



LAND ADJACENT TO THE PLOUGH INN, CREWE ROAD, ALSAGER

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

for

HOLLINS STRATEGIC LAND

ISSUE:
FINAL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 Appletons was commissioned by Hollins Strategic Land in February 2015 to carry out a **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** in respect of planning for the erection of up to 70no. dwellings on land east of The Plough Inn, Crewe Road, Alsager. The application is outline but including access details with all other matters reserved for subsequent approval. An indicative masterplan layout plan has, been prepared to demonstrate the likely number of dwellings which could be accommodated on the site and thereby best understand the proposals potential impact. The site is predominantly grassland which is mown infrequently and covers approximately 3.95 hectares but also includes areas of woodland and trees, a small water body with wetted land and scrub. It lies adjacent to but outside the settlement edge of Alsager within designated open countryside as shown on the Local Plan proposals map.
- 1.2 This assessment considers the baseline for both landscape and visual amenity and seeks to identify the sensitivity of each before considering the change that the introduction of the proposed housing development will produce. Potential landscape, visual and character impacts of the proposals will be assessed and mitigation proposals to ameliorate such impact should it occur will be recommended. The document has been carried out in accordance with best practice contained within the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd edition prepared jointly by The Landscape Institute and The Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (I.E.M.A.). A summary of the methodology employed for this assessment are set out in Section 2 and in detail at **APPENDIX 1**.
- 1.3 The assessment should be read in conjunction with the following drawing:
1.3.1 **Indicative Masterplan version D (APPENDIX 2)**.

Individuals involved in preparing this Assessment

- 1.4 This assessment was undertaken by Appletons, landscape architects and environmental consultants, a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. Two Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) were directly involved in writing this assessment: Lorna Cruice CMLI (Director) and Dave Starkie CMLI (Associate Director). Viewpoint photography, mapping and figures were prepared by Cassandra Wheadon CMLI (Senior Landscape Architect).

Planning Background

- 1.5 An outline planning application, dated 25th June 2014 for the proposed development of the site for up to 70no. dwellings with access was submitted to Cheshire East Council, (Planning Application no.14/3054C). Subsequently an Appeal (Ref: APP/R0660/A/14/2228488) was lodged against the failure of Cheshire East Council to issue a decision on the application. A second outline planning application was submitted in December (Planning Application no. 14/5912C). The Appeal is due to be heard in July 2015.

- 1.6 The application site is located adjacent a site to the east which is currently being developed by Miller Homes. This was initially an application by Hollins Strategic Land (no. 12/0893C) for the erection of up to 65no. dwellings and was approved on 18th January 2013 and the subsequent reserved matters approval (no. 13/1210C) was issued for 65no dwellings on 27th June 2013. Appletons was involved with this scheme for the preparation of pre-planning tree survey and subsequent drawings to discharge conditions relating to trees protection and management and therefore are already very familiar with the surrounding landscape and features of the area. A Landscape and Visual Impact assessment was not required for the planning decision for this development.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The site has been assessed in terms of the character, landscape and impacts of the proposed residential development on the existing site and the surrounding area. It has been carried out in general accordance with the recommendations contained within the 'The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact' 3rd Edition published jointly in 2013 by The Landscape Institute and The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The baseline condition of the site has therefore been established and an assessment of the positive and negative impacts in terms of landscape character, landscape effects and visual effects has been made.

Definition of Assessment Area

- 2.2 The focused study area shown on **Figure 6 – Photograph Viewpoint Locations (APPENDIX 6)**, was selected on a realistic and pragmatic basis as an approximate 2.0km radius from the centre of the site, beyond which the proposed development is unlikely to result in significant impacts or effects. Viewpoints where predicted impacts may be significant to a greater or lesser degree were assessed. Potential views from further distance were also assessed and discounted as being negligible or not feasible.

Site visits and selection of viewpoints

- 2.3 The surrounding area has been visited on a number of occasions from January 2012 with the latest visit to the site undertaken on 11th February 2015. The surrounding road network driven and local public rights of way were walked. Positive and detracting elements in the landscape were recorded, as was the general land use and susceptibility and value/ quality of the site and surrounding area. Viewpoints were identified based on public viewpoints (public rights of way) and a best effort was made to establish where potential sensitive, partial and open views of the site could be observed. The Zone of Visual Influence and detailed study area selected for the assessment of predicted (landscape effects) and the selection of viewpoints used in the landscape and visual impact assessment was submitted to the Local Planning Authority in early March 2015 but at the time of writing no responses had been received from the Council to their agreement to the viewpoints selected. However, it is considered that the viewpoints selected are reasonably representative. Private viewpoints (residential properties) were also considered, key distant viewpoints identified to determine the wider impact on the landscape and where development would have the potential to affect the value and character of existing views.

Photographs

- 2.4 A photographic survey of the site was made using a prime lens (AF-S NIKKRO 35mm 1:1.8G) on a digital SLR camera (Nikon D3100) which allows for images to be reproduced as close to that which is generally equivalent to the focal length of the human eye.
- 2.5 The methodology seeks to use recognised, published industry standards and techniques to identify and describe a landscape and visual baseline. These are then used to ascribe a sensitivity to landscape receptors and determine the effect on visual receptors which may be

altered through the introduction of the proposed development. Landscape and visual impacts and their effects are considered separately although the conclusion on sensitivity and impact will have regard to both these related areas of study and proposals made for the mitigation of that impact. The magnitude of change brought about through the proposed development is considered alongside the level of sensitivity for each landscape receptor or visual receptor and the level of landscape or visual effects is expressed as a combination of these two elements. The proposal site has been assessed for both Landscape and Visual effects based on the proposed residential development and associated infrastructure and open space only.

2.6 The detailed methodology adopted for this assessment is contained in **APPENDIX 1**.

2.7 The following principal sources of information and guidelines were used to inform the Assessment of Effects on the Landscape Resource and Visual Amenity:

Sources of Information

2.7.1 Planning Policy

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), March 2012;
- Congleton Local Plan, adopted January 2005;
- Supplementary Planning Document No. 14: Trees and Development;
- Alsager Town Strategy;
- Cheshire East Emerging Local Plan Submission Version, March 2014.

2.7.2 Guidance

- 'Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment third edition 2013;
- 'Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' Advice note. The Landscape Institute, March 2011.

2.7.3 Advice

- 'A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment – Third Edition', SNH, 2009.

2.7.4 Background

- 'Landscape Character Assessment for England and Scotland', (The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002);
- The Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment, 2008;
- OS 1: 50000 map sheets 118;
- Aerial photographs of the site and surroundings;
- Topographical Survey data; and
- Information regarding the proposed development provided by the client and commissioned consultants.

3.0 STUDY AREA AND BASELINE

Site Context

Location

- 3.1 The location of the proposal site is shown on **Figure 1 – Location and Context** and **Figure 2 – Aerial Photograph (APPENDIX 4)**. The site lies on the south western edge of Alsager, which is situated within the unitary authority (with borough status) of Cheshire East. Alsager is situated east of the M6 motorway on the B5077 roughly 4km east of Crewe town centre and 6km north-west of Stoke on Trent. According to the 2011 census, Alsager had a population of 11,775. Alsager is within the county of Cheshire, England.

- 3.2 The B5077 (Crewe Road) runs parallel to the north-western boundary of the site from which the access to the site is proposed. This links to the M6 motorway approximately 3.8 kilometres to the west. The M6 runs north to south approximately 1km to the west of the site. 200metres to the south of the site is the Crewe-Derby railway line which runs north eastwards Alsager. Immediately beyond the railway line to the south west is the former Royal Ordnance Factory Radway Green, now part of BAE Systems. This is a collection of pre war brick and concrete buildings and surrounding earth structures of a municipal nature set within a secure high chain link fence and concrete posts.

General Description

- 3.3 The site occupies approximately 3.95 hectares and is located within two enclosed fields on the west edge of the Alsager settlement. It is divided in two halves by a gated access track which runs from Crewe Road south eastwards Alsager Hall Farm. The eastern boundary is formed by an unadopted access road leading to the Old Mill public house and the Hall Farm Shop and café situated towards the southern boundary of the site. To the immediate east of the road is a residential development site currently being constructed by Miller Homes, which itself adjoins the 'Poppyfields' residential development. As a result of this latest development the application site does adjoin the existing settlement zone line on both the northern and eastern sides. To the south of the application site, a brook, known as Valley Brook; its tree lined banks form a natural southern boundary which also forms the boundary to the adjacent development site. This has sensitively informed the Miller Homes layout with respect to appropriate stand off distances to trees and providing a linear zone of open space and a 'natural edge' to the residential area. The replication of the tree lined brook has also influenced the indicative layout of the application site. The Old Mill public house and Alsager Hall Farm lie immediately south of the brook with the pub car park lying at a lower level than the access road and abutting the banks of the brook. A Mill dam/lodge of water is located to the immediate east of the public house which it is assumed was associated with the farm and mill building present on the site in the 19th century. The BAE Systems factory complex, the public house and farm buildings provide a built presence containing the south-eastern and southern aspects of the site beyond Valley Brook. The western boundary of the site is formed in part by small scrubby but also be the Plough Inn public house and the Wacky Warehouse children's indoor play facility with

associated car parking formed off Crewe Road. The site and the above described building all lie within the open countryside as allocated within the Local Plan but physically represent the edge of the Alsager settlement or urban edge.

Land to the north of the site

- 3.4 To the north the site abuts Crewe Road with relatively dense grain of residential development forming a large expanse of existing settlement on the west side of Alsager. Existing red brick residential houses dominate the street scene. Numbers 201 to 235 are directly opposite to the application site, which comprise of large semi-detached dwellings set back from the road frontage behind hedgerows and trees. Some share private drives and access points which break through the frontage hedges in three places. These are common features along Crewe Road. Within this area are small enclaves of green space including a local nature reserve known as Cranberry Moss, off Dickinson Way, within 400 metres of the site, an open space recreation area of Cranberry Lane within 45 metres of the site. This settlement extends towards the west of the site by some 340metres along the line of Crewe Road where the settlement edge is formed by a strong line of houses on Close Lane. Beyond this to the north of Crewe Road and bounded by the M6 motorway is conservation area within the spoil heaps and water filled workings of an old mineral workings. This has created high vegetated and wooded mounds which obstruct views from the further north-west. The topography to the north of the site is generally flat lying at approximately 85m AOD. This area is within the Crewe and Nantwich Local Plan jurisdiction.

Land to the west and south west of the site

- 3.5 Land to the west of the site between Crewe Road and the railway line is predominantly open farm land through which Valley Brook and its tree lined banks continues. The railway line abuts the northern boundary of the BAE Systems with the factory occupying a large area of this locality of around 38 - 40 hectares. The M6 is located to the further west at around 1km from the site.

Land to the south of the site

- 3.6 The eastern portion of the BAE Systems factory occupies land within the southern aspects of the site beyond the railway line. The access track dividing the site running from Crewe Road passes over the railway to the south of the site just beyond Mill Farm and continues alongside the fenced boundary of the works over gently rising ground rising to a high point of 115m AOD in the south at approximately 1.5 kilometres distance. To the far south the land is pastoral in nature with a mosaic of grassed and cultivated fields bordered by low or defunct hedgerows with hedgerow trees. The A500 lies at approximately 4 kilometres due south of the site. The intervening landscape support small farmsteads with groupings of farm buildings. The area to the south and south east has is access via a number of public rights of way, private access tracks and a permissive footway running through Alsager Hall Farm, over the railway bridge and alongside the BAE Systems Factory.

Land to the east of the site

- 3.7 Immediately to the east of the site is the development currently under construction by Miller Homes with the residential area of Poppyfields merging with existing urban settlement of Alsager which continue eastward towards the town's centre. The Miller Homes development is comprised of 65no. standard house types from the developer's portfolio and are being built as a mix of property types with a high proportion of detached dwelling but also including semi-detached and terraced properties. The road frontage is planned set back from Crewe Road behind a hedgerow. Between the residential development and the railway the land is divided in two narrow fields. South east of the site at approximately 1.75 kilometres distance is a detached property known as The Hall. This is set in large grounds with an associated small woodland and sparsely vegetated field to the immediate west through which a public right of way passes. To the further south-east at approximately 1.75 kilometres distance is dense grain residential areas with Alsager Golf Club to the immediate south of this.

Site description and landscape appraisal

- 3.8 The landscape characteristics of the site are indicated on **Figure 3 – Site Characteristics Plan (APPENDIX 4)**. The site itself is predominantly greenfield land that extends to approximately 3.95 hectares. It is comprised of a two field parcels of poorly maintained semi-improved grass divided by a private track which links Crewe Road with Alsager Hill Farm to the south of the site and beyond to the further south. Crewe Road forms the northern boundary. Immediately to the east is an unadopted access track, which itself adjoins a residential development currently being constructed by Miller Homes for the erection of up to 65 dwellings. The south of the site is bounded by a narrow brook (Valley Brook) within a shallow channel bounded by tree groups and individual trees. Beyond the brook is further built development formed by Alsager Hall Farm, Shop and cafe, the Old Mill public house, 2no. dwellings and the large expanse of the former Ordnance Factory beyond the railway line. The sites western boundary is formed in part by a trees belt which branches off from the brook's tree'd banks, but is primarily defined by the Wacky warehouse children's play facility, the Plough Inn public house and the associated parking which abuts the western boundary. There have been remnants of a bonfire observed on all visits made to the site. The Alsager Round Table makes use of the site for bonfire parties which gives the site an unmanaged look as the burnt remains do not appear to be taken away and tidied up.

Trees

- 3.9 The site currently retains trees, groups of trees and woodland of varying quality and density across the site but which is predominantly distributed towards the sites perimeters. The trees and scrub vegetation on the site were assessed by Appletons in January 2014 in accordance

with BS 5837: 2102¹ to accompany the first planning application with reporting in February 2014. The tree survey report was updated in December 2014 and March 2015 for application no. 14/5912C to include the discussion on impact on trees from the proposed development/ amount of tree losses in relation the UK BAP Priority Habitat designated on the site (see para. 2.13). The plans, drawing no. 1926_01: Tree Survey Plan and 1926_04 Rev A: Tree Impact Plan with the tree survey report (revision E), are provided in a separate document as part of the planning application which illustrates the distribution and condition etc. of the trees.

- 3.10 Trees have been considered within compartment areas for the purposes of assessing their distribution and value which is indicated on drawing no. 1926_01: Tree Survey Plan. The trees towards the Crewe Road frontage form a relatively dense screen of tall scrub and mature trees of variable condition, generally poor to moderate (category B or C). Compartment A includes larger mature specimen Oak trees which are covered by a woodland TPO and covers approximately 2,180 sq. m. Vegetation between compartment A and Crewe Road consists of dense clumps of Birch regeneration approximately 4.0 – 8.0 metres in height. These are thin ‘whippy’ specimens with some Oak regeneration and Hawthorn shrubs. Compartments H and I form dense groupings of Hawthorn scrub, Elder and Goat Willow including a number of larger but declining specimens located at the entrance to the main road. Compartments A, B, H and I are located within a UK BAP priority area. However, this is probably referenced to woodland which was partly cleared in the past and the regenerating vegetations has since grown and remained unmanaged. The succession of colonising species will take several decades to achieve high canopy woodland. In ecological terms these area have been assessed as species poor and ecologically of low quality. In empirical terms the amount of UK BAP priority habitat designated on site is assessed as 0.97 hectares.
- 3.11 Other vegetation of visual note is located along the eastern boundary of the site within compartment C. This is comprised of mature Oak and Sycamore with occasional Ash and hawthorn. The area also encompasses a small pond with reed mace which supports a small breeding and isolated colony of Great Crested Newts. The trees here form a strong group and foliage massing which associates with the vegetation off site but retained within the Miller Homes development. The area cover approximately 2990 sq. m. Compartment E is formed by a stand of very tall Alders reaching over 14 metres in height which are visible in views within and beyond the site above other surrounding vegetation. Trees and low vegetation straddle the course of the Valley Brook and form filtering to the southern boundary of the site. Specimens of predominantly Goat Willow and Hawthorn are located along the western boundary. These are breaking up and in poor condition which offers limited value to the vegetation cover on site. Young, individual trees are sporadically distributed across the open areas of the site.

¹BSI Standards Publications, 2012. *BS 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations.*

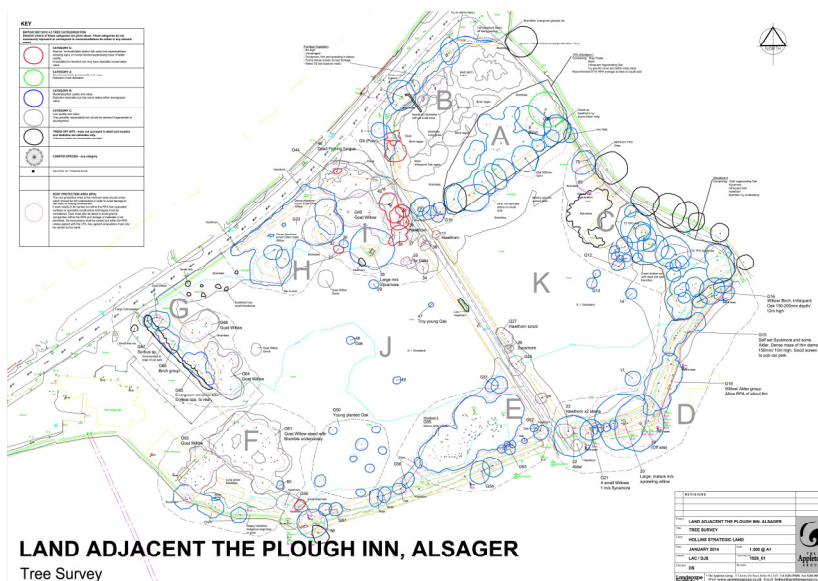
- 3.12 A Tree Preservation Order protects a woodland, a group of 2no. trees and 2no. individual trees all located within the eastern parcel of the site.
- 3.13 Trees and vegetation beyond the site and within a 0.5 kilometre radius are predominantly aligned with the Valley Brook, edges of development and field boundaries. The residential settlement to the north and east generally have well vegetated gardens with trees which generates a 'leafy' suburban character. Trees along the railway are limited in the vicinity of the application site but a belt of trees is located between the BAE Systems Factory and the railway line providing some screening from the Crewe Road area. To the further south-east there is a relatively dense grouping of trees around the property and grounds of The Hall at approximately 0.75 kilometres distance. A small woodland is also present at grid reference SJ 79037 54528. In general, the open fields dominate the landscape to the south, south-east and west although this landscape is filtered and divided by narrow bands of trees and individual specimens.

Hedgerows

- 3.14 Hedgerows are historically located around the boundaries of the site but these are now less distinct having been partially removed or outgrown and forming part of the massing of foliage, particularly along the Crewe Road frontage. Towards the access to the Plough Inn hedgerows are more recognisable but unmanaged with gaps offering views into the site from Crewe Road.
- 3.15 A Historical Hedgerow Assessment was undertaken by Appletons in February 2014 which looks at the significance of hedgerows on the site. The report findings were that there is evidence to suggest that the following hedgerows may have formed an integral part of a field system pre-dating the Enclosure Acts.
- The length of hedgerows bordering the lane leading from Crewe Road to the Old Mill.
 - The length of hedgerows bordering the stream on the southern boundary of the site.
 - The lengths of hedgerows between the footbridges over the aforementioned stream, moving north-westwards to the rear of the "Wacky Warehouse".
 - All the hedgerows bordering Crewe Road.
- 3.16 It was reported that the hedgerows identified as forming an integral part of a field system pre-dating 1845 should remain intact and as existing. The current indicative proposals indicate that the existing hedgerows may be breached in two locations along the Crewe Road frontage to form vehicle access for potential residential development. This is along the hedgerow fronting Crewe Road to form the vehicle access into the development. However, it should be noted that a similar exercise carried out for the adjacent Miller Homes development to the north east of the site in did not consider that the hedgerow fronting Crewe Road in this location formed an integral part of a field system pre-dating the Enclosure Acts. The hedgerow along Crewe Road has already been breached in the recent past to form the access track to the farm and also to the telecom masts.

3.17 The report relating to the historical criteria for hedgerows on the site are provided as a separate document as part of the planning application.

3.18 Hedgerows within the further countryside beyond the site are variable, some being low and intact with others gappy and unmanaged. Where enclosure is required, this is supplemented by timber field and stock fencing.



Topography

3.19 The site is relatively flat lying at 85m AOD with an imperceptible fall towards the pond area and Valley Brook.

Footpaths

3.20 A public right of way (FP6) crosses the site within the south east corner. This footpath links Crewe Road with the countryside to the south passing off site and over the Valley Brook before linking with footpaths within Alsager Hall Farm which provide access to the further south and east. This is used by local people and dog walkers to gain access to areas beyond the site in the south.

Visual Amenity Generally

3.21 The topography of the site, its location close to the settlement edge on Crewe Road and the Miller Homes development site restrict visual amenity from much of the local adjacent settlement other than from very close quarters. Residential properties overlooking the site on Crewe Road have filtered views as they are set back from the road edge with shared access drives behind hedgerows some of which are tall. There are a number of public rights of way beyond the site to the south and south-east which can be accessed via footpath 6 which passes over the site. The relatively open nature of the landscape to the south and south-east of the site is interrupted by the rising ground and the filtering vegetation of field boundary hedgerows and trees. The vegetation around the Alsager Hall Farm and Old Mill public house and along the access track between the application site and the Miller Homes development provides a strong visual barrier to the site from the south and east. It is considered that intermittent shortened middle distance views are possible from the west at approximately 0.5 – 0.75 km distance. Longer distance views from approximately 1

Landscape features

Agricultural Land

- 3.22 The Agricultural Land Classification across the general locality is ALC Grade 3 (good to moderate) which includes arable and grassland. An Agricultural Land Classification and Grounds Condition report was undertaken in 2014. This confirms that 3 hectares of the site is Grade 3a and approximately 1.3 hectares is non-agricultural land. However, the site is currently predominantly underused grassland.

Ecology and Habitats

- 3.23 Ecological interest on the site has been identified within the pond and surrounding grassland for Great Crested Newt population. The presence of UK BAP Priority Habitat and the benefits that the woodland and trees on site offer to other fauna has also been acknowledged.
- 3.24 A Phase I Habitat survey has been undertaken by REC Ltd in May 2014 for the current application which identifies the habitats present on the site with past work undertaken by ERAP in relation to Great Crested Newt Surveys. The report identified the following ecological matters which relate more specifically to the landscape and visual assessment.
- 3.24.1 Great Crested Newts reside within Pond 1 located within the eastern parcel of the site. This needs to be conserved and the their terrestrial habitat of 50 metres around the pond protected and enhanced to maintain the population;
 - 3.24.2 The Valley Brook corridor is a considered to be a valuable ecological resource and as such proposed dwelling should face onto the corridor to reduce risks of fly-tipping and rear garden extensions;
 - 3.24.3 The woodland to the north of the site, which includes some UK BAP Priority Habitat, is semi-mature but species poor and of low quality. It was considered that potential tree removal for development to take place could be mitigated with replacement diverse native species across the site;
 - 3.24.4 Existing hedgerows around the site boundaries are not 'important' as defined in the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 but do meet the UKJ BAP Priority Habitat definition for hedgerows.
 - 3.24.5 Himalayan balsam, which is an invasive non-native species, is prevalent in places along the site's borders.
- 3.25 Information relating to fauna was also included with the habitat report. Category 1 trees (those with highly suitable features for bat roosts) were identified within the TPO woodland and along the Valley Brook. Other trees within the site had limited potential to support bat roosts.

- 3.26 Ecological value beyond the site is detailed where relevant within the Phase 1 Habitat Survey.

Designated Landscapes

- 3.27 The application site is located within open countryside as designated in the Local Plan. Land to the south, beyond the railway line is Green Belt. The ROF works land is designated as employment commitment.
- 3.28 There are no ecological designations on the land although parts of the existing woodland and hedgerow remnants are UK BAP Priority Habitats. There is a woodland TPO on the site as well as one TPO group (2no trees), and two individual TPOs.

Visual Receptors

- 3.29 It is considered that the visual assessment correctly refers to the following visual receptors within 1.5 kilometres of the site:
- Residential property to the north and east of the site;
 - Farm building to the south of the site;
 - Public houses and environment to the south east and west of the site;
 - Settlement to the north of the site
 - Recreational trails and public rights of way to all aspects of the site;
 - Publicly accessible land;
 - Public highways and footpaths adjacent to the highway.

4.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 In areas beyond towns and cities, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the key tool for understanding the landscape and is generally used for baseline studies. This should be used to identify and describe:

- the elements that make up the landscape including:
 - physical influences which are quantifiable and include features such as hills, valleys, trees, hedges, ponds, geology, soils, land;
 - land cover, including different types of vegetation and patterns and types of tree cover;
 - the influence of human activity, including land use and management, the character of settlements and buildings, and pattern and type of fields and enclosure.
- The aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape – such as, for example, its scale, complexity, openness, tranquillity or wilderness;
- The overall character of the landscape in the appraisal area, including any distinctive Landscape Character Types or areas that can be identified, and the particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement. This includes the elements, aesthetics and perceptual aspects that make each landscape distinctive, usually by identification as a key characteristic of the landscape.

National Assessment – Landscape Character of England

4.2 The landscape character baseline for England is defined on a broad scale by the Character of England Map prepared by the then Countryside Commission in 1998 (now managed by Natural England). The application site falls on the boundary of the National Landscape Character Area No. 61: Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. The character area covers a wide area; beyond Telford in the south to beyond Macclesfield in the north, with Alsager located towards the eastern reaches. The plain is described as gently rolling with only minor changes in elevation. There is no specific reference to the town of Alsager and the surrounding area within the assessment but a key opportunity which may be applied to the application site states:

“Incorporating the principles of sustainable urban drainage schemes (SUDS), for example encouraging rainwater harvesting, incorporating green space and areas of unsealed soil into urban and rural development to allow water infiltration. Supporting projects that identify and address point and diffuse pollution caused by misconnection of domestic waste, illegal discharges from industry and diffuse run-off from the road network.”

4.3 Drivers of landscape change are cited and the following is considered pertinent to the application site and surrounding area.

*"The presence of large conurbations and the dense network of roads mean that development pressures are likely to continue. Road improvements risk the urbanisation of rural villages. The demand for mineral extraction sites and infill sites for waste disposal from the conurbations is likely to increase and as the population increases, the demand for food will increase. **These pressures have the potential to further fragment habitats and change settlement patterns and the vernacular, but can also provide opportunities to create a high quality built environment with multifunctional green space with links to the rural area.**"*

*bold is my emphasis.

- 4.4 Environmental opportunities, amongst other matters, state to:

"Encourage the inclusion of greenspace in new developments to provide opportunities for local communities to engage with nature and foster community spirit, while benefiting biodiversity."

Regional Assessment - Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.5 The most relevant information to the National Character Assessment is provided in local character assessments produced on behalf of local councils. The Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment, 2008 provides an up to date classification of the whole of Cheshire's landscape which can be used for making assessments of landscape character for development management and as a basis in the formulation of a Landscape Strategy in the future. It provides an overview of the Landscape of Cheshire East and is used to inform responsible land use, decision making, as well as complying with planning policy guidance. The assessment replaces the original Cheshire County Council Landscape Assessment of 1994. A Landscape Assessment of Congleton at district level was also completed for what was previously the Congleton borough in 1999 but this is considered to be out of date. The application site lies on the western fringe of an area classified as the Alsager Plain lying to the south and east of Alsager's urban area.
- 4.6 The application site lies within Landscape Character Type 10 – Lower Farms and Woods although it is 'sandwiched' between the urban area of Alsager and the identified area of Industry (I6) of the former Ordnance Factory; see **Figure 4 – Landscape Character (APPENDIX 4)**. It is also just within visual range of the eastern edge of the landscape character Type 12, - Mossland which identifies a small enclave of landscape known as M3 Oakhanger Moss Character Area. This is strongly identified with the SSSI area of Oakhanger Moss which is covered with broadleaved trees and is separated by the M6 motorway that runs north-south through the local area. The area to the east of the M6 and nearest to the application site shows obvious signs of past peat and sand extraction with vegetated mounds of extracted material and water filled depressions. The area has a mixed character of woodland and water features combined with past industrial working.

- 4.7 The application site is classified as Lower Farms and Woods 7: Barthomley Character area. The area is described as being gently undulating lying between around 40-110m AOD. Fields are small in size and regular – irregular in pattern. It acknowledges that the landscape is one of strong contrasts with many local variations, and in places the relatively dense settlement pattern is very obvious as can be seen around the settlement edge of Alsager. Communications networked have had a massive impact on the character of this area including railway corridors and the industrial site of the Royal Ordnance factory at Radway Green to the south of Alsager is identified.
- 4.8 There is currently no landscape strategy available for this part of Cheshire based on the available landscape character assessments.

Landscape Character of the Proposed Development Site and immediate surroundings

Natural characteristics

- 4.9 The site lies at around 85m AOD with the adjacent land rising gently to the south to a high point of 115m AOD at approximately 1.5 kilometres distance. Beyond this, the land is not intervisible with the site, falling away gently towards the A500 some 2.5 kilometres to the south. To the far south the land is pastoral in nature with a mosaic of grassed and cultivated fields bordered by low or defunct hedgerows with hedgerow trees. The application site is well enclosed by existing tall and generally dense vegetation and by Crewe Road to the north and the unadopted track to the Old Mill public house to the east. The tree lined riparian course of Valley Brook provides a generally enclosed edged to the southern boundary although gaps provide some short views and glimpses of the more undulating land around and beyond the Royal Ordnance factory from within the site with containing and enclosing features of tree groups and belts around and beyond the site to the east, west and south.
- 4.10 The landscape character of the application site is influenced to a degree by some of the identified character features of the surrounding landscape assessments. The dense settlement grain influences the site on the approaches east and west along Crewe Road and from the adjacent Miller Homes development. However, there are detracting features by way of the high voltage electricity pylons, 2no. telecommunications masts on the southern edge of the Valley Brook, the electrical overhead lines of the railway and the more dominant and expansive industrial character of the Ordnance Factory to the south of the site.

Cultural and Social Factors

- 4.11 The settlement pattern within the vicinity of the application site is typical of the outer edges of the town with dense to medium grain residential housing predominating to both sides of the main Crewe Road. Edges of the settlement are being developed or have planning approvals in place subject to conditions and s.106 agreements. The older terraced houses reflect the traditional built red brick with more modern post war features seen in the larger estates in the

extended edges. There are no distinguished or notable built features within sight of the application site save for the large building complex of the BAE Royal Ordnance Factory to the south of the site. Communication links by road and rail are evident with the M6 and A500 to the west and south and the railway station for the Crewe/Stoke line within 1.0 kilometre of the site. Public footpaths connect adjacent and on the site from Crewe Road to the countryside to the south.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Aspects

- 4.12 The aesthetic qualities of the site and local area involve judgments involving the following:

Enclosure: The boundaries of the application site are delineated by dense vegetation, particularly to the northern and eastern edges. The southern boundary is more open but with a strong visual feature provided by the stand of tall Alder trees. The characteristics of the surrounding landscape are generally **open** to the south and west with **tight settlement** to the north and immediate east. Alsager town centre to the north east can be described as a **dense pattern/form** of commercial and

Balance: The landscape surrounding the application site consists of a mix of land uses with rural features and urban detracting elements, hedgerows and tree groups. The Royal Ordnance Factory and the overhead electricity pylons are particularly dominating features in the landscape which creates **imbalance** within the overall balance of the local characteristics.

Pattern: The application site is a **departure** from the general surrounding landscape pattern in both land use and form.

Diversity: The landscape can be described as **diverse** due to its mix of agriculture, built and natural elements, which combine to form this area and as such is more able to absorb new development. There are no historic landscape features directly associated with the site.

Scale: The site and adjacent landscape has a **medium** scale made up of large residential areas balanced with open fairly expansive countryside.

Form and line: The landscape of the site is generally **flat** with gently rising landscape to the south. The lines of settlement edges, roads, hedgerows and small wooded areas are generally **sinuous**.

Colour: The existing vegetation cover and grassland of the site and surrounding landscape are predominantly green with dark browns and greys. The developed built areas are reds and lighter browns with the newer built developments having a freshness of materials. The landscape is **relatively colourful** in good light.

Movement: The landscape surrounding the site is both rural and developed and can be described as **dynamic** where influenced by roads and urban features.

Texture: The surrounding landscape is **textured** with a variety of natural and built features.

- 4.13 It is considered that the landscape character of the site is predominantly that of poor underutilised grassland which is occasionally used for a bonfire event, with the remnants of the fire still present. It appears as an unmanaged area although it is infrequently managed grassland, dissected by the rough track leading to Alsager Hall Farm from Crewe Road. It is

influenced by strong urban settlement to the north and east along Crewe Road. In summary, the character may be described as 'urban fringe' where urban and rural uses forge a visual association. The site has no specific intrinsic value with the strongest character feature formed by the mature woodland enclosing the northern and eastern edges of the site. A large stand of Alder trees at southern end of the site limits views from the south.

Susceptibility to change

- 4.14 The susceptibility to change has also been considered. This is the ability of the landscape (whether it be the overall character or condition of a particular landscape type, or individual features/elements or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and the achievement of landscape policies or strategies. The development proposed at the application site would bring about a partial loss of features but that the features are not considered to contribute to the adjacent character type of the Lower Farms and Woods in any significant way. The addition of new elements and the size and scale of the development in relation to those within the locality are not likely to alter the aesthetics of the surrounding character but instead more readily reflect the features of the adjacent urban settlement. Change is likely to occur due to the proposed development, be irreversible but be perceptible to a low degree. **Susceptibility to change is therefore considered low.**
- 4.15 It is a landscape with some local importance in that it forms a gateway to the open countryside beyond the existing railway line and this is reinforced by the public rights of way near and on the site. It is an urban fringe landscape that is not in productive agricultural use. The site has the ability to absorb change due to the above considered criteria and can allow the process of development without impacting adversely on adjacent landscapes given the appropriate consideration of natural landscape features which have restrictions due to wildlife/ habitat and tree protection. Mitigating planting would also need to be considered as part of the process of assimilation of a proposed development to the surrounding landscape. The site is currently in private ownership but with unrestricted informal access.

Landscape Character Value

- 4.16 In terms of the value attached to the character of the application site the following criteria was used to arrive at an informed judgement:
- Inclusion within a local or national designation i.e. National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
 - Inclusion in formal Landscape Character Assessments and whether they are reviewed, plotted and referenced and the scale of the site in relation to landscape character types;
 - Inclusion in Conservation Area assessment, building listings, village design statements and neighbourhood plans;

- Inclusion within related Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance;
- Inclusion within a cultural evaluated or rare landscape;
- Inclusion within an identified geological landscape;
- Inclusion within an important landscape habitat;
- Inclusion within a visually strong and sensory landscape;
- Consideration of any other 'special qualities';

4.17 A finer grain assessment of the site and immediate locality can be undertaken with consideration given to the following:

- The components of the landscape – elements and landscape features such as evidence of recreational use e.g. public rights of way;
- The aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape – scale, complexity, openness, tranquillity or wilderness;
- The overall character of the landscape created by particular combinations of these.

4.18 The existing landscape of the site has been considered and assessed in terms of the features and components both natural and man made that combine to give structure, form and detail to the character of the landscape. The landscape does not have any landscape designation other than being within the open countryside as designated in the Local Plan. The landscape condition of the site is reasonably in tact but unmanaged particularly the wooded and shrubbed areas. There are no valued views or current cultural associations with the site although the site has remnants of hedgerow features which are associated with a field system pre-dating 1845. The site and the immediate surrounding area are not specifically detailed in any of the published character assessments. It is not rare in its type with features associated with undeveloped land not in agricultural production in and around the Alsager area. There is a lack of tranquillity due to its close association with urban areas, The Plough Inn, Wacky Warehouse and associated car park and road noise and it is heavily influenced by the man made static features of the electricity pylons, telecommunication masts, residential housing, railway line and the BAE Systems Factory. There are no intrinsic or strong sensory features and there is a lack of complexity although some of the trees and woodland features offer amenity interest, screening and enclosure to the site. The landscape is therefore judged as **low in value** and **ordinary in quality and condition**.

Landscape Sensitivity

4.19 In conclusion the classification of the existing landscape within the Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment is broadly recognizable at the application site. Fields are small in size and irregular in pattern within landscape of strong contrasts with many local variations, and in places the relatively dense settlement pattern is very obvious as can be seen around the settlement edge of Alsager. As previously stated communications networked have impacted on the character of this area including railway corridors and the industrial site of the Royal

Ordnance factory at Radway Green. The susceptibility of the site to accept new development is considered low with no natural or heritage designations on the land. The site is compatible with the surrounding landscape and typical of those found on the edge of towns. The condition is reasonable but not well managed without any positive land use. There is scope for mitigations and landscape enhancement particularly as many of the trees are over mature, short lived species and in decline in some areas of the site. Hedgerows have become gappy and could be strengthened and reinstated. Continuity of land use change is possible along the Crewe Road frontage. The application site is judged to be tolerant of change with **landscape sensitivity is considered low to medium.**

5.0 PLANNING POLICY

Current Planning Context

- 5.1 The site has been assessed with regard to the current national and local planning authority planning policy.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and presumes in favour of sustainable development unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF at Paragraph 7 defines 'sustainable development' as having 3 dimensions:

- Economic – building a strong, responsive and competitive economy to support growth and innovation;
- Social - supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities and responding to local needs; and
- Environmental – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

- 5.3 Sustainable development underpins the aspirations of the Framework to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimize waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change.

- 5.4 The NPPF is centred on a presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 14. The development of the application site, whilst outside the urban boundary, is not in a Green Belt designation, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a Site of Special Scientific Interest or Local Green Space, all of which would indicated that development could be restricted. In landscape terms the application site accords with the NPPF and is not prejudicial to Congleton Local Plan and emerging policies.

Congleton Borough Local Plan

- 5.5 The Local Plan was reviewed on 27th January 2005 and contains policies and proposals for the area previously covered by Congleton Borough covering the period to 2100. In accordance with NPPF (para. 215), only due weight can be given to the Local Plan policies according to their degree of consistency with NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).

- 5.6 The following policies are considered relevant to this application in respect to the Landscape and Visual Assessment process.
- PS6: Settlements in Open Countryside;
 - PS8: Open Countryside;

○ GR1: New Development;

"ALL DEVELOPMENT WILL BE EXPECTED TO BE OF A HIGH STANDARD, TO CONSERVE OR ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA AND NOT DETRACT FROM ITS ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, AND TO HAVE REGARD TO THE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. PROPOSALS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF CONSIDERED TO BE ACCEPTABLE IN TERMS OF THE FOLLOWING, AS APPROPRIATE:

I) DESIGN

II) LANDSCAPE

III) AMENITY AND HEALTH

IV) ACCESSIBILITY, SERVICING AND PARKING PROVISION

V) TRAFFIC GENERATION

VI) INFRASTRUCTURE

VII) OPEN SPACE PROVISION

VIII) PROVISION OF SERVICES AND FACILITIES

IX) WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS.

THE DEVELOPMENT SHOULD ALSO HAVE REGARD TO ANY SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE AND STANDARDS RELATING TO THE PROPOSAL OR THE SITE WHICH HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL. WHERE APPROPRIATE, THE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL REQUIRE THE SUBMISSION OF STATEMENTS OR ASSESSMENTS TO ACCOMPANY THE APPLICATION IN RESPECT OF DESIGN PRINCIPLES."

○ GR4: Landscaping;

"WHERE A LANDSCAPING SCHEME IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED, EITHER AT PLANNING APPLICATION STAGE OR AS A CONDITION OF PERMISSION, THIS WILL ONLY BE APPROVED WHERE THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE SATISFIED:

I) LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS SHOW SPECIES, SITING, NUMBER, PLANTING SIZE AND PLANTING DENSITY OF ALL NEW TREES AND SHRUBS AND DETAILS OF EXISTING VEGETATION TO BE RETAINED OR REMOVED;

II) PLANT SPECIES ARE USED WHICH ARE APPROPRIATE TO THE NATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND IN SYMPATHY WITH THE CHARACTER OF EXISTING VEGETATION WITHIN THE SITE AND IN THE AREA GENERALLY;

III) LANDSCAPED AREAS ARE ADEQUATE AND APPROPRIATE FOR THE INTENDED USE; IV) SATISFACTORY PROVISION IS MADE FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND AFTERCARE OF THE SCHEME.

This policy seeks to secure high quality, well designed landscaping through landscaping schemes where appropriate to the development. A detailed landscaping scheme will allow the Local Planning Authority to assess the impact of the proposal on a given site and ensure that the existing features are retained and enhanced."

○ GR5: Landscape Character;

○ NR1: Trees and Woodlands;

○ NR3: Habitats;

○ NR5: Improve and Enhance Nature Conservation;

○ H6: Residential Development in the Open Countryside and the Green Belt.

Emerging Local Plan

- 5.7 The application of the Local Plan Strategy Submission Version in March 2014 has now advanced to its examination. However, it is understood that on 22nd October 2014 the Inspector suggested that it may not be appropriate to resume the examination hearings as envisaged.

However, notwithstanding this, the following policies are relevant to the Landscape and Visual Assessment process.

- PG5: Open Countryside;
- SE1: Design;
- SE3: Biodiversity;
- SE4: The Landscape;
- SE5: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows;
- SE6: Green Infrastructure.

- 5.8 Para. 15180 of the document states the Alsager has been identified as one of the Key Service Centres for Cheshire East, and as such the vitality and growth of this town contributes to the prosperity of the Borough as whole. The Miller Homes site was identified as a committed strategic site. Land to the south east of the site, off hall drive, at approximately 400 metres distance is also identified as a strategic site, but one where planning permission has been granted subject to a s.106 agreement being signed. At the time of writing no development had taken place on this site.

Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance

- 5.9 Supplementary Planning Guidance documents are published by Cheshire East Council to guide development principles and decision making. The following would be relevant to the proposed site in terms of landscape and the protection of trees.
- SPD No. 14: Trees and Development.

5.10 Alsager Town Strategy, August 2012

This forms the evidence base of the emerging Local Plan and Objective 6 is considered relevant to the Landscape and Visual Assessment process.

Objective 6: Village Character Strengthen the quality of life throughout Alsager by supporting initiatives that build stable, safe, healthy and strong communities; planning for well designed, sustainable and inclusive developments; and ensuring that all development respects the local village character of Alsager. Conserve and enhance the 'village feel' of Alsager by ensuring that easy access to the open countryside is maintained, existing heritage assets are conserved, that the network of green spaces is enhanced and that the town centre remains the focal point of the town.

- 5.11 It is considered that the development proposals will comply with the above policies in terms of all design and, landscape and environmental issues.

Landscape Designations

- 5.12 The site lies within open countryside as designated within the Congleton Borough Local Plan. Policies PS6: Settlements in Open Countryside and PS8: Open Countryside would apply in respect of the application for development on the site. PG5: Open Countryside is the

replacement policy within the emerging Local Plan. The site also abuts the settlement sedge of Alsager.

- 5.13 Green Belt land lies to the south of the site beyond the railway line.
- 5.14 No other national, regional or local designations are applicable to the application site.
- 5.15 Landscape designations are detailed on **Figure 5 – Landscape Designations at APPENDIX 4.**

6.0 THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The application site is proposed for residential development comprising up to 70 dwellings. The application is in outline with means of access onto Crewe Road from the northern boundary in two locations. The indicative masterplan proposals are attached at **APPENDIX 2** and demonstrates the development form that is anticipated will be taken forward at reserved matters stage and upon which the LVIA has been taken. This indicative layout was finalised in March 2015 and substitutes all previous plans submitted initially when the planning application was registered. The indicative layout plan shows that the site is suitable for a mix of house types, the focus being on family housing with a maximum of 2.5 storeys in height. The applicant's have confirmed in writing that the proposed development will meet the Council's policy objectives for the provision of affordable homes.
- 6.2 A number of key consideration have been taken into account during the design process for the development layout which has evolved over a period of some 12 months prior to the writing of this report and in consultation with officers of Cheshire East Council. This includes the Planning Officer, Principal Forestry and Arboricultural Officer, and the Principal Nature Conservation Officer. The main constraint to the development of the site is the need to maintain and conserve the breeding pond and the foraging and hibernating habitat for the population of Great Crested Newts assessed on the site, this being approximately a 50 metres radius of land from the centre point of the existing pond. Great Crested Newts and their habitats are fully protected by both the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended and the Habitats Regulations with mitigation governed by strict licensing procedure administered by Natural England.
- 6.3 Other physical constraints relate to the presence of existing vegetation and mature trees on the site some of which is designated UK Biological Action Plan Priority Habitat which is located mainly across the Crewe Road frontage and to the eastern and south eastern portions of the site. There is also a woodland which is subject to a woodland TPO (see paras. 3.9 – 3.12) and a tall stand of Alder trees in the south of the site which provide a =strong visual feature in the landscape.

Therefore the amount of development has been designed to:

- Respond positively to the constraints and opportunities identified in the assessment of the application site and its setting;
- Reflect the density of the surrounding settlement and the character of the surrounding landscape area whilst making efficient use of land that is a disused Greenfield site.

- 6.4 The majority of the housing development is located to the western field parcel (plots 1-65) with 5no plots (66-70) located on the eastern side with plots 66, 67 and 68 fronting Crewe Road and plots 69 and 70 located further into the field alongside the access track. The density of

proposed built housing mirrors that of the adjacent Miller Homes development of between 19-28 dwellings per hectare (dph). However, across the site as a whole (3.95 hectares) including the Great Crested Newt core terrestrial habitat, TPO woodland, existing retained trees and land along the brook buffer, the density equates to 17.7 dph. Whilst the constraints reduce the developable land there is the opportunity to enhance and create open space and green features which increase the biodiversity of the site and assist in bringing pedestrian linkages across the site to and from the wider surrounding countryside.

6.5 The application seeks consent for the principle of development and the detailed design will be the subject of further approval by way of the submission of an application for the approval of reserved matters. The foregoing having been said all the work carried out to date in relation to ecology, transport and access, flood risk, drainage and design demonstrate that the site has the potential to provide a sustainable development in accordance with NPPF. The main objectives outlined in the Design and Access Statement are:

- Encourage good design that will create places with distinctive character, pleasant to use and human in scale.
- Promote character by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development and landscape as recommended within Policy GR1: New Development;
- Promote diversity and choice through a range of housing typologies;
- Promote the continuity of landscaped road frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public spaces as recommended within Policy GR4: Landscaping;
- Promote accessibility and local permeability by creating access from routes that are attractive, safe and work effectively for all users;
- Promote legibility through development that provides recognisable pedestrian routes, gateways and focal points;
- Provide areas of informal green space and areas of recreation for children of a more formal structured nature.

6.6 The results of the ecological and tree/vegetation assessments and the consultations with both the Council's Forestry and Arboricultural Officer and Nature Conservation Officer have shaped the indicative layout proposals. 1.41 hectares of land will be retained and enhanced for biodiversity and ecology and a further 0.26 hectares of the Valley Brook will be retained and enhanced together with 0.05 hectares of existing hedgerows and trees. This equates to 44% of the overall site area. These features are not necessarily planned to reduce or offset any significant adverse effects, including landscape and visual effects and are part of the overall development layout but will significantly improve the landscape and the visually amenity of the proposed development site and its wider setting beyond the identified baseline condition. Mitigation or compensation for any identified adverse effects will be discussed in later chapters.

Open Space and Habitat Creation

- 6.7 The open space provision located around the Great Crested Newt habitat will involve the retention of the existing newt breeding pond, the introduction of two further ponds which are relatively unshaded, additional planting of blocks of native shrubs and trees, the enhancement of the brook corridor and the removal of invasive plant species (Himalayan balsam). The planting of tree and shrub blocks is also to offset the loss of BAP priority habitat from the frontage of the site as well as providing refuge for newts. A hibernacula will also be created at an average 10 metres wide to wraparound the open western and southern edge of the open space to create hibernating refuge and to assist in directing pedestrian access from the more sensitive parts of the open space. Tree and shrub planting along the structure will reinforce this provision. Hedgerows H1, H2 and H3 will also benefit from additional planting.

Built Form

- 6.8 Both housing parcels will be accessed independently from Crewe Road with access throughout the housing layout via roads and footpath networks. The eastern section will comprise of a single road serving 5no. number of houses with the access sweeping around the south western edge of the TPO woodland. This will allow for the retention of the TPO woodland intact and avoiding impact on root protection areas of trees to the edge of the woodland block. This will also retain a proportion of the regenerating Birch and hedgerow to the frontage of the site which is designated as UK BAP Priority Habitat. This arrangement has been progressed and agreed in detailed consultations with the Council's officers in order to maximise the retention of Habitat Priority type in association with a viable development proposal.
- 6.8 In the western parcel the development will be accessed via a primary route running generally north/south with branches of smaller access drives into housing cul-de-sacs. Best practice design as recommended within Manual for Streets will be adopted with the creation of neighbourhood characters and shared surfacing in key locations. An apartment block will be located to the south western corner closest to the larger building of the Wacky Warehouse just off site.

Boundary treatment

- 6.9 Both the western and eastern development parcels will be set back from the Crewe Road frontage to respect the existing highway grassed verge and to respond accordingly to maintain a strongly vegetated road corridor in this locality. This will provide adequate screening and filtering of the development from the Crewe Road views and also mirror and reflect the design parameters set for the adjacent Miller Homes development to provide a consistent and continuous character on this section of Crewe Road.
- 6.10 Boundaries to the east will be essentially be retained as existing since these fall as part of the open space habitat provision by where gaps occur or need strengthening it is envisaged

detailed planting proposals will be agreed. To the south, the brook corridor will be judiciously enhanced to strengthen the boundary and limit views into the development but with careful consideration in terms of keeping the channel clear for flood prevention issues. The boundary with the Plough Inn will be strengthened together with the access to Alsager Hall Farm where the house curtilages and the open space about the track.

Pedestrian movement

- 6.11 Pedestrian footpaths will connect to Crewe Road, into the Plough Inn/Wacky Warehouse and onto both Footpath 6 and Footpath 7. Footpath 6 will be slightly diverted from its existing course through the south western corner of the site to be navigated via the proposed access roads in this area with the existing bridge crossing Valley Brook retained in its location. Pedestrian routes will also be created as 'woodland' walks along the edge of the Valley Brook corridor and along the edges of the open space area.

Landscape to housing areas

- 6.12 The layout proposes a sinuous geometry to the road and access drives with provision within front curtilages to provide tree planting to the street scene. Tree lined access roads will assist in breaking up and filtering views of the development from the most directions. The retention and strengthening of existing vegetation to the boundaries will maintain screening from close and more distant views and to assimilate the development to both the adjacent countryside and the existing residential areas to the north and east. The open space area will be landscaped and additional tree planting proposed within rear garden areas particularly where these abut private or open space land.
- 6.13 New areas of structure planting comprising native species and locally indigenous species mixes will be introduced where appropriate to complement the existing landscape structure of mature trees and enhance the sense of place within the new development.

Recreation Provision

- 6.14 The open space provision is predominantly for the benefit of habitat creation and in securing enhanced biodiversity within the area. Due to the amount of provision this is considered to provide for increased betterment of the current baseline than would usually be expected of a development of this nature. Although there is a requirement for suitable areas for Great Crested Newt habitat this area will be enhanced with additional planting and pedestrian linkages to enhance the informal and passive recreation within the development.
- 6.15 The need for formal typologies of children's play provision has been included within the development as a Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP). This is located to the edge of the stand of Alder trees to the south of the site and has been indicated on the masterplan as a series of play equipment connected by an informal path. The area will achieve natural surveillance for properties overlooking the site. The play provision is intended to conform to the concept of more

natural play by integrating with the adjacent trees to give a variety of challenges and environments to young people. A buffer to the brook would be established with connections to the pedestrian footpath network. The area of play would not be less than 400 square metres in total.

House types

- 6.16 The indicative proposals are proposed to create a strong settlement character with an integrated open space which will assist in providing attractive vistas. The detailed design of houses would be agreed at reserved matters stage. It is intended that the approach would reflect the existing development to the east and would ultimately comprise of house types from the developer's portfolio constructed primarily in red brick with details of render and roof pitch.

7.0 CONSIDERATION OF EFFECTS

- 7.1 The impact is considered in terms of (A), landscape impacts – the irreversible loss of natural features such as habitats and vegetation, (B) visual impact as the result of the development on a range of receptors and (C) any adverse change in the character of the landscape. In summary the findings of the LVIA for the construction and completion/operational phases are set out in the following sections.
- 7.2 Full details of the methodology used for the preparation of this assessment are provided in Appendix 1.

Predicting, describing and assessing Landscape Effects

- 7.3 In considering the effects on the landscape the degree of change in respect of the loss or impact on natural landscape assets such as trees or hedges, manmade features such as walls or the modification of the topography and quality of existing features which also contribute to landscape character of the site and surrounding environment is assessed. This is known as '*landscape impact*'.

Identifying landscape receptors and interactions with the proposals

- 7.4 Landscape receptors are those components of the landscape that are likely to be affected by the proposed development and can include key characteristics, individual elements and features and specific aesthetic and perceptual aspects. The interaction or impact of the different components of the proposed development at all its different stages between the landscape receptors is identified.

Susceptibility to change

- 7.5 The susceptibility to change has also been considered as part of the quality of the landscape. This is the ability of the landscape (whether it be the overall character or condition of a particular landscape type, or individual features/elements or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and the achievement of landscape policies or strategies.

Establishing value

- 7.6 Individual elements, and/or aesthetic/perceptual aspects and/or statements relating to landscape conservation which may be noted in Landscape Character Assessments are often taken as indicators of the value of the landscape. The condition is also a determinant of value. The condition of the different landscape types or areas including evidence for change in that condition is also assessed. The fact that an area is not designated either nationally or locally

does not mean it does not have value but this needs to be weighted against other criteria to assess the landscape's merit in terms of designation.

Landscape sensitivity

- 7.7 Sensitivity of the landscape is the judgement on the combined susceptibility of the landscape to the particular type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape. This is expressed in this assessment as low, medium or high.

Landscape Effects

- 7.8 Landscape effects may include:
- The degree of change in and/or partial or complete loss of elements, features, or aesthetic or perceptual characteristics that contribute to the character and distinctiveness of the existing landscape resource;
 - The addition of new elements or features that will influence the character and distinctiveness of the landscape;
 - The combined effect of these to changes in overall character.
 - Effects may be beneficial, neutral or adverse and a judgment is made taking account of:
 - the degree to which the proposals fit with existing character;
 - the contribution to the landscape the development may make in its own right, even if in contrast to that character.
- 7.10 The magnitude of change is assessed in accordance with the criteria contained in **Table E within APPENDIX 1.**
- #### Significance of landscape effect
- 7.11 The correlation between sensitivity and magnitude of effect is determined to give the significance of landscape effect.

Predicting, describing, assessing Visual Effects

- 7.12 The '*visual impact*' of the proposed development on the general public is assessed. Such impacts could be the result of visual intrusion into an important viewpoint or the direct obstruction of views into the wider landscape. Visual receptors that have a greater awareness of the view, such as walkers and residential occupiers will notice the introduction of new features more than those who are not absorbing it. However, it must be remembered that in respect of residential occupiers that within planning law there is no right to a view. The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed site, the duration of the impact, the scale and massing of the proposed development and the elevation of the proposed feature from the viewpoint are all assessed to determine the degree of impact.

Susceptibility of visual receptors

- 7.13 The following are relevant when assessing the significance of the impact on visual amenity:
- The receptor's sensitivity and activity type. Receptors that have greater awareness of the view such as walkers will notice the introduction of new features more than those who are not actively absorbing the view;
 - The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed site. The greater the distance of the viewpoint from the feature the less detail is observable and it becomes more difficult to distinguish the feature from the background;
 - The duration of the perceived impact, the number of potential receptors will increase as the duration of the impact increases;
 - The scale and degree of the proposed scheme, the greater the proportion of the view that it taken up by the proposed feature the greater the impact. Proposed features that would include considerable movement will result in an increased negative impact;
 - Seasonal effects;
 - The elevation of the proposed feature from the viewpoint, if the proposed features is viewed against the sky then the impact will be greater than if the feature is viewed against a background;
 - The proportion of the development that is visible.

Value attached to a view

- 7.14 Judgements are made about the quality and value attached to the views experienced taking into various factors. These include views that are recognised through a relationship with heritage or inclusion within planning documentation/development framework and the value attached to the view as signified by appearance in literature, guide books, interpretative material or on literature or art.

Visual sensitivity

- 7.15 Sensitivity of the landscape is the judgement on the combined susceptibility of the receptor to the particular type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the views. This is expressed in this assessment as low, medium or high.
- 7.16 The sensitivity of the receptor often takes into account the following:
- Number of users;
 - Frequency of use;
 - Period of use;
 - Focus of attention on the landscape;

Magnitude of visual effect

Effects are assessed and described for each receptor with reference to representative and/or specific viewpoint. The size of scale, extent and duration and reversibility of the change in the view are assessed.

- 7.17 The magnitude of change is assessed in accordance with the criteria in **TABLE J in APPENDIX 1**.
- 7.18 The correlation between sensitivity and magnitude of effect is determined to give the significance of landscape effect.

Character Effects

- 7.19 An assessment to establish the '*character impact*' is made to assess the degree of change affecting both the site and the wider environs. Adverse changes in landscape character can occur as the result of the loss of landscape features which are acknowledged components of local distinctiveness, or the construction of new features that do not match those that already exist.
- 7.20 To assess the significance of the potential effects/impacts the degree or magnitude of change (sometimes referred to as the nature of change), both adversely and beneficially, acting on the baseline conditions and the sensitivity of receptors is objectively considered. This is considered with and without mitigation based on prescribed criteria.

8.0 LANDSCAPE AND CHARACTER EFFECTS

- 8.1 This section will deal with the assessment relating to landscape and landscape character effects of the development. In accordance with GLVIA, prior to making judgements as to the potential impacts of the development, the value of the landscape of the site and its immediate surroundings needs to be established together with the susceptibility of key landscape characteristics to the type of change potentially brought about by the development. These aspects are correlated to judge the landscape sensitivity of the site and locality to the type of change proposed.
- 8.2 The landscape character of the site and its context in the surrounding area cannot be considered in precisely defined areas and the effect of one area on the neighbouring area needs to be assessed. Effects that result indirectly from the proposed change as a consequence of the direct effects, often occurring away from the site, or as a result of a sequence of interrelationships are known as indirect effects. They may be separated by distance or in time from the source of the effects. Landscape effects are assessed with reference to the site itself and to the wider setting landscape character area.
- 8.3 The application site is a green field site within the open countryside but set immediately adjacent to the settlement edge of Alsager. The site and its context are described in detail Chapter 3.0. The site and the surroundings applicable to the change in brought about by the proposed development lies within the character Type 10: Lower farms and Woods, as described in the Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment. The landscape character of the site and surrounding landscape is described and assessed in detail in Chapter 4.0.

Susceptibility

- 8.4 The susceptibility to change of the landscape and character of both the site and surrounding landscape is judged to be **low**.

Value

- 8.5 The value of the landscape and character of both the site and surrounding landscape is judged to be **low**. It is considered **ordinary in quality and condition**.

Sensitivity

- 8.6 The sensitivity of the landscape and character of both the site and surrounding landscape is judged to be **low to medium**.

Construction phase

- 8.7 It is uncertain at this stage as for how long the construction phase will last, but it is envisaged that the construction of the proposals would be broadly in the following sequence:

- Placement of protection measures for any vegetation to be retained.
- Construction of access road and infrastructure.
- Building out of the residential properties and hard areas.
- Where appropriate, structure planting could be undertaken prior to the commencement of building operations especially on landscape buffer strips between the development and existing housing adjacent to the site and against the northern boundary where it abuts the open countryside.

- 8.8 An assessment of the potential impacts of the construction phase have been based on the proposals put forward in the Indicative Masterplan attached at **APPENDIX 2**. Construction effects would be temporary in nature and confined broadly to the same zone of theoretical visibility as the operational phase. The construction of the development would be finite, enduring for a relatively short period of time. There are no features of recognised landscape value on the application site and the site does not lie in any designated landscape of national or regional value or importance.
- 8.9 During the construction stage lifting apparatus / cranes, plant and machinery, HGVs, light vehicles, a site compound and materials would be present on site. There would be movement across the site by vehicles and plant which would render the site works more visible to the observer. Construction would involve the loss of all the infrequently managed grassland, the removal of frontage vegetation along Crewe Road to the western parcel of land, a proportion of the vegetation fronting Crewe Road to the eastern parcel of land and the loss of scattered semi-mature trees across the open grassed areas. The Tree Survey Report, dated February 2014.Rev E dated 19th March 2015, details the precise numbers and approximate areas of tree and vegetation loss as a direct result of the proposed development. The majority of tree losses are assessed as in poor to fair condition and equates to approximately 8240square metres or 21% of the total site area. The loss would result in a small reduction of features of local landscape character but at the same time the loss of the landscape elements would not detrimentally affect other adjacent landscape features due to its confined position and enclosed topography.
- 8.10 Trees on the eastern and southern boundaries would be retained. Stand off zones to respect the rooting system of trees will need to be considered in relation to dwelling and road locations. There will be a nominal loss of existing outgrown hedge planting along the northern western boundary to along Crewe Road to facilitate the development. All other hedgerows will be incorporated into the development layout. The existing waterbody and surrounding grass area is to be retained and protected as a damp grassland and scrub habitat.

Magnitude of Impact

- 8.11 The total loss of the landscape resource and features and the change brought about to the landscape character by the development's construction is judged to be of a **magnitude of medium adverse**.
- 8.12 The loss of tree and shrub cover would be offset by extensive new planting on the site in the form of hedgerows and within the open space provision, which would also enhance the biodiversity of the site from its current position. The loss of the landscape as a whole is considered will be compensated for by the retention and enhancement of the open space provision which will allow for greater public access and increased biodiversity.

Significance of Landscape Effect

- 8.13 The overall significance of the landscape effect is a correlation between the sensitivity of the landscape resource and the magnitude of the effect. In this assessment it is judged to be of a **moderate significance** whilst the development is under construction.

Operational phase

- 8.14 For the purposes of the assessment the operational phase is classified as the period when all the new buildings, infrastructure and associated landscape works have been completed. Predicted impacts are likely to be **long term and irreversible** in this phase. The following assessments are based on the consideration of the proposals as a whole, including the new access, the internal road and footpath system, the movement of vehicles within the site and the night time impacts of lighting on the wider landscape.
- 8.15 In the context of the surrounding landscape character the change is considered to be only perceptible to a few components of the wider landscape and would be unremarkable in the localised area particularly as the changes would be reflective of the adjacent settlement edge and would mirror that of the adjacent Miller Homes development. The alteration of the landscape would not necessarily decrease landscape value and quality given the condition and land use of the current baseline resource and the site is considered therefore to have the ability to absorb change. Detracting urban features within the landscape reduce the value and render the site of lesser quality than the generalised key characteristics of the Landscape Character Type. The adjacent landscape character in this location would not therefore be impacted on significantly by the development proposals.
- 8.16 It is acknowledged that there would be increased prominence of the site with new buildings and infrastructure from certain viewpoints.

Magnitude of Impact

- 8.17 The total loss of the landscape resource and features and the change brought about to the landscape character by the development's permanent operational phase is judged to be of a ***magnitude of medium adverse***.

Significance of Landscape Effect

- 8.18 The overall significance of the landscape effect is a correlation between the sensitivity of the landscape resource and the magnitude of the effect. In this assessment it is judged to be of a ***minor to moderate significance*** when the development is newly completed and prior to the establishment of associated landscape works and maturity of the open space habitat. Whilst the change would result in a built development there would not be a disruption to the adjacent rural or settlement landscapes or loss of any valued views or association with adjacent character areas. ***Within 15-20 years the significance is judged to reduce to minor and ultimately to be of negligible significance in the long term.***

9.0 VISUAL EFFECTS

- 9.1 The 'visual impact' of the proposed development on the general public and people who may observe the development changes is assessed. Views to the proposed development on the application site would be available from roads and lanes, residences, and public rights of way (PRoW) surrounding the site, along with areas of public access. Workers within agriculture may also be exposed to views. Visual impacts could be the result of visual intrusion into an important or valued viewpoint and/or the partial or full obstruction of views into the wider landscape, and/or change in composition of rural views to that of suburban housing. The distance of the viewpoint from the proposed site, the duration of the impact, the scale and massing of the proposed development and the elevation of the proposed feature from the viewpoint are all assessed to determine the magnitude of the impact and the significance of the effect.

Potential receptors appraisal

- 9.2 Viewpoints have been selected from various locations and possible vantage points identified through site visits and analysis of desk top studies and topography from mapping. Views of the proposed development have been chosen to be both representative of the range of differing receptors (public, community, residents, visitors and workers) within the area and of the visual amenity available at points north, south, east and west of the proposed site. The sensitivity (low, medium or high) of the receptors has been judged. Viewpoints can also be assessed in terms of the type of receptor and views have been selected which are representative of a typical view of that type of receptor or selective of a particular important view.

Susceptibility of Visual Receptors

- 9.3 The susceptibility of visual receptors has been considered. The interest and focus of walkers, cyclists and horse riders of the local lane and footpath network including the highway footpaths on and around the site has been considered. These are generally considered to be of *medium to high susceptibility* since they are able to take in views in the course of their activity.
- 9.4 The residents of the community looking over from Crewe Road and those from the Miller Homes development to the east of the site are considered *high susceptibility* as most of the residents currently benefit from a 'green' view even if the angle of the view towards the site from a particular window is oblique or if the views are enjoyed primarily from gardens.
- 9.5 Workers and visitors to the commercial enterprises of the two public houses in close proximity to the site and the farm shop and café of Alsager Hall Farm are considered to have *low to medium susceptibility* given that their attention is not generally focused on the views although they may have an appreciation of their generally surrounding in context to their activity.

- 9.6 Vehicle users on Crewe Road would be travelling at an assumed speed limit of up to 40 miles per hour. As the focus of attention is on driving, the scenic quality is not as prominent although road users would appreciate a change to their current baseline view, particularly during the construction phase. They are considered to be of *low susceptibility*. Similarly, road users on the lane to the east of the site, between it and the Miller Homes development would observe a degree of change although the field parcel closest to the view would remain relatively unaltered. They are also considered to be of *low susceptibility*.
- 9.7 There is no open access land, schools or hospitals where the public may gain access or sports and recreational facilities within view of the application site.

Value attached to views

- 9.8 'Value' attached to views takes account of planning designations, heritage assets and publications, interpretation and guidebooks that confer value to a particular view. The narrative and key characteristics within landscape character assessments, and the views described may confer value to certain views. In assessing the site and the surrounding landscape in terms of planning designations, character assessment and other literature there is no evidence to convey significant value to any of the views that have been assessed and views are generally considered to be of *low value*. There may be 'local' value, particularly from house occupiers directly overlooking the site in that there would be a significant change to their views but in English law private views are generally not legally protected, although visually intrusive views would be a consideration.

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors

- 9.9 The *visual sensitivity* of receptors has been judged through a combination of the susceptibility of visual receptors to change and the value attached to views. These judgments are detailed in the **Photograph Viewpoints at APPENDIX 5** but are summarised as follows:

- Walkers, cyclists and horse riders using the local footpath network are considered medium sensitivity since they are potentially highly susceptible but with a low value views.
- Residents within dwellings are considered of *medium to high sensitivity*.
- Motorised road users are of general *low sensitivity*.
- Workers and visitors to the public houses are considered *low to medium sensitivity*.

Assessment of Visual Effects and Magnitude of Change

- 9.10 The visual impacts of both the construction and operational phases have been assessed. Given the relatively short period of time for the construction and the permanence of the housing upon completion, significant effects for the operational phase only are described as follows. The detailed assessment for both the construction phase and operational phase is contained within the **Photograph Viewpoints at APPENDIX 5**.
- 9.11 The site is not considered to be large scale in the context of the surrounding settlement and in particularly the adjacent development by Miller Homes is of a similar size and housing numbers. The site is generally considered to be 'flat' and well contained by existing vegetation and would therefore not be in a prominent position or intrude into elevated views. The proposed development would not block any important or valued. The built form would affect the loss and major alteration of primary features such as grassland, shrubs and trees to parts of the site, particularly across the Crewe Road frontage and the characteristics of the current baseline features would change in views to nearby receptors. Views south across the site from the Crewe Road aspect would be altered but views are not judged as valued views and are in context with a number of existing urban features such as the Ordnance works, electricity pylons and the telecommunication masts as well as other built form in close proximity.
- 9.12 In general terms the magnitude of change are assessed as ranging from *small to medium adverse* for most receptors with *large adverse for receptors immediately fronting the site from residential dwellings on Crewe Road* but with *medium degree effects* where screening within their garden curtilages or access drives curtails views. Receptors of mainly footpath users to the south, south east and east would experience *adverse impact of low to medium* magnitude dependant on the angle of view, distance to the site and the proportion of the site that would be a component of the view. Other effects would be of *low magnitude* for visitors, motorised road users and rural workers as the impact of change would be observed for a short duration due to the activity.

Significance of Visual Effects

- 9.13 The sensitivity and magnitude of change are described in detail in the **Photograph Viewpoints at APPENDIX 5**. In summary the significance of the visual effects are set out as follows:

Residents:

- 9.13.1 Up to 14no. semi-detached and detached properties on Crewe Road with direct and near direct views would experience adverse and permanent visual effects of ***moderate – major significance***.
- 9.13.2 Properties continuing north eastwards along Crewe Road with indirect views and partial obscured would experience adverse effects of ***negligible to minor significance***.

- 9.13.3 Properties continuing south westwards along Crewe Road including the Holly Trees Hotel at approximately 0.5 kilometres distance, with indirect views and partially obscured would experience of **minor to moderate significance**.
- 9.13.4 Up to 8no properties within the Miller Homes development with direct and near direct views would experience adverse and permanent visual effects of **minor to moderate significance**.
- 9.13.5 The property known as Mill House with indirect views and partial obscured would experience adverse effects of **negligible to minor significance**.

Users of public rights of way:

- 9.13.6 Pedestrians/walkers and to a lesser degree cyclists and horse riders who are users that are not promoted on the routes, would experience permanent visual effects to a lesser or greater degree as follows:
- 9.13.7 Users of footpath FB5 (to north of site along Cranberry Way) would experience adverse effects of **moderate significance reducing to minor over time**.
- 9.13.8 Users of footpath FP6 (south east and within site) would experience adverse effects of **minor to major significance** depending distance and orientation to the site.
- 9.13.9 Users of footpath 7 FP7 (to east and southeast of site) would experience adverse effects of **minor to moderate significance** depending distance, orientation to the site and the degree of intervening vegetation. Horse riders would experience an elevated view but the significance is judged to be the same as for pedestrians.
- 9.13.10 Users of footpath 8 FP8 (to south east of site) would experience adverse effects of **moderate significance** due to the close proximity to the site but the intervening and screening features.
- 9.13.11 Users of footpaths FP9 and FP13 (to further south east of site) would experience adverse effects of **minor to moderate significance** depending on distance to the site and the intervening and screening features.
- 9.13.12 Users of Permissive public footpaths PFP 1 (to south of site) would experience adverse effects of **minor to moderate significance** depending on distance to the site and the intervening and screening features.
- 9.13.13 People using the access track dividing the two field parcels of the proposed development site would experience the most change to visual amenity due to the proximity of the views. They would experience adverse effects of a **major significance**.
- 9.13.14 Users of public rights of way beyond those identified are not considered to experience significant effects due to distance from the site which renders changes indistinguishable within the landscape or due to intervening and obscuring landscape features. This includes footpaths to the west of the site between it and the M6 corridor and footpaths to the far east, south east and south where vegetation and rising topography render the site unobservable.

Pedestrians on public highway footpaths

- 9.13.15 Pedestrians on Crewe Road in the immediate vicinity of the site frontage would experience adverse effects **moderate to major significance** due to time spent observing the site. Not all of the proposals would be visible at once due to intervening residential properties and garden vegetation but the development would fill most of the view.
- 9.13.16 Pedestrians using the unadopted road sharing the route of footpath 7 (Crewe Road to Alsager Hall Farm/Old Mill Public House) would experience adverse effects of **minor significance** depending on the focus of attention towards the site, orientation to the site and the degree of intervening vegetation.
- 9.13.17 Pedestrians using the highway footpaths within the Miller Homes site to the east that can observe the site through existing built houses would experience adverse effects of **minor significance** depending on the focus of attention towards the site, orientation to the site and the degree of intervening vegetation.

Visitors to the Plough Inn/Wacky Warehouse

- 9.13.18 People visiting the pub and play attraction will spend limited time observing the view when entering and parking cars within the grounds. They would experience adverse effects of a **minor to moderate significance** due to the length of time observing the view in the context of their activities.

Visitors to the Old Mill Public House

- 9.13.19 People visiting the pub will spend limited time observing the view when entering and parking within the car park adjacent to the south eastern corner of the site. They would experience adverse effects of a **minor significance** due to the length of time observing the view in the context of their activities. Although the car park is close to the boundary intervening vegetation will screen views.

Visitors to Alsager Hall farm shop and cafe

- 9.13.20 People visiting the pub will spend limited time observing the view when entering and parking within the car park adjacent to the south eastern corner of the site. They would experience adverse effects of a **minor to moderate significance** due to the length of time observing the view in the context of their activities. The car park is close to the boundary with views through filtering vegetation towards the developed western field parcel.

Roads/transport network

- 9.13.21 Motor borne users of Crewe Road/B5077 (immediately north of the site) would experience adverse effects of **minor to moderate significance** depending on the focus of attention towards the site and the fleeting nature of traffic movement across the site.

- 9.13.22 People on roads associated within the Miller Homes development would experience adverse effects of **minor significance** depending on the focus of attention towards the site and the limited nature of views.
- 9.13.23 Motor borne users of the road leading from Crewe Road to Alsager Hall Farm/Old Mill Public House would experience adverse effects of **minor significance** depending on the focus of attention towards the site, orientation to the site and the degree of intervening vegetation.
- 9.13.24 Users of Cranberry Lane to the north of the site would see little change to views and they would experience adverse effects of **negligible to minor significance**.
- 9.13.25 Train users passing to the south of the site would experience effects of **negligible significance** due to the very fleeting nature of the view and the limited degree of development that would be visible.

Rural workers and employees within BAE Systems factory

- 9.13.26 Views by people engaged in work within the rural areas of around the site and within the factory works are limited and focus on the view is constrained due to their activities. Depending on distance from the site and specific location they would not in any event experience adverse effects more than of *minor significance, and generally of negligible significance*.
- 9.14 In summary it is considered that the residents in close proximity to the site and users of the local footpath network close to the site would experience the changes with the most adverse significance. Distance from the site and the degree of intervening vegetation serves to diminish this experience particularly in the context to land to the south, south east and east. Road users whilst experiencing the change would not be significantly affected. In many views the new housing development will be a changed view but would be seen in the context of existing urban features and existing housing and so would not, particularly over time be considered an intrusive feature.

Visual Envelope (ZVI)

- 9.15 Based on field analysis and with reference to existing screening, including built structures and vegetation identified from mapping and air photography a predicted zone of visual influence (ZVI) of the development has been prepared. The ZVI is shown on **Figure 6 - Zone of Visual Influence Plan (APPENDIX 4)** The ZVI is indicative of the part of the landscape from which views of the proposed development might be gained. It does not imply that views would be possible from all points within the area delineated nor does it indicate that all the developments might be seen or that the development would be highly perceivable. Photographic viewpoints have been taken from within this Zone of Visual Influence as shown on **Figure 6** and are attached at **APPENDIX 5**.

10.0 NIGHT TIME IMPACTS AND CUMMULATIVE IMPACTS

Night time Impacts

- 10.1 Street lighting and lighting from houses would impact on the amenity of existing close distance receptors to a minor degree. Highways are not generally used to the same extent as in daylight hours and views from existing houses are generally inverted as occupiers close their curtains to the darkness. Night time views would also be seen generally within the context of other existing street lighting on Crewe Road and within the Miller Homes development. Work within adjacent rural areas land would normally cease during night time hours although visitors to the two local public houses would experience a change to night time views due to lighting effects. However, a degree of intrusions would exist from the baseline of no lighting which is considered **minor adverse**. The use of appropriate down lighters to reduce light spillage and the specification of lighting columns to reflect the scale and character of the local surroundings would help to mitigate this issue.

Cumulative impacts

- 10.2 Future housing developments within the local area have been identified to the south west of the site at land off Hall Drive at approximately 0.5 kilometres distance and in two separate applications on land known as White Moss Quarry between the M6 corridor and Crewe Road at approximately 1.0 kilometre distance. The former has outline planning permission for up to 125no dwelling subject to a 102 agreement. The smaller site at White Moss has outline planning permission for 110 no dwelling and the larger site which was submitted on 15th October 2013 for 350no dwelling is not yet decided.

Cumulative landscape effects

- 10.3 When assessing cumulative landscape effects may be increased as a result of adding new types of change or from increasing or extending the effects of the main project when it is considered in isolation. The main project may be judged of relatively low significance when taken on its own, but when taken together with other effects of other schemes, usually of the same type, the cumulative landscape effects may become more significant. The cumulative landscape effects must be considered particularly in terms of consequences for key characteristics of the landscape in question. Judgments are made about the compatibility of the proposals being considered with the existing characteristics of the landscape such as scale and pattern and whether or not the character of the landscape is changed to such an extent that it becomes a new landscape type.
- 10.4 In the context of the application site the development site with planning permission but not as yet built are considered to be sufficiently distance so that the change to the landscape resource would not alter the scale and size or the geographical area of the cumulative landscape effects identified. The changes are not considered to alter the landscape character of the application

site. The emphasis of the cumulative assessment is that it does not combine to create a significant cumulative effect.

Cumulative visual effects

- 10.5 Cumulative visual effects are the effects on views and visual amenity enjoyed by people, which may result either from adding the effects of the project being assessed to the effects of other projects on the baseline conditions or from their combined effect. This may result from changes in the context and character of views experienced in particular places due to the introduction of new elements or removal of or damage to existing ones.
- 10.6 The distance between the visual receptors or viewpoints and the various projects does influence the magnitude of the cumulative visual effects and so contributes to the judgments of their significance. In the context of the application site the inter-visibility of the site with those projected for development is extremely limited and negligible. The influence further development will have on receptors is related to their sequential movement and their understanding of the landscape views as they move through the landscape and as such the overall experience will be one of a more urbanising effect in the locality. In this instance the observer would need to move to another viewpoint to see the same or different developments. This would be particularly relevant for motorised users of Crewe Road when travelling in either direction. It may be considered that further development will downgrade the value of views from that currently existing and allow the application site to more readily absorb development.

11.0 LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT

- 11.1 The visual impacts identified are associated with the proposed residential development from predominantly near views although intermittent mid distant and long distance views are possible. Comprehensive landscape proposals and the retention and enhancement of a large area of public open space will be an integral part of a more detailed housing layout and subsequent reserved matters application should the application be approved. This assessment however, provides an indicative masterplan indicating the level and arrangement of new landscaping within the layout and the open space. The existing vegetation on the eastern, south eastern and along the Valley Brook corridor are mature trees and woodland and will be retained and supplemented as part of the development proposals. These provide strong features which both contain and help to screen the site from many potential viewpoints. These features will be further strengthened by additional tree and shrub planting, along the Crewe Road frontage boundary and will help to maintain an enclosed character of the land around the proposal site. Although not identified as mitigation to reduce or remove adverse effects the proposals will greatly enhance the development and have been part of the overall design process and planning of the development. Adverse visual impacts can be offset and in the long term may give rise to further positive effects and contribute to the overall quality of the landscape
- 11.2 Detailed proposals would seek to offset the proposed impacts by the following methods:
1. The development of a Construction and Environmental Management Plan to reduce impact on the amenity of local residents during the construction phase which, the contents of which may be secured through the imposition of a standard planning condition.
 2. Sympathetic design to development to avoid impact on retained trees and vegetation and respect stand off distances and root protection areas.
 3. Additional tree and shrub planting to boundaries to strengthen this character and provide additional screening in association with planting for enhanced biodiversity and habitat creation for Great Crested Newt habitat to the eastern field parcel.
 4. Landscape proposals within the development site will include planting of trees within front and rear garden curtilages. Internal trees will assist in breaking up the built elements and filtering close views.
 6. Dwellings to be built from materials/colours to match the local vernacular.
- 11.3 Views from Crewe Road to the north would be mitigated by a use of sympathetic building materials which reflect local character and form will serve to assimilate this development within the surrounding landscape and adjacent existing development. Dwellings would face the road frontage and be set back to create a verge of approximately 5.0 -10.0 metres with a strong avenue of trees. Tree planting within the development would mitigate longer distance views to the south, south east and east and would assimilate the development within the overall landscape setting.

12.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 12.1 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment undertaken for the proposed development have been assessed using similar criteria, receptors and viewpoint locations due to their activity, proximity to the site and relationship to the surrounding landscape. The assessment has focused on the proposal site and the likely impacts or effects development would have on the landscape and visual receptors.
- 12.2 The proposals seek to create residential development that respond sympathetically to the landscape character and existing residential development in the general locality and to incorporate and replicate landscape features that are evident in the local character area. The development will include a high proportion of open space for the conservation of the Great Crested Newt habitat and this will be enhanced to increase biodiversity and provide an amenity area for local future residents. The proposed landscape features use elements to position the development sensitively in the landscape with due regard to neighbours and other surrounding land uses. The site is well screened and enclosed by existing vegetation on the eastern and southern edges and is screened from views from the north, north west and northeast by existing settlement. Views are mainly very local views obtained from the south and east from public footpaths, with close views from Crewe Road. Other views are limited in the majority of cases by intervening landscape and urban features. The close presence of the residential settlement of Alsager and the adjacent Miller Homes development to the east contains the site physically to the north and east side and is influenced by a number of urban features including the Ordnance factory to the south and the electricity pylons. Retaining boundary features along with offsetting landscape works and the introduction of tree planting within the development will further enhance and screen the development which will strengthen over time as the planting matures.
- 12.3 The surrounding landscape lies within the Lower Farms and Woods character type is predominantly rural pastoral fields. The key characteristics of the landscape are not represented strongly in the surrounding landscape and it is considered that its susceptibility to change is generally low. It is also judged to be low in value as a landscape resource and ordinary in quality and condition.
- 12.4 The change in the landscape with the introduction of the proposed housing development will be most pronounced in the immediate areas surrounding the site. The introduction of residential housing and associated infrastructure where there was previously grassland with some tree and shrub cover will be a change to landscape character and substantial change for a number of close properties (residential receptors) which can obtain views of the site within a local context and for vehicle and pedestrian users of Crewe Road in the vicinity of the site. There are a small number of public receptor points (pedestrians and

vehicles) who experience indirect and infrequent views to the proposal site from near distance other than Crewe Road and from visitor attractions including the two public houses and the Alsager Hall Farm shop and café.

- 12.5 Mid distance views from the south, east and south east have difficulty perceiving the proposed development within the wider landscape due to the filtering effect of existing built form and vegetation around and in close proximity to the application site although it is acknowledged the views will be obtained from the car park of the farm shop. These views will perceive the proposed development within an enclosed parcel of land and in the context of the large built complex of the Ordnance factory. However, trees and hedgerows along field boundaries and intervening belts of vegetation will help to screen the proposed site to a large degree over the longer term. Other longer distance views will also see the site in this context. The development would potentially form part of a wider Alsager settlement which can create a new defensible settlement edge that sensitively addresses the transition of development from settlement to rural.
- 12.6 The proposed offsetting measures in the form of new landscaping within the development site will fulfil some of the characteristics identified with the surrounding landscape character assessment and help to resolve some of the features of low value, poorly managed areas. All landscaping would adhere to local planning policy with regard to development design. The site has the ability to absorb change and allow the process of development without impacting adversely on adjacent landscapes given appropriate development layout and mitigation. The site will provide for increased biodiversity and assist with meeting local housing provision numbers in a sustainable manner.

Conclusion

- 12.7 The proposals would not represent a significant adverse effect on both the landscape resource and to visual receptors except where receptors are in close proximity to the site. The retention of substantial area of existing tree and shrub vegetation to the eastern portion of the site and the creation of enhanced habitat for Great Crested Newts assists in assimilating the proposed development into the adjacent landscape. The site has the ability to absorb change and is considered to be appropriate change of use in terms of landscape character in the context of the adjacent settlement edge. The relatively unmanaged nature of the site and detracting urban features allow the site to establish a new character without significant adverse effects. Over time it is considered that new landscaping as part of the development will provide positive landscape benefits.

end

