





Existing chalkstream (River Oughton)



Vegetated Boundary to the North of the site



Established open meadow grassland

Introduction

Guarda Ltd has been commissioned by Hill Residential to prepare this Landscape Strategy document.

This document describes and sets out the narrative behind the proposed landscape design approach and anticipated appearance for the former Mill Site in Ickleford. It explains the key design principles, landscape structure, and material palette that will inform the development, ensuring a cohesive and contextually responsive scheme.

Existing Landscape Character

The site comprises a former flour mill complex, including a number of silos and warehouse structures. In contrast, a substantial area of well-established meadow lies to the south of the site. This meadow is bounded by a mature belt of woodland trees to the north, south and west, contributing to a natural and established landscape character.

The site is enclosed by residential development to the north and north-east. Trees along the northern and eastern boundaries of the mill site provide effective visual screening between the site and neighbouring residential areas.

Vehicular access is currently taken from Arlesey Road, with vehicles crossing the River Oughton to enter the site.

The river forms a strong and clearly defined edge to the village settlement of Ickleford, creating a distinct transition between the built form and the surrounding countryside.

KEY

- Illustrative indication of existing trees and hedges to be retained. Refer to Arboricultural Report, Tree Constraints Plan & Impact Assessment by Sharon Hosegood Associates.
- Existing Vegetation to be retained.
- Proposed location of feature and native or native cultivar trees.
- Proposed location street trees.
- Proposed native hedge.
- Proposed ornamental hedge.
- Proposed native buffer planting.
- Proposed mown path through wildflower and biodiverse grass.
- Proposed attenuation basin with wetland wildflower and wetland planting.
- Existing vegetation along the River Oughton riverbank to be retained, with proposed coir rolls and marginal planting.
- Proposed hoggin footpath alongside river with 1.2m high protective railing to top of bank.
- Existing footbridge enhanced with raised planters.
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- Proposed woodland LEAP located within existing trees, incorporating a natural log boundary, timber play equipment, and bench seating.
- Proposed Play-on-the-Way incorporating stepping logs and balance beams, with bench seating.
- Proposed frontage with tree planting and 0.5 m high timber bollards.
- Proposed native bulb planting to site entrance.
- Proposed shared garden to the apartment block, with picnic bench seating, enclosed by native hedge planting and resident-only access gates.
- Vehicular bridge providing the main access to the site.
- Existing grassland south of the site to be retained.



Illustrative Landscape Masterplan

Site Wide Design

The landscape design for the site has been informed by the Ickleford Design Code (May 2022). The development has been structured around a series of distinct character areas that reflect both the wider village context and the intrinsic qualities of the site. Movement through the development offers a varied yet cohesive landscape experience, reinforcing local identity and sense of place.

1. Arlesey Road Frontage

Arlesey Road is characterised by a green, village-edge quality and forms an important connection to Hitchin. The landscape strategy seeks to retain the sense of openness on entering the village. A row of native street trees will frame key views across the existing meadow, reinforcing the rural character while providing structure and visual continuity along the frontage.

2. Open Space and LEAP

The masterplan prioritises the southern green open space to preserve the gap with neighbouring settlements and maintain the rural setting. The countryside edge is retained as a landscaped buffer to the surrounding environment. Existing mature trees are preserved to safeguard key views across the wider landscape.

This area incorporates SuDS attenuation features, located at the site's lowest point, integrating sustainable drainage within the open space framework. The LEAP is sensitively positioned within the existing tree belt to minimise visual impact on the open meadow character. Native planting and retained grassland establish a natural backdrop to this character area.

Dwellings are oriented to face the green space wherever possible, promoting passive surveillance and providing attractive outlooks. In areas south of the river where direct frontage is not achievable, open views across the landscape are maintained to preserve visual connectivity.

3. Chalkstream

The Riverside Walk along the northern bank of the chalkstream establishes a soft transition between the development and the natural landscape beyond. The river frontage will remain largely undisturbed, enhanced with additional native planting and intermittent seating to create a high-quality green and blue corridor for residents and visitors.

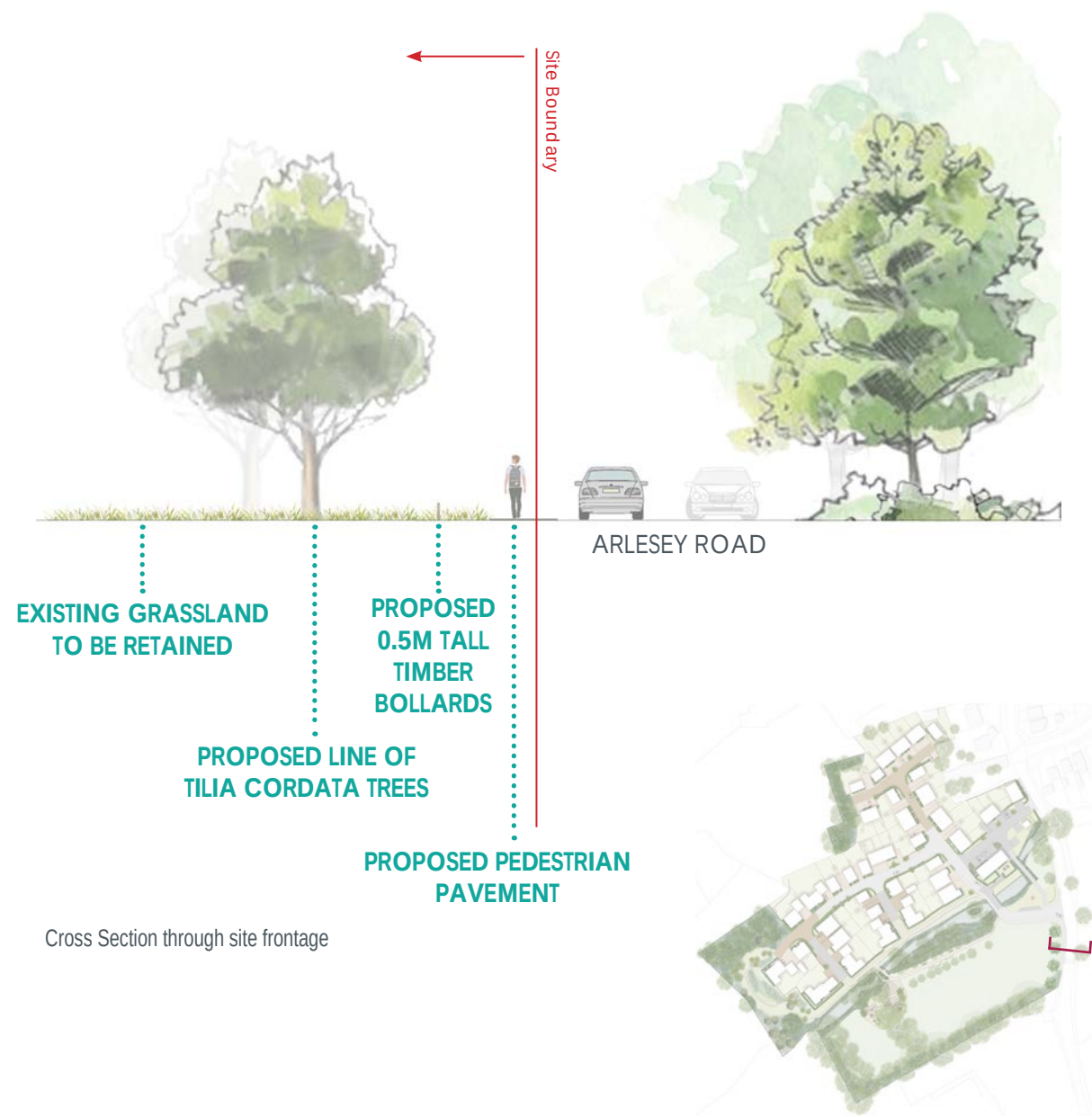
Connectivity is prioritised through strong east-west pedestrian and cycle routes. Existing bridges will be repurposed to accommodate pedestrian and cycle use only, reinforcing sustainable movement and improving accessibility throughout the site.

4. Vegetated Street Scene

The principal street runs north-south through the development, forming the structural spine of the scheme. Proposed hedgerows and trees along the street create varied enclosure and outlook, establishing a robust yet attractive landscaped environment within the developable area. The character gradually softens towards the Green Belt edge, responding sensitively to the wider landscape context.

5. Mill Complex / Private Drives

Shared surface streets branch from the main route, forming pedestrian-priority environments that encourage social interaction and a sense of community. These streets terminate with framed views towards the chalkstream or open space areas, maintaining visual connections to the surrounding landscape and reinforcing the site's natural setting.



Landscape Strategy – Village Entrance Character

The landscape strategy seeks to retain and enhance the strong sense of openness experienced when entering the village — a quality that provides a welcome contrast to the more urban character of Hitchin. The transition from town to countryside is an important part of the village’s identity, and this approach ensures that rural character remains the defining first impression.

Removal of Industrial Boundary Treatment

The existing green mesh fencing along the site boundary will be removed. Its utilitarian and industrial appearance is incongruous with the quaint rural qualities of the village and currently interrupts views across the adjacent meadow. The removal of this fencing will immediately soften the frontage and restore visual continuity with the surrounding landscape.

Timber Bollards

Vehicular access will be controlled through the introduction of low-key timber bollards positioned discreetly along the site frontage. This approach avoids the harsh and visually intrusive presence typically associated with metal fencing, ensuring that the openness of the meadow and wider landscape setting is preserved. The proposed timber bollards will:

- Maintain uninterrupted views across the meadow and surrounding countryside
- Provide effective vehicle deterrence without creating a sense of enclosure
- Allow pedestrian permeability, in accordance with the principles set out in the local design code
- Introduce a softer, more welcoming edge treatment appropriate to the rural character of the village

By defining the boundary without forming a continuous barrier, the bollards reinforce the informal and open character of the village entrance, supporting a transition that feels rural, permeable and visually cohesive rather than defensive or suburban in nature.

Native Lime Tree Avenue

To further strengthen the sense of arrival and rural character, a row of native lime trees will be planted along the frontage. This planting strategy will:

- Create a strong and legible gateway into the village
- Reinforce rural identity through native species selection
- Provide vertical structure while retaining openness beneath the canopy
- Establish long-term visual continuity along the approach

Over time, the lime trees will form a distinctive yet understated green framework, marking the transition from urban edge to village landscape.



0.5m High Timber Bollards



Tilia cordata tree



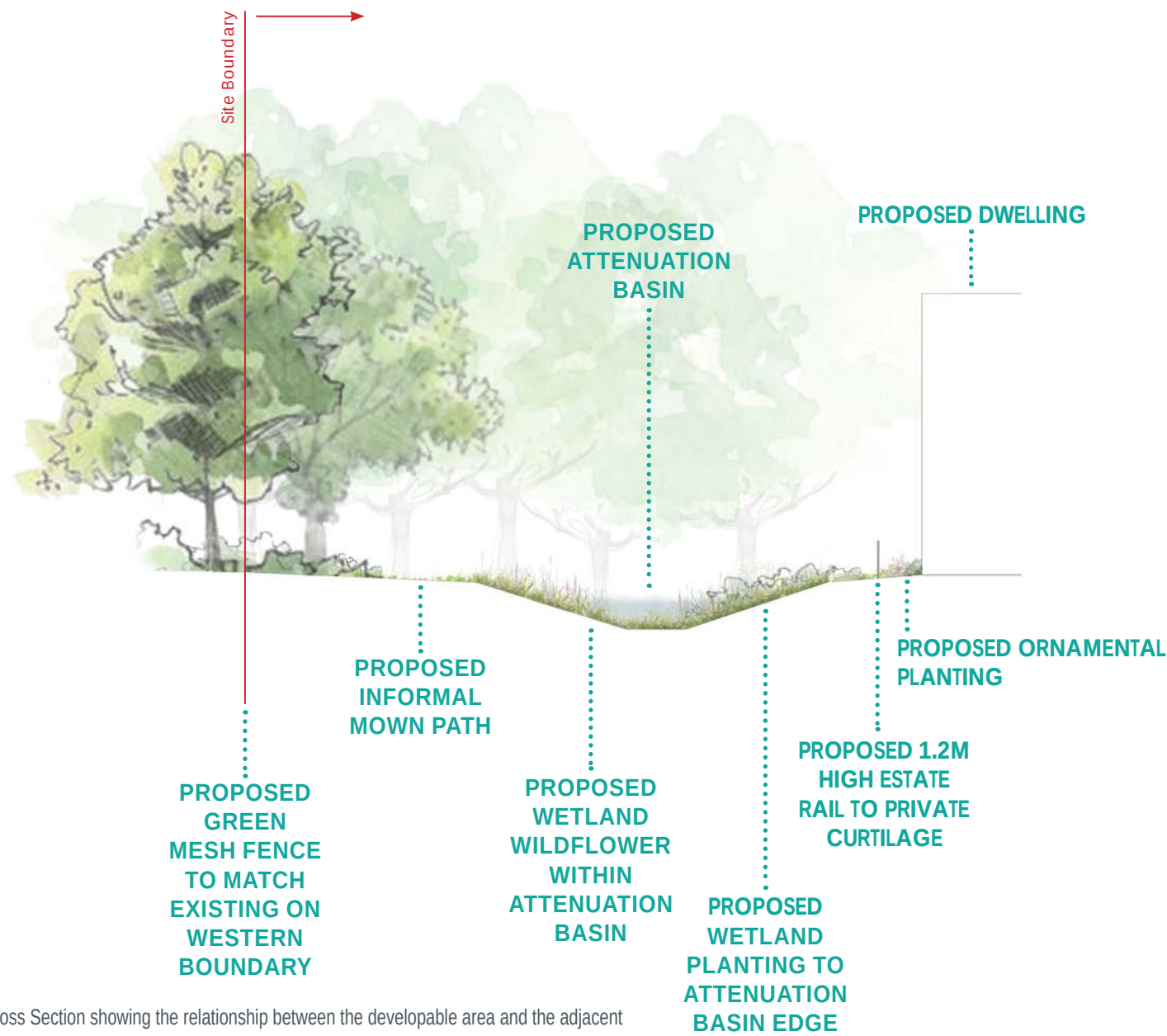
Google Street View (August 2020) looking north on Arlesley Road and the site to the west

Landscape & Green Infrastructure

Designing within the Green Belt

The area of open space to the west of the developable area lies within the designated Green Belt. While no built development is proposed within this area, the design adopts a sensitive and landscape-led approach in recognition of its policy context and its ecological value.

The open space is intended to provide a soft, natural transition between the proposed development and the adjacent woodland along the northern and western boundaries. The strategy reinforces the existing landscape, while creating a sense of openness and enhancing the biodiversity value.



Cross Section showing the relationship between the developable area and the adjacent open space

Ecological Considerations

The landscape proposals respond carefully to the green belt designation, as such:

- No formal/surfaced footpaths are proposed within this area.
- A simple mown grass path will provide primary pedestrian access.

This approach reduces ground disturbance, protects wildlife corridors, and extend the semi-natural character of the space.

Sustainable Drainage & Biodiversity Enhancement

An attenuation basin is proposed within the open space as part of the site's sustainable drainage strategy. Rather than appearing as engineered infrastructure, the basin will be designed as a naturalistic landscape feature.

Enhancements include:

- Native marginal wetland planting to create habitat diversity.
- Native shrub planting to provide structure and seasonal interest.

The basin and surrounding planting will contribute to ecological uplift, surface water management, and visual amenity, creating a multifunctional green space.

Tree Strategy

The large mature lime tree (T4) is proposed for removal. Further site appraisals and specialist testing have been undertaken, which confirm that the tree is structurally defective due to fungal decay. As a result of this structural weakness, the tree poses a potential safety risk. In the interests of the safety and well-being of future occupants and members of the public, it is therefore considered unsafe to retain and removal is recommended. To maintain landscape continuity and canopy cover, it will be replaced with a semi-mature tree of the same species planted in close proximity to its original location.



Attenuation basin with wildflower planting



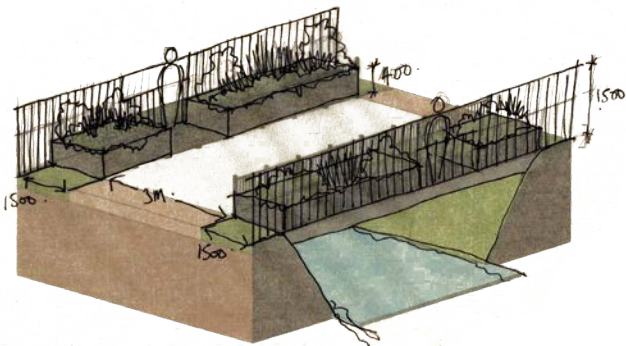
Mown path through wildflower



Coir rolls planted with marginal planting



River Oughton Landscape Proposals



Sketch proposals for pedestrian footbridge



Proposed coir roll enhancement

The Riverside Walk along the northern bank of the chalkstream provides a soft transition between the development and the wider natural landscape. The river frontage will remain largely undisturbed, enhanced with native planting in the form of pre-planted coir rolls and intermittent seating to create an attractive green and blue corridor.

Homes to the south are oriented to face the chalkstream, benefiting from a rural outlook and providing natural surveillance. Frontage treatments adopt a natural approach, with native hedges and estate railings defining private gardens while maintaining a soft edge to public space.

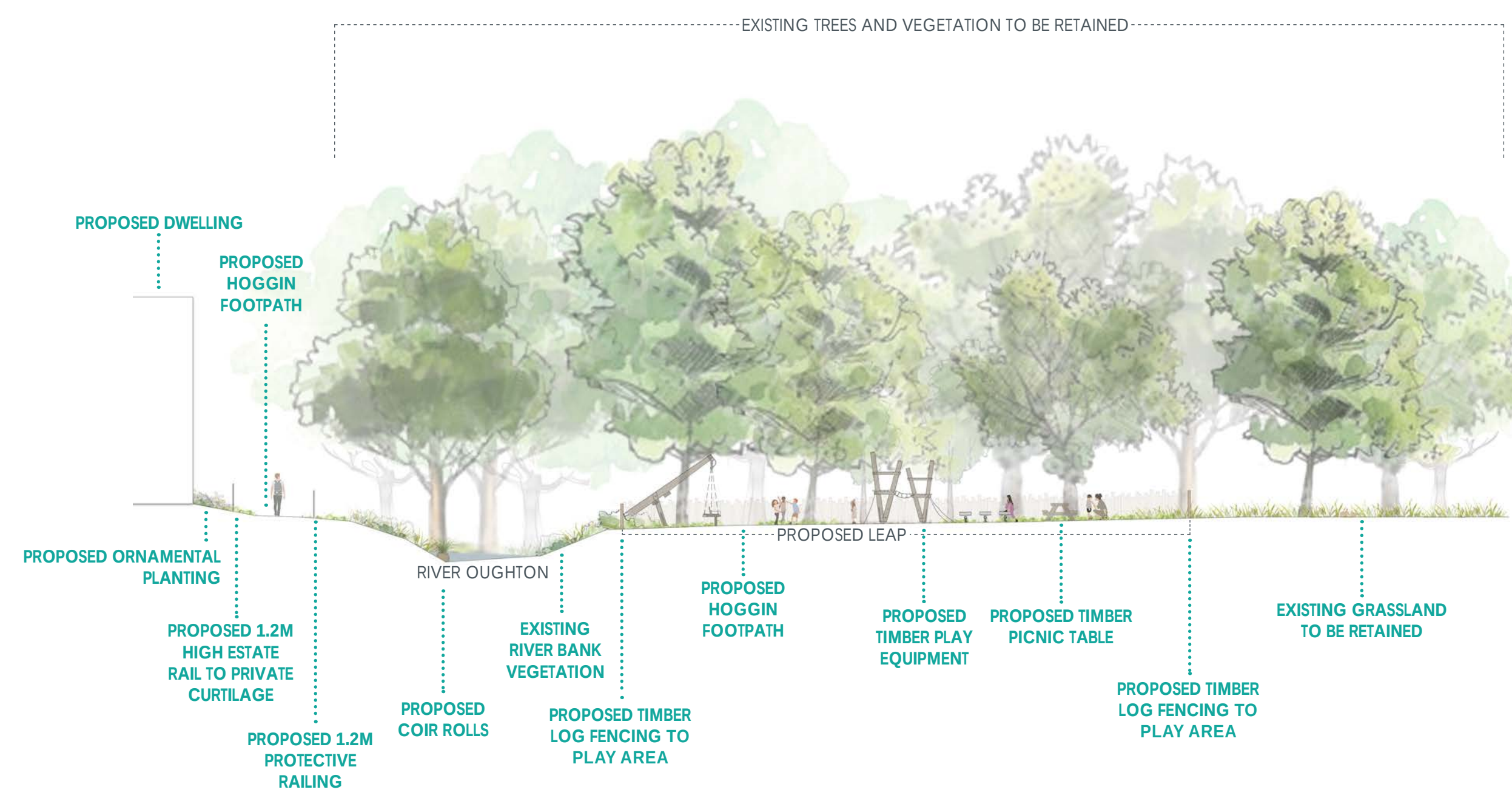
A metal vertical railing is proposed along the extent of the steep northern bank to prioritise safety while retaining visual openness. The railing design will align with boundary treatments elsewhere along the corridor.

Strong east-west pedestrian and cycle routes prioritise connectivity. Existing bridges will be repurposed for pedestrian and cycle use only, supporting sustainable movement. Raised planters will soften hard edges and contribute to a cohesive, naturalistic character.

Additional ecological enhancements include log piles along the southern bank, created from recycled timber obtained during site clearance, providing valuable habitat within the chalkstream corridor while also deterring access down to rivers edge.

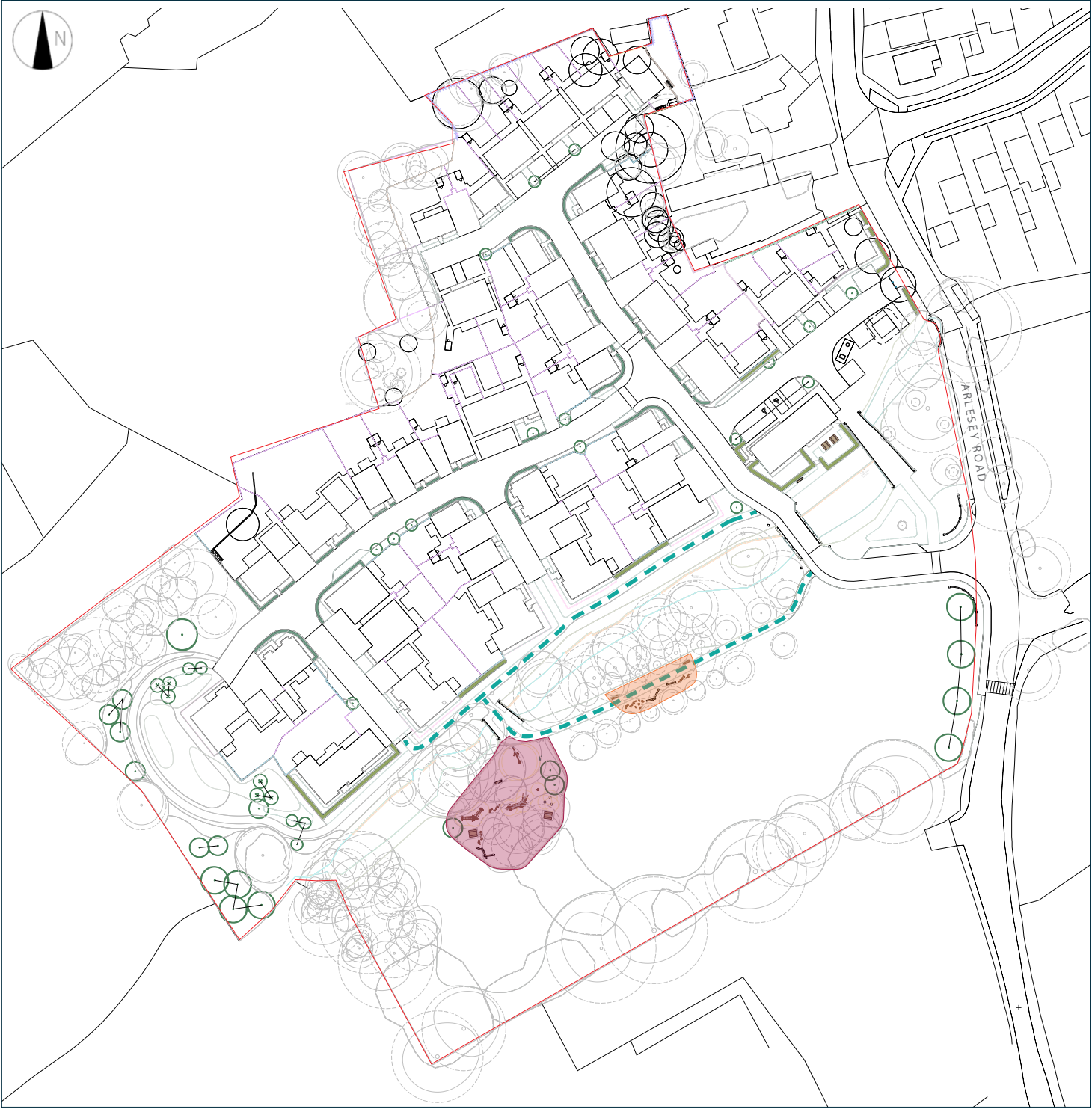


River Oughton and existing vegetation



Cross Section showing the chalkstream proposals and the proposed LEAP





Ickleford Mill, Play Strategy Plan for Proposed Layout

Overview

The play strategy is centred around the large southern open space, set within a natural landscape framework. This space forms the principal destination for recreation and informal activity across the site.

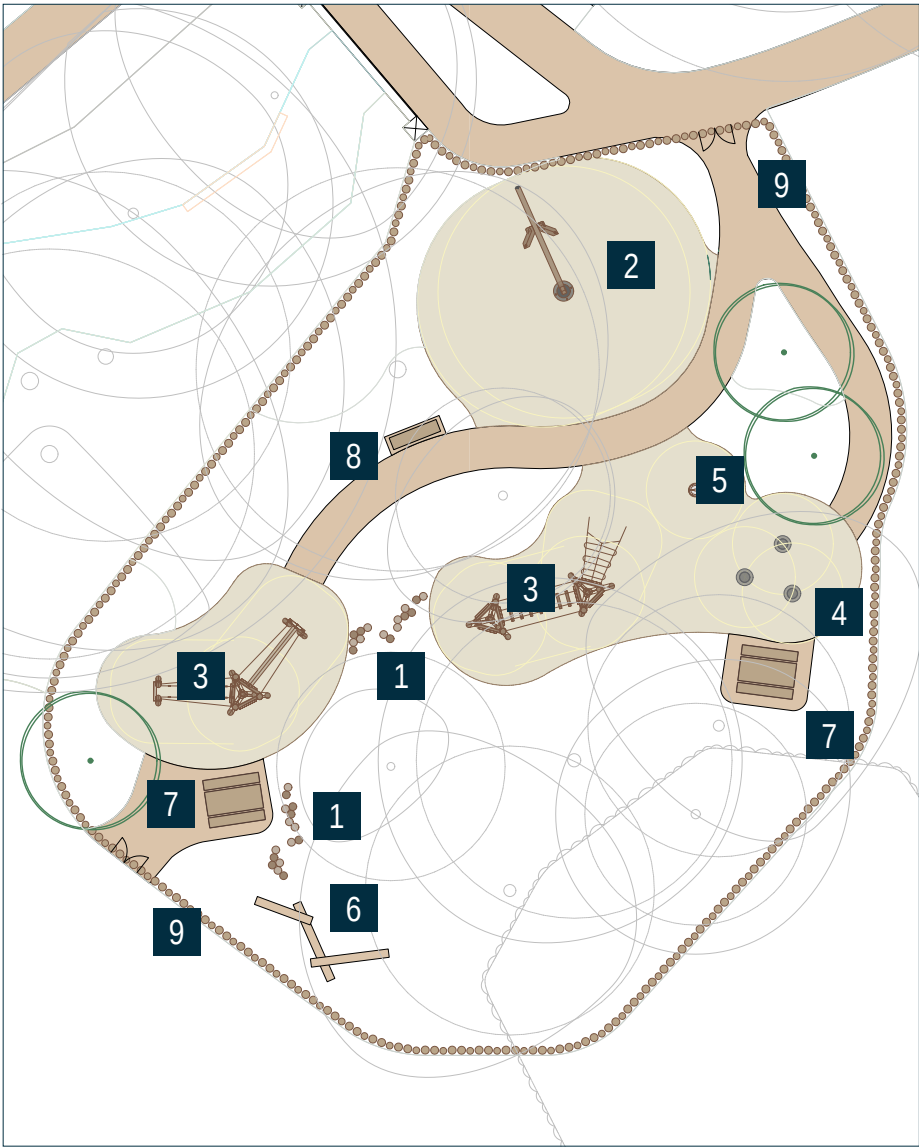
Informal “Play on the Way” elements are incorporated along the formal footpath south of the chalkstream, encouraging incidental play and interaction as part of everyday movement. Bench seating is provided to support rest, pause and social interaction along this route.

The southern open space provides a clear, accessible and well-defined setting for play and informal use, directly associated with the LEAP, establishing a strong recreational focus within an attractive and cohesive landscape setting.

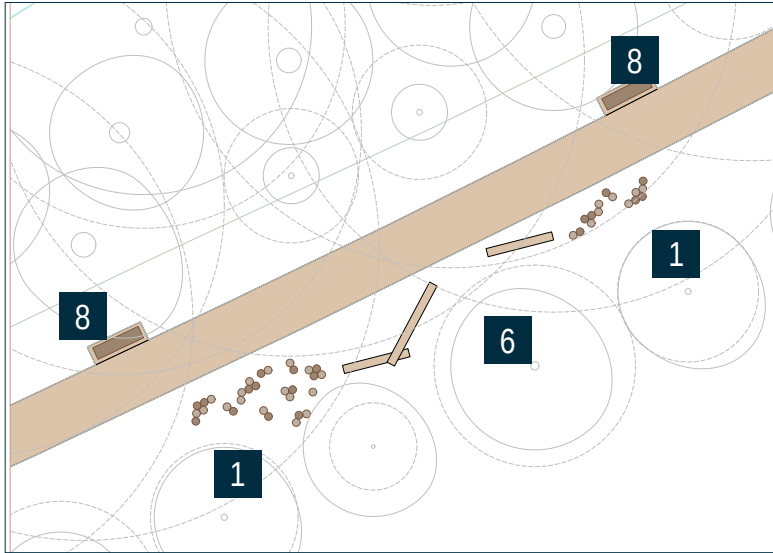
Key

- Proposed LEAP
- Proposed ‘Play on the Way’
- Indicative Circular Pedestrian Route

LEAP



Play On The Way



Play Equipment Plan - LEAP and Play On The Way

Play Equipment Plans

The proposals seek to deliver a range of play opportunities distributed across the site, comprising a LEAP and 'Play on the Way' elements.

The LEAP is located within the southern area of open space and is designed to cater for a wide age range. It includes a balance of more challenging play, such as climbing, balancing and swinging, alongside smaller-scale items that encourage rocking and spinning for younger children. The space promotes interaction with the surrounding woodland setting, enabling exploratory play within the trees. The area is enclosed by a secure log boundary and incorporates picnic bench seating for accompanying adults.

Additional informal play opportunities are provided through 'Play on the Way' elements along the pedestrian route to the south of the site, creating a linear play experience. Bench seating is incorporated throughout the route to provide opportunities for rest and pause.

Play Equipment

- 1. Stepping Logs sourced from Site
- 2. Cantilever Tyre Swing
- 3. Triangular Podium Log Combination
- 4. Turning Springy Tyres
- 5. Small Spinner
- 6. Balance Beams and Logs sourced from Site
- 7. Picnic Benches
- 8. Bench Seating
- 9. Log boundary with Gate Access



Open Space & Play Strategy

The precedent images illustrate the type and character of play equipment proposed across the site. The equipment is naturalistic and deliberately low key in appearance, designed to sit comfortably within the landscape and complement the surrounding open spaces.

The play elements support a range of informal play activities, including climbing, balancing, bouncing, swinging and free movement, creating moments of interest and discovery along key routes and within play spaces.

Equipment is predominantly timber, reinforcing the natural aesthetic shown within the precedents. Where necessary, timber posts may incorporate metal shoes to limit ground contact and improve durability.

Play Equipment

- 1. Stepping Logs sourced from site
- 2. Cantilever Tyre Swing
- 3. Triangluar Podium Log Combination
- 4. Turning Springy Tyres
- 5. Small Spinner
- 6. Stepping Beams and Logs sourced from site

Tree Strategy

A diverse mix of tree species has been incorporated throughout the site to establish a clear landscape hierarchy and to ensure that planting responds appropriately to the scale and character of each space.



Tree Palette

- 1. Betula pendula
- 2. Tilia x europaea
- 3. Alnus glutinosa
- 4. Malus trilobata
- 5. Malus baccata 'Street Parade'
- 6. Prunus avium
- 7. Prunus x schmittii
- 8. Corylus avellana

KEY

Large native feature trees - 19 trees

Medium / large street trees - 14 trees

Small / medium street trees - 3 trees

Small garden trees/ large shrubs - 10 trees



Feature Trees

Large feature trees play a key role in establishing identity and legibility within the development. Their scale and presence create focal points and reinforce spatial structure. These trees are strategically positioned:

- Within areas of public open space.
- At the termination of key vistas.

Their placement strengthens visual connections and enhances the overall landscape setting.

Street Trees

Street trees are arranged to reinforce the hierarchy of movement routes. Street trees are located along the subsidiary routes / private roads to create a strong avenue character and sense of arrival.

Existing Trees

Mature trees across the site make a significant contribution to the existing landscape structure and character. They provide immediate visual maturity, reinforce local identity, and establish a strong green framework that underpins the development proposals. Retaining these trees wherever feasible has been a key design driver, ensuring that the scheme benefits from an established canopy and sense of place from the outset.

Root Protection & Construction Methodology

All proposed pathways and areas of hard surfacing located within identified Root Protection Areas (RPAs) will be designed and constructed using a no-dig methodology.



Hard Landscape & Boundary Treatments

A high-quality hard landscape palette has been developed to support the residential character of the scheme, establish a clear hierarchy of movement, and create distinct character areas across the site.

The primary road and associated pedestrian footways are finished in asphalt, reflecting their role as the main, high-traffic routes. Private roads transition to block paving in warm grey and brown tones, laid in a herringbone pattern to provide a durable and visually cohesive surface appropriate to the domestic setting.

Private footpaths are formed in block paving laid in a stretcher bond pattern, offering subtle variation from vehicular surfaces and reinforcing legibility within the street scene. Within areas of public open space and along the chalkstream, paths adopt a hoggin finish, creating a softer, more naturalistic appearance while remaining accessible and sustainable.

Boundary treatments are designed to balance enclosure, security, and visual permeability. Estate rail fencing defines property edges adjoining public open space, maintaining openness and views towards the green backdrop. Private garden boundaries comprise a mix of screen walls and closeboard fencing. Existing mesh fencing will be retained where feasible, while industrial security fencing will be removed and replaced with a more appropriate treatment in keeping with the site context.

The boundary to the LEAP will be formed from vertical timber logs, creating a simple, naturalistic edge that responds to and complements its woodland setting. Loose bark chippings is the preferred safety surfacing which will reduce the visual impact on the existing woodland character being retained.

Materials

- 1. Block Paving - Charcoal
- 2. Block Paving - Burnt Oak
- 3. Block Paving - Natural
- 4. Safety Surfacing
- 5. Asphalt
- 6. Hoggin
- 7. Estate Railing
- 8. Log Boundary Fencing