, with private views being limited to the adjoining residential properties to the east and south of the Site.

## 7 POTENTIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

### Design Approach

- 7.1 Countryside have prepared an Opportunity and Constraints Plan and Layout Design Principles and Aspirations (refer to Appendix 2) that sets out the key aspects of the Site and design approach to developing the Site. The former plan supports a landscape led approach to provide maturity and a woodland setting, and retaining trees around the boundary and open space areas. The Layout Design Principles and Aspirations plan provides a very indicative principles for a layout. The written notes set out the aspirations for the design of the development. This includes the objective of retaining the northern part of the western plot (former Rosemead Nursery land) as woodland, with provision for open space, play and walking. The intention is to create a development with secluded intimate clusters of houses with appropriate design and landscape treatment. A design led approach would be adopted with leafy lanes that are meandering with variable width and shared surfaces. The design of buildings would take a reference from the traditional local vernacular, with complementing hard and soft landscape treatment. Existing landscaped boundaries would be reinforced.
- 7.2 Countryside provide a clear appreciation for a landscape led approach to any future development on the Site. There is a recognition of the contribution and role of trees within the Site and the value they would bring to the housing development, the need for a sympathetic layout that relates well to the landscape of the Site and its boundary, and the intention to create a high quality built development that reflects good design and traditional local vernacular.
- 7.3 The Site and the adjoining land to the west, owned by C G Edwards, are currently proposed as an allocation for residential development within the consultation draft of The Broxbourne Local Plan 2016-2031, as part of Policy GO5: North of Cuffley Hill. The policy proposes the allocation as follows: C G Edwards – c. 20 houses; Fairmead Nursery – c. 12 houses; and Rosemead Nursery – c. 14 houses, hereafter referred to as the 'Policy Site'. Development of the land should include: 20% starter/shared ownership houses; 20% affordable houses; public open space; and retention of protected trees. However, based on our assessment, we consider that the Site has the potential to accommodate a greater number of dwellings than 26 without harm to the wider landscape and views, as set out below. We consider the Site could potential accommodate between 50-70 dwellings, whilst still being sympathetically integrated into the Site, with limited tree loss and a retention of the existing overriding sense of a treed or wooded character.

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## Site

- 7.4 TLP consider that Countryside's landscape and design led approach to future development of the Site provides confidence regarding the treatment for the Site. Further detail will need to be provided to support this, which it is understood that Countryside will be providing as part of the Local Plan representation submission. The key requirement will be the retention of the majority of the trees to the north and other moderate value trees, as set out in Section 4. The proposals would provide an appropriate and beneficial treatment of the redundant nurseries sites, based on a design led approach, with high quality buildings, leafy lanes, new tree planting, biodiversity and green infrastructure enhancements, appropriate landscape boundary treatments and open space provision. In addition, there is the potential to secure additional land to the north of the Site, as well as provide long-term management of the Site, which has been left unmanaged and largely neglected. The development would provide the opportunity to secure and extend the life and value of the existing trees within the Site, and potentially to the north of the Site. This would also ensure the retention of their contribution to the wider landscape setting and urban fringe treatment, and the ability to provide a strong defensible Green Belt boundary.

## Key Landscape Effects

- 7.5 In terms of effect on landscape character, the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment identifies the Site and adjoining land to the west, as forming part of the Goff's Oak settlement. The development of housing within the context would be consistent with the settlement character, whilst also retaining its treed character. The character of the adjoining Area 56: Cheshunt Common would not be expected to be affected, subject to the retention of the trees within the northern part of the Site. This would retain a wooded character on the edge of the Area, set within the context of the settlement of Goff's Oak. The strategy of encouraging public access to the landscape from urban settlements would be assisted by the provision of housing and open space within the northern part of the Site, with the potential to provide access to the adjoining countryside, should the opportunity arise for new public rights of way or permissive routes to be created in the future. The defining open arable valley landscape of Area 56 would not be affected by development with the Site. Area 57: Thunderfield Ridges and Area 55: Theobalds Estate are separated from the Site by the intervening presence of existing built development within Goff's Oak, and would not be affected by the development of the Site.
- 7.6 With regard to the Broxbourne Landscape Character Assessment, the key characteristics of LCA B3: Theobald's Estate would not be affected by housing within the Site, with the strong influence of the Theobald's Estate and Theobald's Park being unaffected. The pattern of regular, medium to large scale fields, interspersed with discrete medium sized woodland blocks would remain unchanged, subject to the retention of the trees to the north of the Site. The extensive views over the

surrounding valley landscape would also be unaffected. With the intention to locate the proposed housing along the existing residential boundaries, together with the retention of the main groups of trees along the boundary of the adjoining arable farmland, the development would make little perceptible change to the character of LCA B3. LCA B2: Goff's Oak and Hammond Street would be unaffected, due to the intervening presence of built development within Goff's Oak. Development of the Site would be consistent with LCT B's ability to accommodate some development. The Site and design aspirations would also meet and address many of the key objectives and guidelines set out for LCT B, namely: maintaining the open space between Goff's Oak and Hammond Street; reducing the impact of nursery sites on the landscape; conserving and enhancing hedgerows; retaining field boundaries, and woodland blocks; design of developments that are consistent with local landscape character and historic landscape pattern; screening of harsh urban edges; and planting of locally indigenous trees and shrubs. TLP consider that residential development on the Site would have limited effects on landscape character.

### **Key Visual Effects**

- 7.7 Due to the very limited public views into the Site (refer to Zone of Visual Influence on Figure 01 in Appendix 1), if future proposed houses are no greater than two and a half storey, there would be very little discernible change to views. The main noticeable change would be from Viewpoint 9 along Cuffley Hill, immediately opposite the Site, where the introduction of new housing would be consistent with the existing street scene. If the future houses were taller than two and a half storey, there would be potentially greater effect on the street scenes of Cuffley Hill and Robinson Avenue. The other main effect on views would be from the rear of properties abutting the Site along Cuffley Hill and Robinson Avenue (mainly from first floor windows). Ground floor views are typically restricted by fences, sheds, out buildings and garden vegetation. Effects on these views would depend on the extent of existing boundary vegetation retained and any future proposed planting, but it can be expected that views from these properties would be noticeably changed as a result of future development. TLP consider that residential development within the Site would have very limited effects on views, other than would be expected from locating any residential development adjacent to existing houses.

## **8 GREEN BELT ANALYSIS**

### **Overview**

- 8.1 The Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB) was established in 1944 with the purpose of preventing the uncontrolled expansion of London. The retention and protection of the Green Belt has remained a key element of national planning policy. This is currently covered by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl and keep land permanently open. It identifies the five purposes of Green Belt are :

- ◆ to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- ◆ to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- ◆ to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- ◆ to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- ◆ to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

8.2 Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. This usually takes place when determining settlement policy through the preparation or review of a Local Plan. This was highlighted in a short document prepared by the Borough of Broxbourne, entitled 'Exceptional Circumstances and Sustainable Places', which forms an evidence study for the Broxbourne Local Plan 2016-2031. Within the document it notes that the draft Local Plan sets out a number of Green Belt releases (including the Site), where a good case can be made for 'exceptional circumstances'. This has been informed by a list of draft criteria, which are outlined within the document. The Council intends to prepare a further site-by-site justification for Green Belt release based on these criteria. TLP consider it is likely that, based on its location and Countryside's future design aspirations, the Site would meet the Green Belt, Design, Landscape and Biodiversity criteria.

8.3 The five functions of Green Belt form the main basis for understanding the role and importance of given locations within the Green Belt, and where it would be more appropriate to release land from the Green Belt to meet other key strategic planning requirements, such as housing supply. This is typically done through a Green Belt Review that objectively analyses the relative strength of specific areas in achieving each of these functions and providing recommendations regarding potentially suitable areas for releasing land. There is no statutory guidance as to how to undertake this analysis, but there is an establishing body of work of good practice. Two Green Belt reviews have been undertaken by the Borough of Broxbourne for this purpose and provide an evidence study for The Broxbourne Local Plan 2016-2031. Both reviews have been appraised in relation to the Site. In considering this, it is also noted that Paragraph 85 of the NPPF advises '*when defining boundaries, local planning authorities should not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanent*'.

8.4 Should there be no future release of the Site from the Green Belt, it should also be noted that paragraph 88 of the NPPF requires that, '*when considering any planning application, local authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. "Very special circumstances" will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason and appropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations*'. However, exceptions to the general principle of restricting development within the Greenbelt are set out at paragraph 89 of the NPPF. The last of these exceptions covers, '*limited infilling or the partial or*



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*complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.'*

- 8.5 The Site was previously owned and managed by Fairmead Nursery and Rosemead Nursery, and there is evidence of the previous presence of former buildings/permeant structures. However, it is not clear what the extent of this was and what they were used for. Given it was a nursery business, it is also likely that these structures could be considered as agricultural buildings, and therefore appropriate development in the context of the Green Belt. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is no likelihood of the nursery business being re-established on this land, having been largely redundant for many years. Consequently, there is a need to find an alternative use of the land to enable long term management and effective use of the land. This is particularly pertinent in the context of retaining and managing the more valuable trees to the north of the Site, to ensure their longevity and contribution to the wider landscape, and the biodiversity and green infrastructure benefits that can be provided through active management and new planting within this location. It should also be noted, that there is an additional area of land to the north of the Site, where land ownership is unknown, which also contain trees, which have a local value to the wider landscape. Securing the future longevity of the trees and green infrastructure role within this land, would also be beneficial to the Green Belt. Accordingly, Countryside are investigating land ownership and potential future acquisition of the land for this purpose.

## **Policy**

- 8.6 The Policy is supported by the evidence study 'Goffs Oak Area Development Options'<sup>2</sup>. The Policy Site is identified as one of the promoted sites that was appraised within the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) and identified with the following reference: CG-GB-02: 90a & 102 Cuffley Hill (Rosemead Nursery); CG-GB-48: Land at 104 Cuffley Hill (C G Edward); and CG-GB-65: Fairmead Nursery. The report considers seven development approaches for the Goff's Oak area, the second of which is the '*Goffs Oak village expansion*' and incorporates seven sites on the edge of Goff's Oak. It advises that in terms of green belt function '*the development of some sites around the village would have little impact upon urban sprawl and merging, and form logical infill which could actually strengthen the defensibility of the green belt boundary*'. In relation to the Site, TLP agrees with and supports this statement.
- 8.7 Specific reference is also made to the Policy Site and identifies that '*whilst they are suitable in principle, there are a number of protected trees within the site. These should be retained...*'. Again TLP supports this statement. However, it goes on to say '*...meaning the site can accommodate an*

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<sup>2</sup> Goffs Oak Area Development Options, Planning Policy Team, Borough of Broxbourne, April 2016

*estimated 50 dwellings in a spacious woodland setting*'. Based on consultation and indicative options prepared by Countryside, TLP consider that this objective could still be achieved with a greater allocation of dwellings in relation to the Site. This is based on locating the higher density housing within the southern part of the Rosemead Nursery land, retention of the northern more treed/wooded part as open space, and the careful integration of lower density houses within the centre of the land. The Fairmead Nursery land is less sensitive, with numbers based on a suitable layout options. This would still retain the most important landscape feature, that of the trees to the north of the Site, a retained treed character to the development, and preserve their wider contribution to the local landscape character. Any future layout options would need to respect the Root Protection Area of retained trees, and future proposals would need to include an Arboricultural Implications Assessment and Method Statement. It is also recommended that a Management Plan be provided to ensure the future health and longevity of the retain trees. Proposals should include further habitat creation and informal and formal recreation space within the northern part of the Site.

- 8.8 A number of positive consequences are set out in relation to Development Approach 2, including minor changes to the Green Belt boundary, no significant impacts on the village as a whole, and the establishment of more logical and defensible Green Belt boundaries. In relation to negative aspects, only one specifically relates to landscape or the Green Belt, and that is in relation to the impact on the landscape, particularly along Newgatestreet Road. TLP consider that this is not relevant to the Site or Policy Site.

### **Green Belt Reviews**

- 8.9 The two reviews undertaken by the Borough of Broxbourne, were both undertaken in 2008, one prepared by Scott Wilson<sup>3</sup> and the other by Prospect Planning<sup>4</sup>. The former is the more detailed and comprehensive review. The latter provides a strategic overview of the existing MGB, particularly with reference to the effect of the horticultural industry in relation to the openness of the Green Belt, strategic guidance on the release of land from the Green Belt and review of four different areas of the Green Belt. In 2008, it was considered by the report that sites on the periphery of Goff's Oak would need to be released from the Green Belt to meet future housing needs in the short/medium term. Limited analysis and review is provided for each of the four different areas in relation to the five functions of the Green Belt and there is a lack of information in relation to specific areas of land or sites. However, the exception relates to the Site, where there is specific mention made to the land to the rear of 92-94 Cuffley Hill and its physical enclosure, with the report advising that it is not necessary to retain as Green Belt, with the land having potential as residential development and should be allocated as either a short term housing site or Reserve Housing Land.

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<sup>3</sup> Borough of Broxbourne, Review of the Green Belt for the Preparation of Local Development Framework (LDF), Final Report, March 2008

<sup>4</sup> Review of the Inner Boundary of The Metropolitan Green Belt within The Borough of Broxbourne

- 8.10 The Scott Wilson report undertook a review of other Green Belt studies to help determine a relevant and robust methodology and criteria for assessing the MGB. It assessed the first three purposes of the Green Belt i.e. checking unrestricted urban sprawl (Purpose 1); prevent merger of settlements (Purpose 2); and safeguarding encroachment into the countryside (Purpose 3). The Green Belt within the Borough of Broxbourne was divided into Areas and Sub-Areas and a scoring system used for each criteria to assess the relative performance of the three purposes of the Green Belt, as well as assess the strength of the inner boundary of the Green Belt, and determine constraints and sustainable development opportunities. The Site is located in Area C, and Sub Area C33 (former Fairmead Nursery) with the western part of the Site (former Rosemead Nursery) being located within the much larger Sub Area C31, which covers much of the Cuffley Brook valley. Consequently, the western part of the Site is disproportionately assessed, if based on C31 alone. Where appropriate, a more proportionate representation would be similar to the adjoining Sub Area C34 (C G Edwards land) to the west.
- 8.11 The vast majority of Area C performs well for Purpose 1, including Sub Area C31 and C34, whilst Sub Area C33 performs poorly. With regard to Purpose 2 the majority of Area C performs well, including Sub Area C31, with Sub Areas C33 and C34 performing moderately well. However, it should also be borne in mind that this is based on distance of separation between existing settlements, but as the western part of the Site forms a very small part of the much larger Sub Area C31, that extends between the settlements of Goff's Oak and Cuffley, this is not representative. Accordingly, the Site as whole should be considered to have the same score as C33 and C34. Area C has a mixed performance in relation to Purpose 3. Sub Area C33 performs moderately and Sub Area C34 performs poorly. The latter however, is largely composed of the existing landscape construction business, so has limited relevance to the western part of the Site.
- 8.12 The report considers that Sub Area C33 (eastern part of the Site) provides little contribution towards the Green Belt stating it: *'performs poorly against the Green Belt purposes, its location meaning that it does little in terms of preventing sprawl. In reality, also does little to separate existing settlements and thus, if anything, it could score lower than that attributed here. Of medium countryside value. Consider possible release from Green Belt'*.
- 8.13 TLP agrees with the assessment work undertaken by Scott Wilson, but considers a reduced contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt would arise for the western part of the Site if considered as a separate Sub Area or if the western part and eastern part of the Site are combined as one Sub Area.
- 8.14 The review of Green Belt inner boundaries identified a significant number of weak areas, especially where the boundary ran along rear gardens of homes or curtilages of existing buildings with no clear

or permanent barrier between the two. This applies to both the eastern and southern boundaries of the Site.

- 8.15 Two options are provided as recommendations regarding changes to the inner Green Belt Boundary. Option 1 involves small scale adjustments to improve robustness and defensibility of the Green Belt in the short term and enable release of poorly performing sub areas. This Option would include Sub Area C33 (eastern part of the Site) which is also identified as having *'low constraints and strong performance against sustainability opportunities'*. Option 2 provides a slightly more bold change, involving additional release of larger areas of land in order to achieve a strengthened boundary that would survive over the long term. TLP consider that Option 2 provides a sensible and appropriate solution to cover the length of the Local Plan. Option 2 involves the removal of part of Sub Area C31 (western part of the Site), C33 and C34 (C G Edwards land) and repositioning the Green Belt boundary to the northern edge of the woodland and field boundary. In terms of Green Belt purposes the report advises *'the removal of these sub areas would enable a more robust and defensible long-term boundary that would more effectively prevent encroachment westwards from Goffs Oak'*. TLP agrees with this statement.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Site is located on the north-western edge of Goff's Oak, on the site of two former redundant nurseries. The Site has been left unmanaged and shows evidence of neglect in the form of an overgrown storage area, containers and abandoned cars. The Site benefits from a number of well established trees that form a strong characteristic within the Site. A well treed and wooded character, and mainly better quality trees, lies within the northern part of the Site. Woodland beyond the Site, further to the west, extends this character and provides enclosure for the Site. Both areas of trees and woodland provide a strong boundary edge with the adjoining open arable valley landscape of Cuffley Brook to the north and north-west. The Site is also enclosed to the east and south by existing two storey houses along Robinson Avenue and Cuffley Hill. This enclosure results in there being very little public views into the Site, with views limited to the rear of the properties overlooking the Site. Consequently, any effects on views from future development of the Site are likely to be limited to the adjoining houses.
- 9.2 The Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment incorporates the Site as part of the settlement of Goff's Oak, and the Broxbourne Landscape Character Assessment identifies it as forming a fringe of a much larger LCA where the focus is on the unrelated Theobald's Estate and Theobald's Park. Development would not change the key characteristics of this LCA and would be consistent with the identified ability for the landscape to accommodate some development. The Site and design aspirations would also meet and address many of the key objectives and guidelines set out for the wider LCT.

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- 9.3 The eastern part of the Site performs poorly in terms of the Green Belt functions, whilst the Site as a whole has weak inner boundaries. Release of the Site from the Green Belt would provide much stronger long-term defensible boundaries for the Green Belt.
- 9.4 It is considered that the proposed development of the Site for housing would provide an appropriate new land use with long term beneficial influences, subject to the: proposed landscape and design led approach; the retention of many of the trees; development sympathetically integrated into the existing treed and wooded character of the Site; the provision of further planting and biodiversity enhancements; the creation of new public open space, access and links; and the long term management of the existing and new planting. TLP consider that these objectives can still be met with the allocation of a greater number of dwellings (approximately 50-70) than the currently drafted proposal for 26 dwellings. This would need to be confirmed through the preparation of indicative site layouts to demonstrate how this would be effectively achieved.