Landscape and Visual Appraisal of Land Parcel PS19a Stonehouse

Introduction

MHP Design Ltd Chartered Landscape Architects were instructed by Robert Hitchins Ltd to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal of land parcel PS19a Stonehouse as identified in the Stroud District Council Emerging Strategy 2018. The appraisal gives particular focus to understanding landscape and visual sensitivity of the land parcel to development and the potential effects that might arise to the setting and character of the Cotswolds AONB designated landscape to the east of the land parcel.

A site survey was undertaken by two chartered landscape architects during July 2019 when vegetation was in full leaf and during fine weather permitting clear views.

Site location:

The study site [the site] is located to the immediate north of the allocated land SA2 West of Stonehouse (Great Oldbury development). The land borders open countryside to the west adjoining Pidgemore Farm and to the north south of Standish Court. The eastern boundary is formed by the main line railway cutting. Stagholt Farm located to the immediate west of the railway and its access track form part of the land parcel.

Please refer to **Figure 1** for site location, designations and viewpoint Photograph locations Please refer to **Figure 2** for local topography

Please refer to Figure 3 to Figure 8 viewpoint photographs

Land parcel description:

The land parcel consist of two open agricultural fields separated by the access track to Stagholt Farm. Both fields were each formerly divided into a further two fields, the boundaries of which are identified on Ordnance Survey maps of the land. Presently the single field lying east of the farm track is in arable crop production and the larger field to the west of the track part in arable and part laid to pasture.

Designations and implied value	
Greenbelt	No
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	No but the western boundary of the Cotswold AONB runs
	along the B4008 some 0.2 miles from the edge of the site with
	a railway and its associated cutting and a field intervening.
Listed buildings	No. Locally in Nupend
Registered Park and Garden	No
Conservation Area	No
Open access land/public rights of way	Yes. A number of public rights of way cross the land parcel.
	These are illustrated in Figure 1
Valued landscape	No

Discussion

The land parcel is not covered by landscape or conservation designation and is not assessed to form part of a valued landscape based on physical attributes and previous studies. A public right of way crosses north west across the land parcel. This PRoW forms a direct link between the allocated land (SA2) to the immediate south, with a bridge (Black Bridge) which provides access over the railway to the land north of Stonehouse. This bridge provides a strategic link between Stonehouse and the land west of the railway. A further PRoW extends along part of the southern boundary of the land parcel. Refer to Figure 1 for exact location of public rights of way and bridle ways.

The setting of the AONB and views in and out of the land are key considerations as is the setting of existing public rights of way and views therefrom.

Landscape Character	
National Character Area:	NCA 106: Severn & Avon Vales
County Character Area (Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment):	Settled Unwooded Vale: Vale of Gloucester
Stroud Landscape Assessment:	 Rolling Agricultural Plain Key characteristics of the landscape character type are: Varied landscape of open, flat plain to more undulating landform towards limestone escarpment. Established, old, rich rural lowland, with some woodlands and mature hedgerow trees and occasional orchards. Land is dissected by the River Cam and Frome to the east. Traversed from north to south by M5 motorway, railway, Gloucester Sharpness canal and the A38. Semi enclosed landscape with some distant views, and more restrained views from Frome valley. Churches act as a strong foci and landmarks. Dispersed pattern of isolated villages. Land use is a mix of arable and pasture. Strong field pattern medium to small in scale. The Stroud Landscape Assessment confirms that the Rolling Agricultural Plain is a varied and extensive character type differentiated locally by variations in topography, land use pattern, vegetation cover and river systems. The assessment confirms that the land parcel falls within the sub division of the Escarpment Footslopes. The assessment confirms that the

Escarpment Footslopes landscape character sub division has the following distinctive characteristics:
 Obviously undulating landscape and westward sloping topography when compared to the landscape to the west.
 A transitional fringe between the Cotswold Escarpment and the Lowland Plain landscape character types.
 Pasture is the dominant land use.
 Elm hedgerows found around small streams and on lower slopes.

Discussion

The landscape character of the site reflects the published characteristics of the Rolling Agricultural Plain and its sub area of the Escarpment Footslopes. This is a settled rural landscape with features that reflect the settled elements of the landscape and rural elements of the undeveloped agricultural landscape. This mix of rural and settled features commonplace within the broader Settled Unwooded Vale landscape character area.

The landscape character area forms a transition from the steeply sloping escarpment, characterisied by steep pasture and woodland, to the undulating farmed vale with mix of arable, pasture and settlement. This transition is visible locally creating a good sense of place. The landscape to the south of the land parcel is also important to the sense of place and contributes to the setting of the land parcel. This is due to the well treed character which has a correlation with the lower lying land closer to the River Frome corridor.

Site Features & Details	
Natural Elements:	
Landform	Gently ascending to the north east then forming a gentle
	plateau.
Vegetation	Limited generally to field hedges. Hedges along the southern
	boundary and along the farm track are high quality dense
	hedges in good condition. Field boundaries along the
	western and northern boundaries are weaker in places.
	Hedgerow trees are present particularly along the southern
	and northern boundaries.
Hydrology	No watercourses or ponds have been identified on the land
	parcel.
Cultural Elements:	
Land Use	Agricultural land use with mixed arable and pasture.
Boundaries and enclosure pattern	Part intact but decaying. Some field hedges or boundaries
	have been removed creating large fields for intensive
	agriculture.
Time Depth/historic landscape	Features are simple and rustic with mature trees boundaries
	adding some sense of time depth.

Relationship to built form/settlement	Limited but the land parcel is not remote from the existing
	settlement areas and will immediately adjoin the new
	settlement area when built out.
Amenity/recreation use	A number of public rights of way cross the site which allow
	views onto the Cotswold escarpment to the east and May Hill
	and the western side of the Severn to the west. The footpath
	links to Black Bridge are strategically important in that they
	allow crossing of the main railway line which is otherwise
	locally limited.
Perceptual qualities	Relatively open and elevated agricultural landscape,
	unremarkable in its own features but exposed to clear scenic
	views to the Cotswold escarpment.
Condition	
Hedges	Moderate with both good and weak hedges present. Weak
	areas are gappy or missing or with higher elm content. Good
	areas have strong stands of hawthorn, hazel and other
	desirable species.
Trees	Ash, oak in moderate condition generally
Pasture	Improved, intensive farmed
Arable	Moderate productive
Public Right of Way	Poor. Beyond the southern boundary of the land parcel,
	footpaths appear to have been blocked or are missing
	completely. Not frequently walked as a result.
Other	Stagholt farm and its structures were not identifiable due to
	screening hedges
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Discussion

The land parcel features are simple and relatively unremarkable but do reflect the local rural landscape characteristics. Condition of these features is mixed but assessed to be moderate in slight decline. High elm content in some hedges and limited green infrastructure management appear to be the pressures causing decline. Ash dieback is likely to increase the extent and speed of this decline over the next decade.

Landscape Sensitivity

The Stroud District Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (December 2016) has provided an extensive assessment of land sensitivity to development (both residential and employment) for the district. Land parcel PS19a is contained with assessment parcel St07 of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment which identified the land parcel to have the following sensitivity to development:

Sensitivity to Housing Use: Medium
Sensitivity to Employment Use: Medium

Supporting evidence provided by the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment states the following:

Sensitivity to Housing Use

The sensitivity of the area lies in the rising slopes to the north east which contain the lower landscape including Stonehouse to the south, its contribution to the setting of the linear rural settlement of Nupend including listed buildings, the watercourse and associated riparian corridor, the openness of the land parcel and its

intervisibility with the escarpment to the east. The value of the area lies in the many PROW's especially to the west and the listed buildings in Nupend. Housing would definitely extend the current settlement form and if implemented on the rising slopes to the north may become visible further north. Housing could be implemented on the lower areas to the east but should avoid adversely affecting the watercourse corridor and surrounding Nupend or affecting its setting and character. Consideration should be given to potentially implementing this with nearby sites to create a more coherent and integrated settlement form on the northern edge of Stonehouse.

It is important to note that the Stroud District Landscape Sensitivity Assessment land parcel St07 extends over a large area than the land parcel PS19a. Land parcel PS19a does not extend to Nupend, its listed buildings or the watercourse, all of which are identified as potentially sensitive receptors. As such land parcel PS19a has potential to have a slightly lower sensitivity than parcel St07 generally.

Sensitivity to Employment Use

The sensitivity of the area lies in the rising slopes to the north east which contain the lower landscape including Stonehouse to the south, its contribution to the setting of the linear rural settlement of Nupend including listed buildings, the watercourse and associated riparian corridor, the openness of the land parcel and its intervisibility with the escarpment to the east. The value of the area lies in the many PROW's especially to the west and the listed buildings in Nupend. Employment in this location would conflict with the scale and character of Nupend and its surroundings and may conflict with proposed site allocation to the south. However, subject to this the land is relatively flat and open to the east and it could be implemented on the lower land to the south east. Consideration should be given to potentially implementing this with nearby sites with a mix of uses to create a more coherent and integrated settlement form on the northern edge of Stonehouse.

It is again important to note that the Stroud District Landscape Sensitivity Assessment land parcel St07 extends over a large area than the land parcel PS19a. Land parcel PS19a does not extend to Nupend and its listed buildings, all of which are identified as potentially sensitive receptors. As such land parcel PS19a has potential to have a slightly lower sensitivity than parcel St07.

Discussion

Parcel PS19a is confirmed to have a broad brush medium landscape sensitivity to both housing and employment development. When considered in greater detail it is assessed that the land parcel has lower sensitivity to the south, south west south east with higher sensitivity to the north and in particular north east. This sensitivity has a strong correlation with the transitional landscape character of the site and its interface with the lower sensitivity River Frome corridor, medium sensitivity agricultural vale and higher sensitivity escarpment footslopes. Please refer to **Figure 9** Landscape Sensitivity Analysis.

Visual context	
Key views from site	From Public Rights of Way crossing the land parcel
	towards both the escarpment and into the vale to
	the west.
Key views into the site	From PROW's within the upper escarpment slopes
	From the public accessible areas along the upper
	escarpment including Cotswold Way
Skyline	Distant skyline to west with higher ground west of
	the Severn visible forming distant skyline

	Close skyline of the Cotswold escarpment to the
	east.
	Local skyline formed by vale hedgerow vegetation
	to the north
	Distant skyline to the east formed by distant
	escarpment seen over local vale hedgerow
	vegetation.
Intervisibility/openness/enclosure	Generally open throughout but with greater
	openness to north and north east in association
	with higher ground.
Visual detractors	None

Visual Context and Prominence:

The land parcel is generally quite open but the well treed landscape to the immediate south introduces some containment which is extended by the hedgerows which extend northwards from Stagholt Farm and west of Pidgemore Farm. This established vegetation also corresponds to the lower lying land within the parcel enhancing the sense of containment. The higher areas of the land parcel are quite open although the field hedge that separates the land west and east of the farm track to Stagholt Farm brings some local containment to the eastern margin of the western field.

Views into the land parcel are limited from the south, south east and west due to this vegetation but more extensive from the east and north east. Views from the north into the site are limited by both landform and established field boundary vegetation.

Potential Visual Receptors:	
Walkers using site Public Rights of Way	Represented by viewpoint photograph Walkers experience direct and expansive views to the escarpment to the east and high ground to the west of the vale to the west.
Walkers using track/bridleway from Black Bridge	Represented by viewpoint photograph Walkers experience potential views to the south west over the field east of the Stagholt Farm track. Views into the remainder of the land parcel are more limited by established hedgerow vegetation.
Walkers generally using public rights of way on the mid to upper escarpment slopes	Represented by viewpoint photograph Generally from the mid to upper slopes where public access is gained through public rights of way, there is potential to experience extensive and panoramic views into the vale to the west, south west and north west. The site land parcel has potential to be seen within the foreground/ middle ground of these views.

Represented by viewpoint photograph Limited views from a short length of the Cotswold
imited views from a short length of the Cotswold
Way immediately south of Standish Wood where clear views to the west and south west are available. Views are expansive and panoramic generally with the land parcel seen in the middle foreground of the view.
Represented by viewpoint photograph
Views to the south and south west into the vale which are extensive and panoramic. Site is seen in

Discussion

The public rights of way within the land parcel due afford scenic views both into the vale and to the Cotswold escarpment. These views are not unique to this location but are scenic and without detractors. Maintaining a rural setting and intervisibility with the wider vale and in particular the Cotswold escarpment is a constraint to development.

Views into the land parcel from the elevated viewpoints along the escarpment are scenic and inform the vale setting to the western margin of the AONB. The land parcel itself has limited features which are indistinct when seen from the escarpment, but its value lies in its openness and rural character.

Maintaining the rural vale character of the broader vale as seen in elevated views from within the AONB is a constraint to development. Maintaining rural footpath setting and views to the escarpment and into the vale from site public rights of way is also a constraint to development.

Visual Sensitivity

The Stroud District Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (December 2016) identifies land parcel St07 to have medium sensitivity to both housing and employment development. The main visual sensitivity is associated with potential intervisibility of development on higher land within the land parcel to potential sensitive receptors to the north and on the escarpment. Land parcel PS19a contains the most elevated land within the wider land parcel assessed by Stroud District. It is therefore assessed to have slightly higher visual sensitivity for this higher land than the medium sensitivity identified in the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment.

Summary of constraints and opportunities

A summary of landscape constraints for land parcel PS19a are as follows:

- Maintain a rural setting to the existing public rights of way that pass through the land parcel
- Maintain the rural vale setting to the AONB
- Maintain the sense of transition from the escarpment to the vale landscape
- Maintain the rural vale setting to Stonehouse

• Maintain the rural vale setting to the adjoining allocated development land

A summary of visual constraints for land parcel PS19a are as follows:

- Maintain the rural character of the settled vale in views from the AONB
- Maintain intervisibility with the existing public rights of way that pass through the land parcel with the wider vale to the west and the escarpment to the east

Opportunities:

- Improve public footpath links to Black Bridge from the West Stonehouse allocated development land south of the land parcel
- Extend the well treed landscape of the Frome Valley to extend green infrastructure
- Create a 'seamless' extension to the existing approved West Stonehouse allocation site.

Mitigation and landscape strategy

The Stroud Landscape Sensitivity Assessment defines its medium landscape parcel sensitivity calibration to mean 'Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the land parcel are susceptible to change and/or its values are medium/low through to medium/high and/or it may have some potential to accommodate the relevant type of development in some defined situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are intermediate'

Mitigation measures both inherent through spatial and architectural design and by the provision of strategic new green infrastructure has potential to contain or limit significant character change or potential adverse effects from development within the land parcel. These measures are set out in summary below and considered further in the landscape strategy for the site.

Potential mitigation through layout consideration

- Density and distribution of buildings. Lower density and lower roof heights in areas of higher ground to the north and north east
- Height and prominence of buildings limited at interface with open countryside particularly on higher ground to north and north east.
- Settlement character variation with higher density urban character in lower areas away from
 interface with open countryside and lower density, rural character development along margins.
 Large agricultural scale buildings incorporating a pallet of dark colours and textured finishes to
 break the mass of built form may be appropriate where seen in the context of agricultural
 building and the railway towards the eastern margin of the land parcel. These could in themselves
 act as a screen to other areas of the land parcel.
- Provision of strategic open space to achieve intervisibility from site footpaths to the wider rural landscape.

Potential mitigation through green infrastructure considerations

- Retention of existing green infrastructure to protect existing habitats and provide landscape anchors for new green infrastructure
- Strong rural character to new green infrastructure to reflect the rural character and enhance potential for new habitat creation

- Strategic green infrastructure to along line of Stagholt Farm track to link southern boundary with northern site boundary. This can achieve practical division of the land parcel into smaller scale areas to reduce the visual scale of development.
- Strategic green infrastructure along western boundary to link existing green infrastructure south
 of land parcel to northern site boundary and maintain separation with Pidgemore Farm and
 Nupend to the west
- Strategic green infrastructure along northern boundary to define and strengthen buffer between settlement interface with the open vale countryside to the north.
- New green core along the alignment of the existing public right of way which provides strategic link to Black Bridge.

Landscape Strategy

A landscape strategy which integrates the mitigation measures set out above, is set out below:

- Development proposals should respond to the transitional nature of the land parcel by extending the character of the well treed landscape of the Frome Valley which forms the setting for allocated land to the south. This increases the capacity of the landscape to accommodate higher density development with limited landscape and visual effects. Development should maintain an agricultural character at its interface with the landscape to the north east and a mixed agricultural /small scale settlement character with the open countryside to the north. To the west the development should seek to achieve a green buffer between the land parcel and the agricultural landscape that forms the setting to Nupend and Pidgemore Farm.
- The well treed character of the landscape south of the land parcel to be extended along the line of the existing hedgerow and track at Stagholt Farm. This provides an opportunity to create a significant green screen buffer between the lower lying land with greater capacity for development, from the higher lying land with greater potential constraints. This buffer has potential to extend the well treed character up to the northern boundary of the land parcel, where it can be extended east to west to simultaneously create a robust and visible green buffer with the open agricultural landscape to the north. This extensive belt of new and existing green infrastructure will be prominent in views from the north, east and north east where it will be seen to be a part of the well treed landscape that forms the setting to the allocated land. Although the openness of the present land west of Stagholt Farm will be lost in views, the well treed character will be seen to diffuse views of built form and replicate the smaller scale pattern of settlement already seen within the expansive views into the vale.
- Land to the east of Stagholt Farm track should maintain an agricultural character but incorporate greater tree planting so that development features are diffused in elevated views from within the AONB. Larger scale employment can be accommodated where architectural and spatial design creates built form that has agricultural qualities reflected in simple form and darker toned materials, clustered or grouped more informally and contained by dense tree planting. This area of the land parcel has some capacity for residential development where the scale and detailing similarly reflects that of the local rural settlement. Again, tree planting and strengthening of hedges so that only partial views of new built form will be important to diffuse the visual prominence of new development when seen from the AONB. Whilst new built form would be seen within a new framework of green infrastructure, this would not be out of context with the character of settlement seen within the vale.

Please refer to Figure 10 Potential Green Infrastructure

OVERALL SUMMARY:

Land parcel PS19a consists of a number of open agricultural fields laid to pasture or in arable production adjoining Stagholt Farm to the immediate west of the main railway line, north of Stonehouse. The land is contained by hedges in varying condition with occasional hedge trees and gently ascends from south west to north east.

The farmland is not protected by designation and is assessed not to form part of a valued landscape. The land parcel does lie close to the western boundary of the Cotswolds AONB which lies east of the main line railway. The land parcel does form part of the general vale setting of the AONB and is identifiable in views from the elevated landscape of the Cotswold escarpment. The land parcel does not have any distinctive attributes but forms part of the much wider rural, settled vale landscape which is experienced in frequently panoramic and expansive local views.

The context of the land parcel is important to its sensitivity with the higher ground to the north east having greater potential sensitivity than the lower lying ground to the south and west. This is due to a more open aspect and potentially greater intervisibility with views from within the AONB. The well treed landscape to the immediate south of the land parcel has a greater association with the well treed and settled landscape of the Frome Valley. Its allocation as future development land is important to the context of land parcel PS19a as the site. Once the West of Stonehouse urban extension is complete the land will become the interface with the open countryside. Existing landscape sensitivity assessment has identified that the land parcel lies within a larger parcel (St07) which has been assessed to have medium sensitivity to residential and employment development.

A number of public rights of way cross the land parcel from where long distance views are obtained both into the vale and of the Cotswold escarpment. Of these footpaths the main PRoW which centrally crosses the land parcel is the most strategic as it provides a link from the allocated land SA2 to land north of Stonehouse via the Black Bridge crossing to the mainline railway.

The rural landscape character of the land parcel does form part of the rural vale setting to the Cotswolds AONB and it falls within views both to and from the AONB. The vale landscape character which forms the setting to the AONB and is the focus of expansive and panoramic views, is a settled landscape. This landscape is experienced as a mosaic of agricultural fields, settlement and vegetation predominately associated with field boundaries but also including small copses and riparian vegetation along local watercourses. Larger urban and commercial areas are seen within this vale landscape, but they are also seen to be contained by vegetation so that their potentially urbanising effect on landscape character and views is contained and limited. Mitigation measures through strategic planting would therefore be beneficial to reflect this characteristic of the vale landscape and visual amenity.

The present land parcel is generally open but has a framework of field hedges that already link to the well treed landscape to the south. By extending and developing these areas as strategic green infrastructure it is possible to create a number of smaller land parcels that have greater potential for development which limit and contain potential urbanising effects of the character of the landscape as seen in elevated views from the AONB. The provision of strategic open space within the main land parcel also provides

opportunity to maintain key views out from the land and provide further subdivision of space for smaller scale development, in keeping with the scale and appearance of that already seen in the vale landscape.

The cluster of smaller development parcels set within a framework of green infrastructure will contain new development and retain a rural character to the settlement area. This character will be experienced as a textured, settled landscape much as already seen in views from the escarpment. As such the potential magnitude of change that might be experienced from the AONB is more likely to be lower. With the panoramic and expansive views experienced from the elevated escarpment, the developed land parcel with mitigation measures in place, will still only form a fraction of the overall view into the settled vale.

The development of parcel PS19a would appear as a seamless part of the well treed settlement of the allocated SA2 land with a new interface with the open countryside formed by the new buffer of green infrastructure located along the northern boundary of the land parcel. This approach protects the settled rural landscape character already experienced from the AONB and replicates the successful mitigation woven into the masterplan for the allocated land south of the land parcel.

MHP Design Ltd Chartered Landscape Architects

7th August 2019

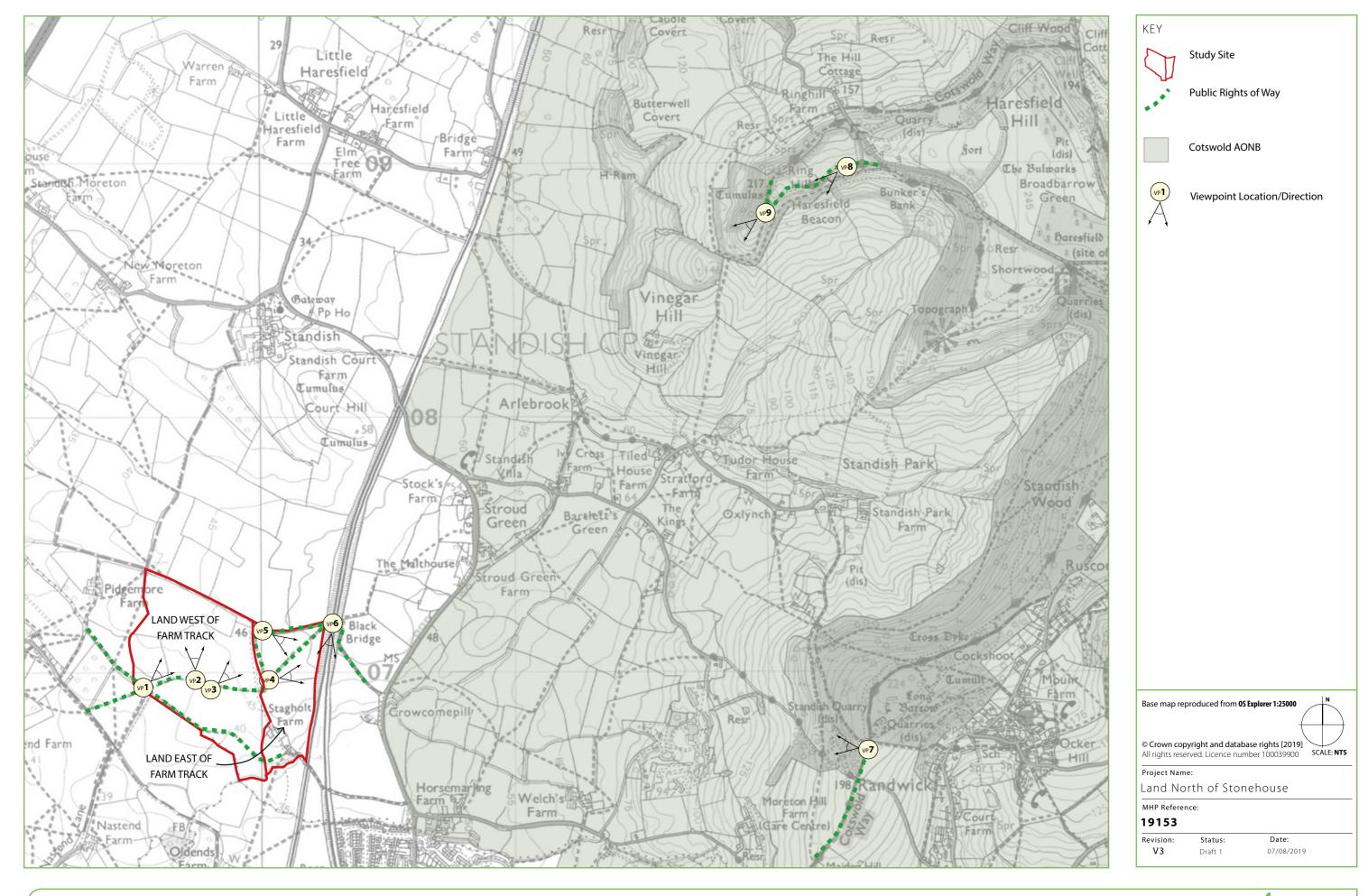
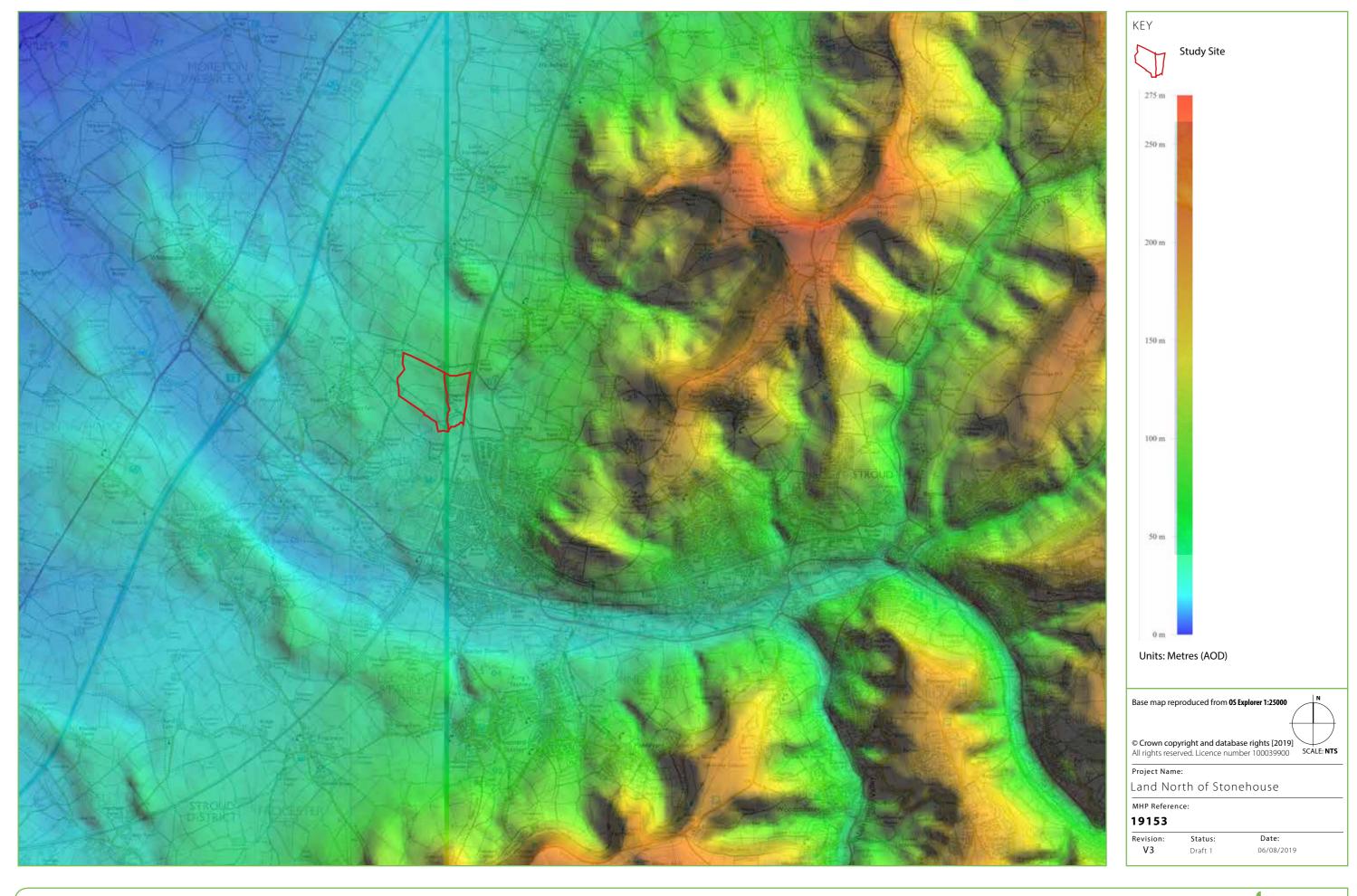


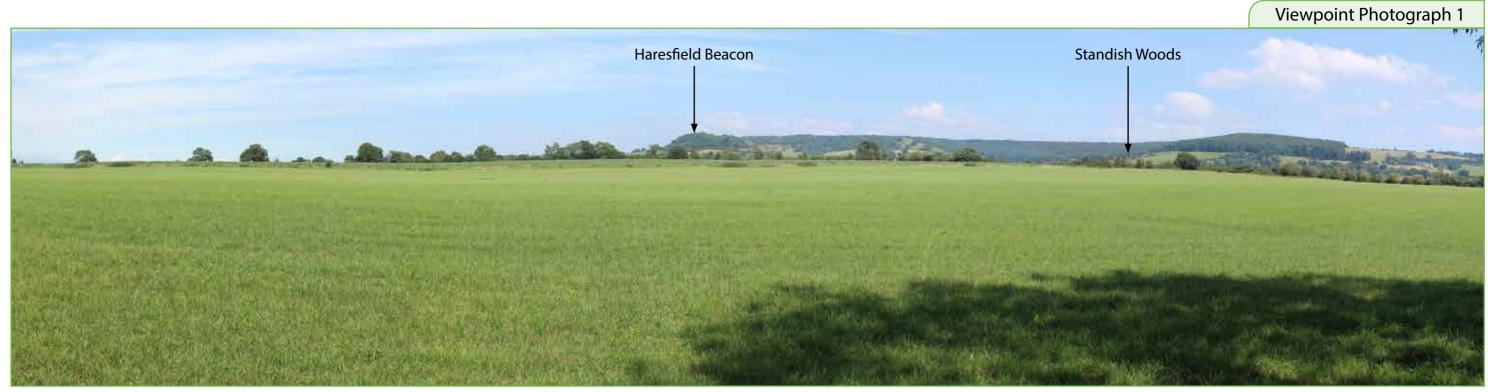
Figure 1 Site Location, Designations, Context and Viewpoint Photograph Locations **19153** Land North of Stonehouse











View looking from PROW land west of farm track towards Cotswold escarpment

Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19 This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.

Viewpoint Photograph 2

View looking from PROW land west of farm track towards Cotswold escarpment south of Stroud

Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19
This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.





Standish Woods Standish Woods

View looking east from PROW to Cotswold escarpment

Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19
This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.

Viewpoint Photograph 4

View looking east from land east of farm track towards Cotswolds escarpment

Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19
This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.





View looking east over the eastern land parcel

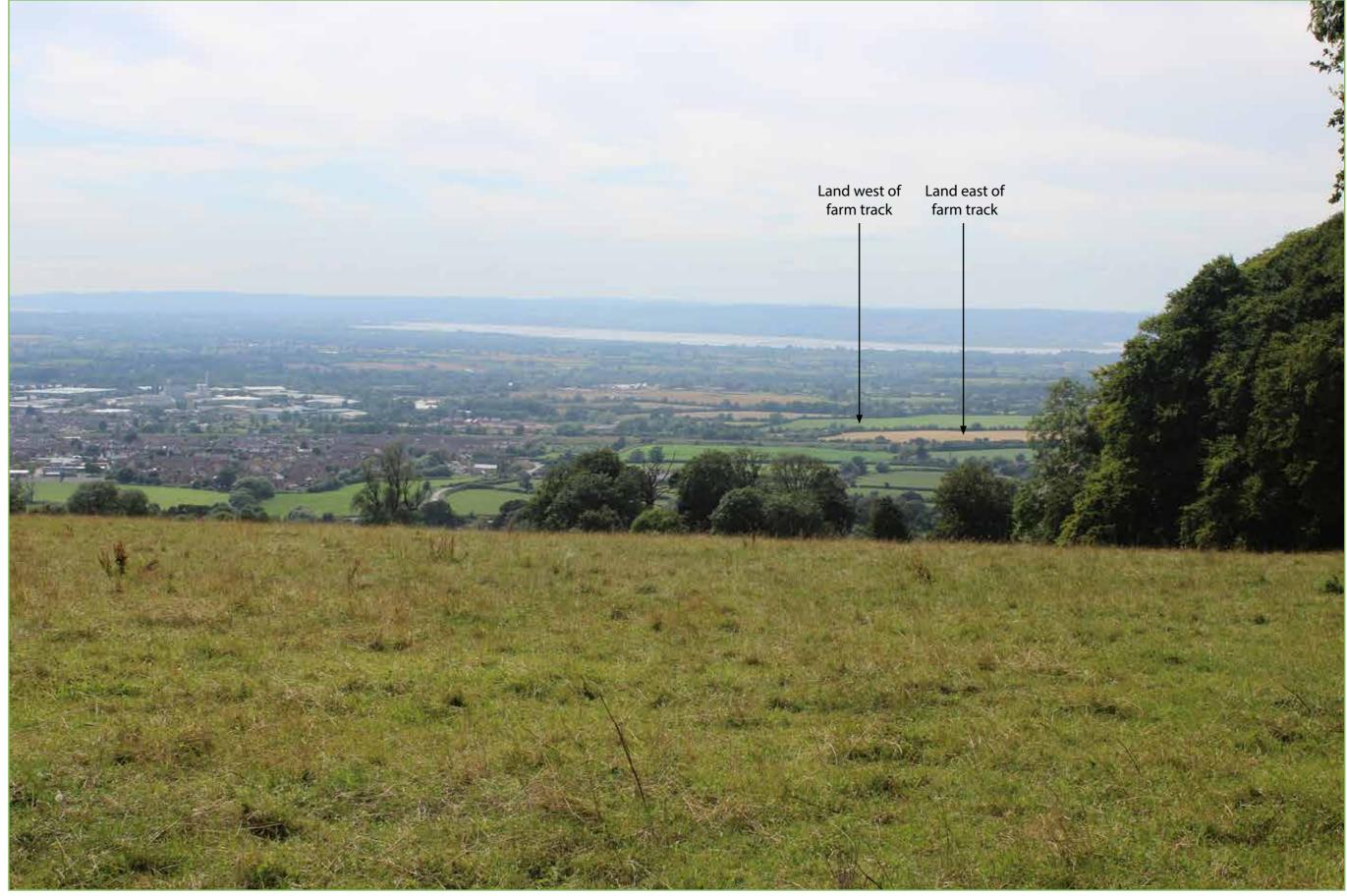
Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19
This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.



View looking south from Black Bridge

Full extent of panorama, taken 24/07/19
This is a composite image made up of a number of 50mm photographs joined together horizontally to form an overall field of view which is wider than seen in detail by the human eye.





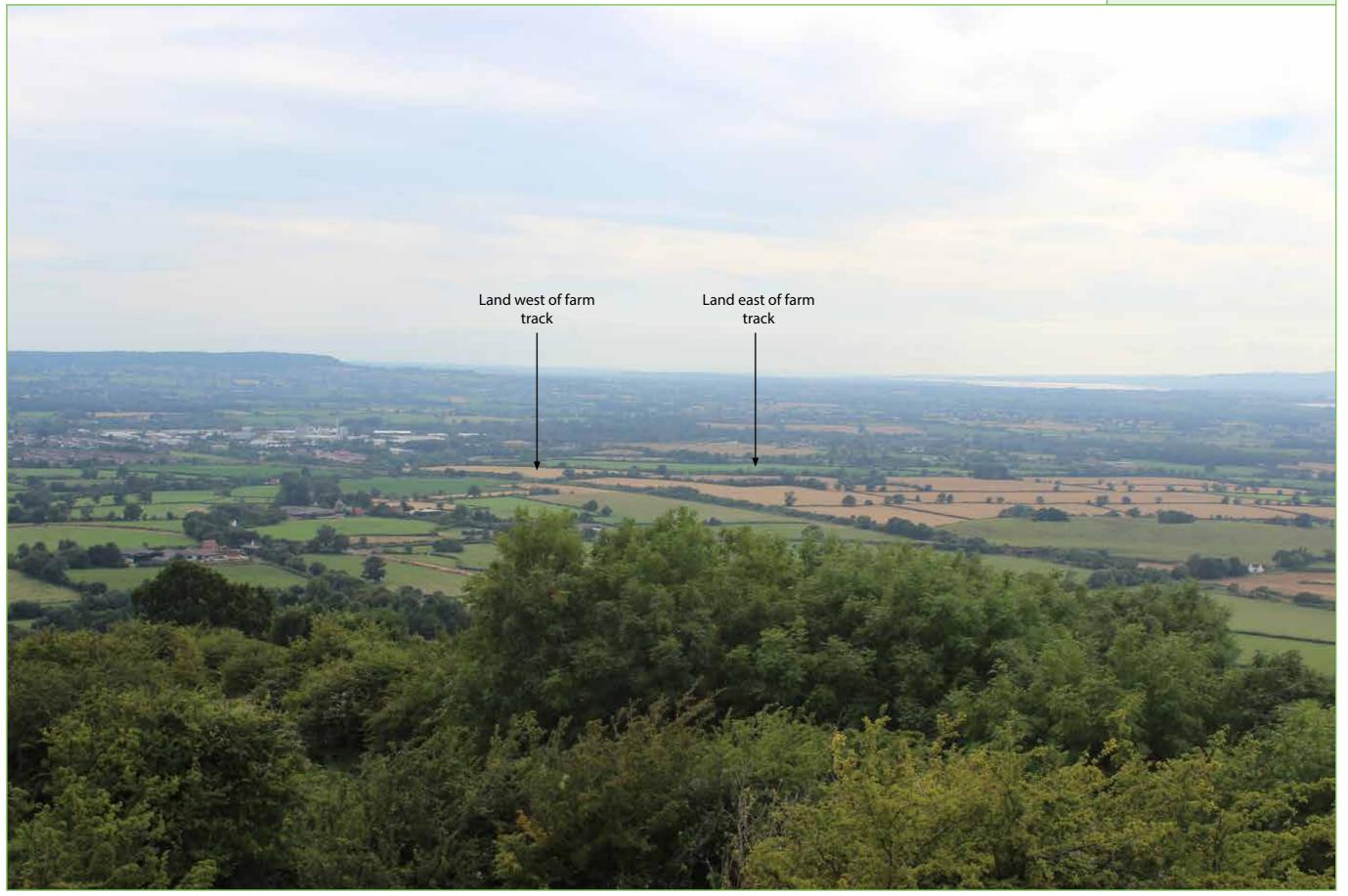
View looking west from the Cotswold Way at the southern edge of Standish Woods

Image captured 24/07/2019



View looking south west from Haresfield Beacon

Image captured 24/07/2019



View looking south from Haresfield Beacon

Image captured 24/07/2019



