

Technical Note for updated LUC Landscape Sensitivity  
Assessment

**THE BROOKMANS ESTATE – BROOKMANS PARK**  
Aurora Properties Ltd

Updated November 2019

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# 1 TECHNICAL NOTE: REVIEW OF LUC LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT AUGUST 2019

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## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Land Use Consultants (LUC) was commissioned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) in March 2019 to prepare a strategic level Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA). Published in July 2019, the study concentrates on understanding the sensitivities to residential development but does not address potential landscape capacity in terms of quantity of built development. The outputs of this assessment were also intended to provide evidence to support the development of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. LUC confirm that more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) would be required on a site by site basis in relation to the development of any specific site and to inform masterplanning.

1.1.2 WHBC has undertaken three previous Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Studies in October 2012, October 2014 and June 2016. Those studies are all contained on the Council's Local Plan evidence base (under Environment) and were used to inform the emerging Local Plan at Regulation 19 consultation and at submission. It is therefore unclear why the Council has instructed LUC to repeat this task and of greater concern, why LUC has adopted an entirely different methodology to the previous studies.

1.1.3 The LSA uses the WHBC Landscape Character Assessment as a basis for defining assessment areas and considers the sensitivity to residential development of all land within Welwyn Hatfield other than:

- *"Settlements large enough to be inset (ie excluded) from the Green Belt: Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Welwyn, Welham Green, Brookmans Park, Cuffley, Woolmer Green, Oaklands & Mardley Heath, Digswell and Little Heath;*

- *Areas which have 'absolute' constraints that preclude such development."*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Welwyn Hatfield landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2019, p3.

## 1.2 Study Area and Assessment Parcels

1.2.1 The LUC assessment is organised by landscape character area (LCA), using the character areas defined by the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment. Where an LCA lies adjacent to a settlement, the LCA has been divided it into sub-areas and an assessment is presented for each settlement edge in that LCA. Assessment areas away from settlement edges are referenced by the LCA number, and assessment areas adjacent to inset edges are referenced by the LCA number and a letter.

1.2.2 Areas subject to ‘absolute constraints’ - i.e. where development will not be permitted - have been identified and are not assessed in terms of their sensitivity to development; however it is important to note that constrained areas may also have an impact on the sensitivity of adjacent, unconstrained land. The following areas are treated as absolute development constraints, and have been defined in keeping with the definitions used in the Welwyn Hatfield Green Belt Study Stage 3 (February 2019):

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Scheduled Monument
- Historic Park and Garden
- Ancient Woodland
- National Nature Reserve
- Local Nature Reserve
- Local Wildlife Site.

1.2.3 The land surrounding the settlement of Brookmans Park is identified as Landscape Character Area 54: Potters Bar Parkland:

*“The assessment area is located in the south of the Welwyn-Hatfield district and is divided into two halves by Brookmans Park. There are strong urban influences but also a historic character associated with many surviving parkland remnants.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Welwyn Hatfield landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2019, p203.

#### 1.2.4

The assessment area has been divided into four sub-areas, all of which abut specified settlement edges:

- Land at Marshmoor, to the east of the industrial estate at Welham Green (46)
- Land to the east and south of Welham Green (54a)
- Land adjacent to Brookmans Park (54b)
- Land adjacent to Little Heath and Potters Bar (54c)

#### 1.2.5

Area 54b is identified as the land to the north of Brookmans Park as well as the settlement of Bell Bar (to the west of the A1000), and the land to the south of Brookmans Park. Landscape Assessment Area 54b also includes a small area of land to the west of the railway line, bounded by Station Road. It is unclear as to why Area 54b is to both the north and south of the settlement, given that the landscape, topography, views (in and out) and the character of the two areas is very significantly different and should not therefore be merged into one assessment, albeit the LUC assessment does recognise the difference between the land to the north compared to the land to the south.

#### 1.2.6

Promoted Site BrP12 is located within the northern section of Landscape Assessment Area 54b (Land adjacent to Brookmans Park).

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### 1.3 Sensitivity to development on the edge of Brookmans Park (54b)

1.3.1 For the northern section of Area 54b the Assessment makes the following conclusions:

*“To the north of the settlement the remnant parkland characteristics of the golf course, and the ecological value of deciduous woodland blocks, create sensitivity. However woodland containment and settlement influence can also be considered to reduce sensitivity in terms of their impact on rural character both within and beyond the area, and tranquillity is further reduced by road and rail links. Therefore, sensitivity to residential development to the east of the railway line north of Brookmans Park is typically **moderate**. This reduces to **low-moderate** at Bell Bar, where the only sizeable open space is a rough grazing field contained between the settlement edges and the A1000 which, although it has value as a settlement setting, has limited landscape character or quality.”<sup>3</sup>*

1.3.2 As such it can be concluded the parcel BrP12 has also been identified by LUC as having moderate sensitivity to development.

1.3.3 However, the LUC study fails to recognise that the topography of the land adjacent to the northern urban settlement of Brookmans Park (BrP12) is significantly lower than the land to the east towards Bell Bar, has no long range views into or out of it, and is well contained and enclosed; the railway line to the west, Peplins Wood wraps around the north of the site, and Brookmans Park Golf Club is to the east. These factors all differentiate BrP12 from the remainder of 54b.

1.3.4 These factors are all relevant considerations to landscape sensitivity, and when taken into consideration should logically result in the sensitivity of BrP12 being reduced from moderate to low-moderate.

1.3.5 LLA has previously undertaken a Landscape Sensitivity Study, which was submitted to WHBC in 2015 which explains in detail that the Landscape Sensitivity of the land adjacent to the settlement (the location of BrP12) would be less sensitive to development than the higher ground to the north and east.

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<sup>3</sup> Welwyn Hatfield landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2019, p212.

## 1.4 Key sensitivities and mitigation potential on the edge of Brookmans Park (54b)

1.4.1 To minimise adverse impact on landscape and visual character, LUC considered that development proposals should:

*“• Ensure development is not placed on slopes that are visually prominent in the wider landscape.*

*• Avoid damaging parkland character and protect BAP Priority Habitat deciduous woodlands as well as hedgerows and other semi-natural features.*

*• Maintain and enhance connectivity between natural landscape elements, avoiding containment of sizeable areas, such as Brookmans Park Golf Course, by development.*

*• Ensure that the role of high ground south of Hawkshead Road as a visual separator between Brookmans Park and Potters Bar / Little Heath is maintained.”<sup>4</sup>*

1.4.2 All of these bullets appear to apply to the section of Area 54b to the south of Brookmans Park. However, bullet 3 is considered to address the land to the north:

*“Maintain and enhance connectivity between natural landscape elements, avoiding containment of sizeable areas, such as Brookmans Park Golf Course, by Development”*

1.4.3 As this comment addresses the section of Area 54b north of Brookmans Park, it is considered directly relevant to parcel BrP12. However, no such direct comment about a specific housing site appears anywhere else in the entire LUC Landscape Sensitivity study and is inconsistent with other assessments. Furthermore, it does not take account of the important compensatory improvements and landscape mitigation (including new footpaths, cycle ways, access to managed woodland etc) that would be provided as part of future development at parcel BrP12.

1.4.4 It also fails to acknowledge that Brookmans Park Golf Course is not a “natural landscape”; it was originally within the grounds of The Brookmans Estate manor house and is a manmade landscape that is already significantly contained by its own mature woodlands.

1.4.5 This reference to Brookmans Park Golf Course and the suggestion of containment of that landscape should be removed from the LUC study for consistency and having regard to the specific circumstances of Area 54b – north.

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<sup>4</sup> Welwyn Hatfield landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2019, p213.

## 1.5 Compensatory Improvements

1.5.1 In July 2019, MHCLG updated the Planning Practice Guidance to introduce specific compensatory improvements to offset the removal of land from the Green Belt. These are important considerations for the consultation on both the Landscape Sensitivity Document and the Green Gap Assessment.

1.5.2 These comprehensive improvements are set out in the accompanying Liz Lake Associates Figure 1 Landscape and Biodiversity Opportunities, and include:

Planning Practice Guidance example	Brookmans Park, BrP12 enhancement
<p><b>New or enhanced green infrastructure</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extensive area of open grassland and isolated mature oak specimens will be retained and enhanced to create a diverse habitat of value and informal recreational space. A mosaic of new habitats will be created to optimise the wildlife value of the area.</li> <li>• The existing grassland would be enhanced to increase floristic diversity and promote complementary areas of damp and neutral / acidic grassland.</li> <li>• The majority of the existing grassland on the north and south of the Legg would be subject to an ongoing agricultural management regime including hay cropping and grazing, to optimise the botanical value of the grassland.</li> <li>• Planting within and around the proposed residential development area would include groups of native flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs of specific value to invertebrates, breeding birds and bats. These new habitats, along with retained / enhanced areas of grassland, would help to screen and sub-divide the development, to integrate it into the surrounding partially wooded landscape and to optimise ecological connectivity, through creating new green links and habitat of intrinsic value to a range of wildlife.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Woodland planting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A programme of conservation management to Peplin’s Wood and The Legg will be implemented, connecting areas of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Sites.</li> <li>• A phased programme of thinning and coppicing is proposed to enhance the species, age and structural diversity of the woodland and encourage the regeneration of a characteristic woodland flora. The existing inappropriate trees and shrubs (including poplar, sycamore and laurel) would be removed as would the fly tipping.</li> <li>• A 15m buffer strip will be provided adjacent to the ancient woodland within the development area managed to provide a linear woodland edge habitat including some native tree and shrub planting, to boost natural regeneration, within a mosaic of grassland communities. The resulting graded shrubby and tall grass / herb woodland edge will be of undoubted benefit to invertebrates, breeding birds, bats, other small mammals, herptiles and other wildlife.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 15m buffer strip will be provided adjacent to the ancient woodland within the development area managed to provide a linear woodland edge habitat including some native tree and shrub planting, to boost natural regeneration, within a mosaic of grassland communities.</li> <li>• The hedgerows are to be reinforced to provide a substantial native tree belt linking the ancient woodland habitats to provide a valuable wildlife link for bats, great crested newts, reptiles and other</li> </ul>

Planning Practice Guidance example <span style="float: right;">Brookmans Park, BrP12 enhancement</span>	
	protected and notable species, including a range of characteristic woodland birds.
<b>Improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a programme of conservation management to Peplin’s Wood and The Legg, the connecting areas of ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Sites.</li> <li>Ponds located in the ancient woodland, which are currently heavily silted and of low ecological value, are to be restored to provide suitable open habitat for a range of aquatic flora and fauna, including great crested newts, which are found in nearby ponds.</li> <li>The hedgerows are to be reinforced to provide a substantial native tree belt linking the ancient woodland habitats to provide a valuable wildlife link for bats, great crested newts, reptiles and other protected and notable species, including a range of characteristic woodland birds.</li> <li>New ponds / SuDs to be created on the site. These would be specifically designed to optimise their potential for wildlife and would be planted with locally indigenous marginal and emergent aquatic plants, to encourage use by typical wetland insects, breeding birds and amphibians.</li> </ul>
<b>New or enhanced walking and cycle routes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public access would be permitted via new routes to be created in strategic parts of the woodland, these routes and proposed new glades would increase the diversity of habitats within the woodland.</li> </ul>
<b>Improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community orchard to include traditional Hertfordshire varieties of apples and other fruit trees.</li> <li>Open spaces will be provided and made accessible to the public, enabling previously closed land to be used for recreation and leisure by local residents of Brookmans Park.</li> <li>Public footpaths and cycle ways will be provided to join Bell Bar to Brookmans Park by a green route.</li> </ul>

1.5.3 The above mitigation and compensatory improvements through the release of BrP12 from the Green Belt have been highlighted previously. However, new Government guidance demonstrates the importance in policy-making authorities recognising these benefits and providing the framework for them to be delivered. All of the compensatory improvements being offered are within the ownership of the land owner of BrP12 and are deliverable. The land owner has met with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust who have subsequently undertaken a survey of Peplins Wood, The Legg and Georges Wood, with the land owner being happy to continue to work with H&MWLT to agree to a management plan for the ongoing and future successful management of these woodlands.

1.5.4 The assessment of future development sites to be released from the Green Belt should include consideration of such compensatory improvements.

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