

Landscape Strategy

For proposed residential development at:
Land east of Bedford Road
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 2UR

for

Arte Construction Ltd

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Site Description

The proposed development is on land east of Bedford Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire. The proposals include fifty dwellings in a mix of detached and semi detached. A public open space (POS) is proposed in the northern portion of the site. The development will sit within a boundary of approximately 1.7 hectares of a pasture field.

The site is on the eastern edge of Westmill, a suburb of the town of Hitchin. The settlement boundary of Hitchin follows the site's boundary within the current Local Plan however the site is bounded to the west by Bedford Road and Westmill, and to the south and east by the grounds of The Priory School, situating it within a suburban landscape. To the north is the River Oughton a natural landscape corridor between the settlements of Ickleford and Hitchin. The town is surrounded by arable fields.

The site is currently accessed via a field gate at the south western corner. The proposals is to create a opening and access point in the north western corner from Bedford Road.

The boundary of the field enclosure consist of mixed species hedgerows and trees. To the south is a substantial, well managed hedge of mainly hawthorn. To the east off-site is a broad tree belt of sycamore, ash, Norway maple, oak and some pine with an understorey of hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood and field maple. The northern edge is relatively open with some fully mature hawthorn, cypress, ash and scrub. Along the western edge is a wide verge of managed grass. The tree line is inconsistent with young ash dominant on the southern stretch, with mature ash trees to the north. There are hawthorn and field maple and some blackthorn of non-continuous hedgerow along the edge.

The site has no Public Rights of Way, built elements including fencing or roads. The rough grass of teh interior has emerging stands of willow and bramble. It is likely an occasional hay crop is taken. There may be some informal dog walking on site. There is evidence of fly tipping.

Opportunities and Constraints

The site offers an established setting for a new housing in a suburban edge environment, with established bus routes, close to the town centre and services. Employment areas are within walking and cycling distance.

The site has strong links to nature, a local Nature Reserve lies immediately to the northwest with links to a good network of footpaths including the named trail the 'Icknield Way'.

There are playing fields to the south, and Hitchin has numerous sports clubs within walking distance of the site. Burford Way allotments lie 250m to the west. There are several allotments in the town.

Hitchin has a good train service to large employment centres to the north and east, and to London in the south.

The site is suitable to be considered Grey Belt in line with national planning policy.

The mature trees and hedgerows on the boundaries provide an instantly mature and tree'd backdrop to new homes. However the western edge will see some tree losses for access and implementing the swales in the SuDs scheme. Existing subterranean drains reduce areas of tree planting.

The POS on the northern edge is an opportunity to create diverse habitat within the attenuation basin, meadow grass and tree planting, and links to the riparian landscape immediately to the north.

The site is within the Green Belt, and outside of the settlement boundary.

Gas mains affect planting possibilities in the northern POS and other utilities on the western edge.

The site is overlooked from the west, and tree losses may lead to more open views, There are partial seasonal views from the north.

There are, however few visual receptors that will experience a significant visual effect of the proposals.

The proposals allow for an improvement in the landscape management of the site to promote biodiversity, use of permeable surfaces and the planting of new trees.

Design evolution

The design has sought to accommodate housing to reflect the local densities and housing need. Therefore the proposals will bring 50% affordable housing within the scheme. The proposals also accommodate a SuDs scheme with swales, and an attenuation basin to the northern POS :

- New built elements sit comfortably within the field boundary
- Heights of ridge lines follow the existing pattern of development
- POS on the northern edge follows design guide and links to PRoWs to the north
- On site cycle and refuse storage
- Opportunities for wildlife provision

Design Considerations

The landscape design process has sought to provide a suitable setting for the settlement edge and integration into the suburban fabric of Hitchin.

The North Herts Design Guide (2011) principles for design include:

- Character (sense of place and history)
- Continuity and Enclosure (distinguish between public/private space)
- Quality of the Public Realm (sense of well-being and amenity)
- Ease of movement (connectivity and permeability)
- Legibility (ease of understanding)
- Adaptability (ease of change)
- Diversity (ease of choice)
- Quality of Private Space (useability)
- Sustainability (reducing Car parking)

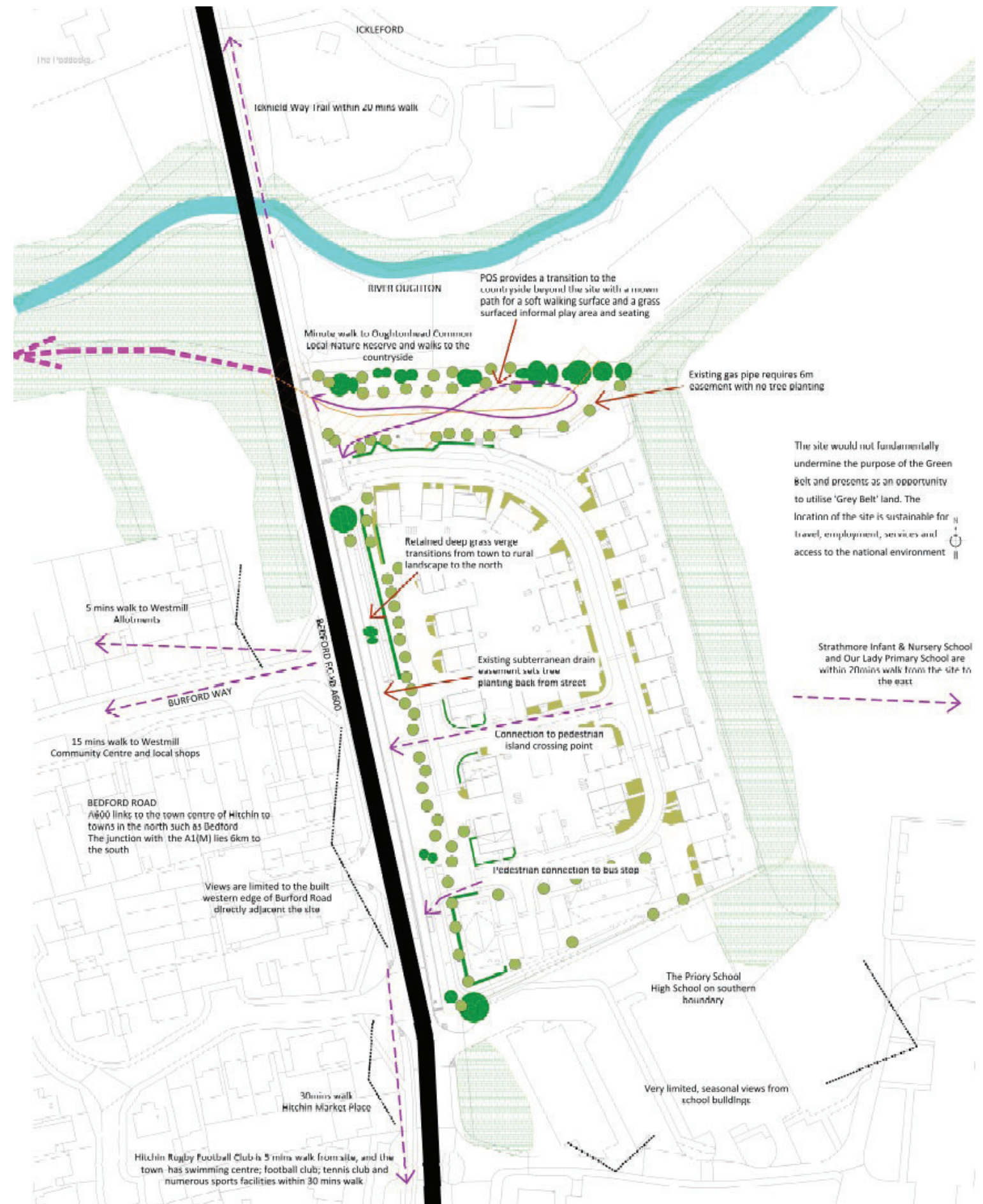
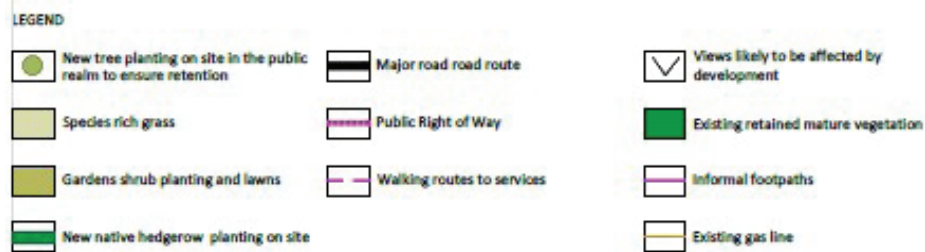
The layout reflects the lower density of housing away from the town centre. The site has no visual relationship with Conservation Areas, scheduled monuments or listed buildings.

The building line has been designed to be line with surrounding residential blocks and to present open frontages onto the main Bedford Road.

The proposals will allow for the continued access to the countryside with good connectivity to the surrounding footpaths whilst presenting a soft settlement edge on the northern boundary.

Pavements and informal footpaths within the development link to routes to the village centre and the countryside and circulate within the site itself.

- The layout allows for adequate parking within the curtilage of individual properties and provision for visitor parking. The scheme will retain boundary vegetation where possible however there is capacity for enhancement along the western and northern edges. The eastern and southern vegetation boundaries are strong and should be retained within the scheme. In regard to mitigation there is a 6m easement in the POS which restrict trees planting and species.
- New planting within the POS on the northern should be layered to retain some visual permeability in keeping with the river corridor landscape to the north. The proposals offer an opportunity for 'softening the interface between urban and rural landscapes' which is a guideline for development in this landscape character area.
- Generally views are not affected by the scheme, the built settlement edge means that only some dwellings will experience a change to views, and this does not penetrate further than the first row of dwellings on Bedford Road.
- All existing boundaries except the break for access and swales will be retained for landscape value and biodiversity.
- The POS provides a location for informal play for pre- schoolers in a naturalistic environment.
- It is recommended that all new tree planting avoids ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) which is dominant in the boundaries due to ash dieback, *Chalara fraxinea*, and include species that are resilient to climate change and disease.



Access and circulation

Pedestrian

The design of pedestrian routes across the site links to Bedford Road bus stops and PRowS.

Pavements create more formal routes within the development to link with the roadway to the southwest.

The suburb provides, pre school, primary and secondary schooling all within walking distance.

Local shops are within 15 minutes walk of the site, and the centre of town is within 30 minutes walk.

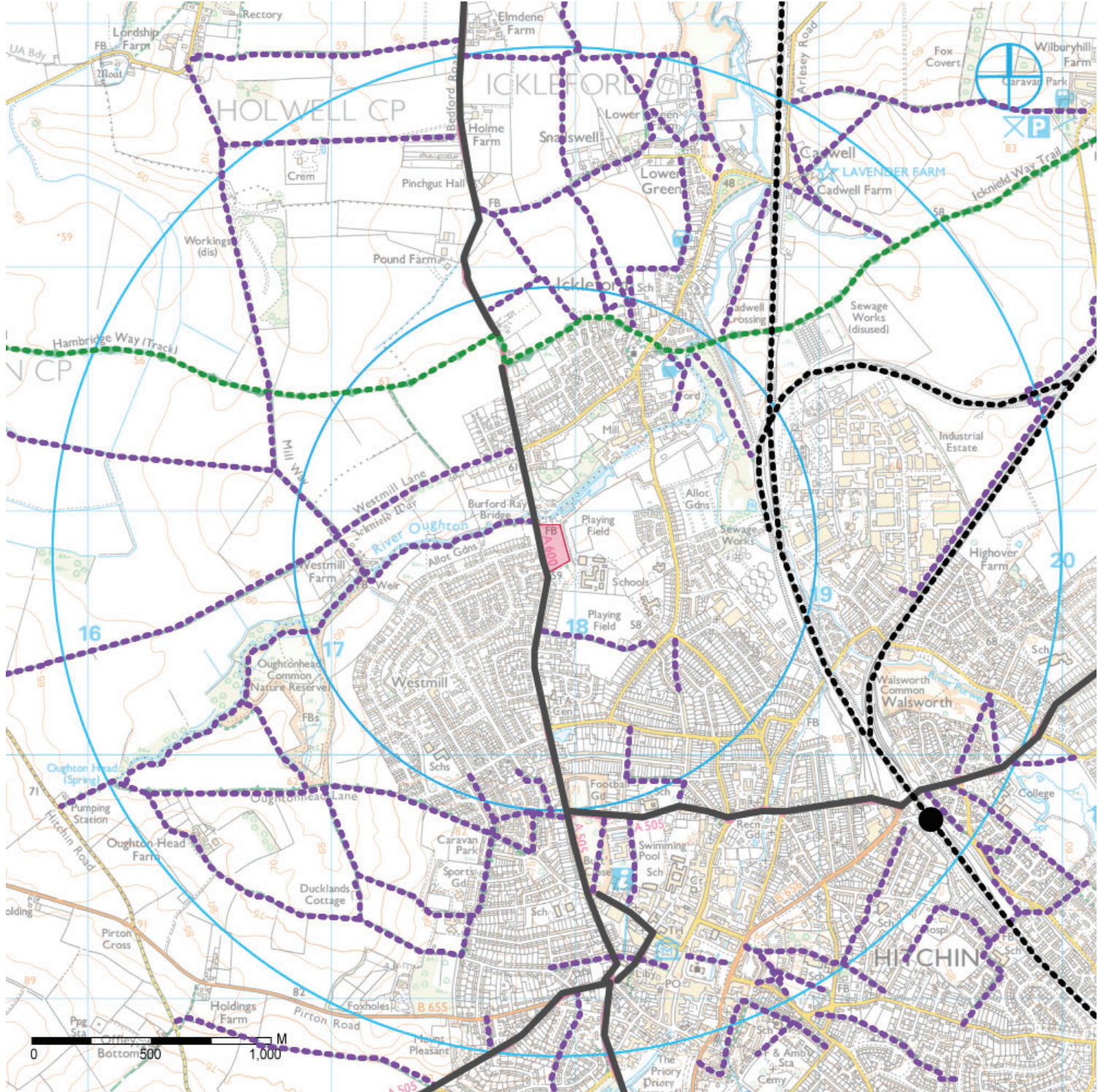
Cars

Car parking provision is off street either to the frontage of properties or garage provision to the rear of new homes.

Generous resident and visitor parking on site will not lead to congestion in the suburb.

Refuse vehicles and fire emergency trucks

Movement through the site allows for refuse and fire vehicles to reverse and leave the site in forward motion.



Hard landscaping

Materials used in the area reflect development over time and a variety of styles. Later development have open frontages with shrub planting to individual dwellings and deep grass verges are common.

The materials palette will be high quality and suitable for the suburban character of the location.

With warmer hues found in the local context should be used throughout the scheme, the specification will provide a robust surface suitable for the intended uses.

Less formal areas of pedestrian routes will use a small, staggered bond setts in the natural colours.

Hard landscaped areas should use 'natural' hues in keeping with the settlement location. This should be permeable where possible. The change in materials signposts shared surfaces and parking bays. Tarmac roads should use a soft grey and avoid heavy black capping, over engineered kerbs and excessive signage.

SuDs

The site offers surface water attenuation within the POS on the northern portion of the site which can also provide biodiversity planting opportunities.

Boundary treatments

The wider site enclosure will retain the native species hedgerow and tree lines.

The rear garden area should be design to reduce the extent of timber close boards fencing in public view.

Boundaries in the public realm should be open or have hedging to define the property edge.

Seating

Benches in the POS should be simple, timber and suit the naturalistic setting on the settlement edge.

Play items

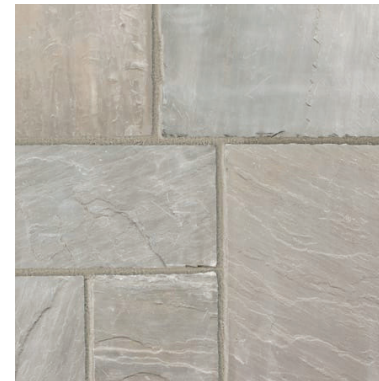
There is an area of informal play in the POS on the northern edge of the residential area. Timber preschool farm animals; tractor and play sculpture butterfly are overlooked by seating and the dwellings orientated to the north.



Example of Concrete block permeable paving 'Harvest'



Example of permeable Block Paving 'Charcoal'



Example of sandstone 'grey multi'



Woodscape bench



Planting palette

The site is on the settlement edge with open countryside to the north. A soft planting palette using native, or naturalistic planting would compliment the location.

The proposals allow for extensive planting of nectar rich flowering shrubs and perennials which would be an improvement in biodiversity from the species poor grassland. Native shrubs and grasses blended into the shrub planting will lead to a more natural look to planting suited to the location.

Attenuation basins provide conditions to have a greater range of wildflower and grasses suited to damp conditions, whilst the POS can be managed as a wild flower meadow.

Refuse and cycle storage areas should be enclosed by planting.

The proposed boundary screening is in the public realm to the north, west and southern edges which will allow for these to be managed for screening and wildlife benefit within a landscape management plan.



Native shrub planting Dogwood



Flowering shrubs for long nectar producing season



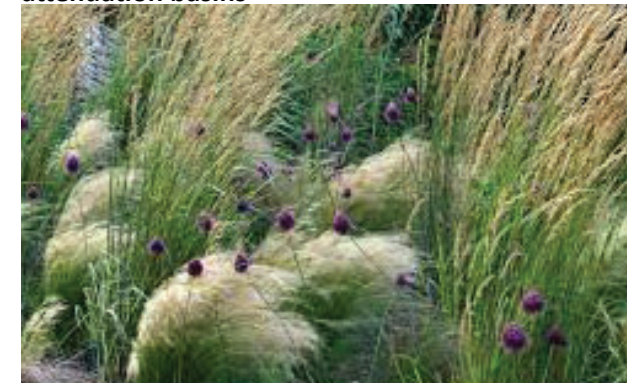
Wildflower and native grasses within the POS



Native planting suited to damp conditions in the attenuation basins



Herb planting including Rosemary



Informal shrub border with ornamental grasses



Native ferns



Example of mown paths through wildflower/grass meadows

Tree planting

The site benefits from a green backdrop provided by the substantial boundary vegetation. This will provide a soft landscape setting for new built elements.

Tree species present on site boundaries with some additional species will lead to a wider biodiversity on site. Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) provides a light crown with profuse berries in autumn, birch (*Betula pendula*) and hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) are low water demand and along with rowan make suitable street trees.

Huckleberry (*Celtis australis*) and Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) suggested to ensure there is climate change resilience within the species mix.

Oak (*Quercus robur*) and willow (*Salix alba*) are present in the vicinity and are suited to the POS where they are 10m outside of the easement for gas pipes. Both species have extremely high biodiversity habitat.

Mixed species hedgerow planting can be incorporated into individual dwelling frontages, and use to screen close board fences where necessary. Additionally the northern edge of the site hedgerow plants could be brought into better management and enhanced to improve screen and structure for nesting birds.

Recommended hedgerow species include:

Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*

Field maple - *Acer campestre*

Dogwood - *Cornus sanguinea*

Hazel - *Corylus avellana*

Blackthorn - *Prunus spinosa*

The design process has been developed to retain as many trees as possible on the site boundaries.



Rowan



Rowan berries



Hornbeam



Huckleberry for climate resilience



Silver Birch



Oak



Native hedgerow species: hawthorn; field maple; dogwood; buckthorn; hazel; blackthorn



Native hedgerow managed for screening and wildlife