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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Hankinson Duckett Associates was instructed by The Chesterfords Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, in May 2015, to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment to inform the preparation of The Chesterfords Neighbourhood Plan. The brief for the assessment sought to assess the landscape character of Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford Parish and to determine its local landscape character, identifying key characteristics and sensitivities, both in terms of character and visibility. The report also seeks to set out landscape capacity and development guidelines, should development sites come forward in the future.
- 1.2 This Landscape Character Assessment is based on current good practice and recognised methodology (Ref 1). It identifies character areas within the Parishes, which have been assessed so as to define the character of the Parishes and setting to the villages and determine their sensitivity to, and capacity for, development.
- 1.3 Natural England describes landscape character as the landscape features which make an area unique. It is defined as "*a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements, be it natural (soil, landform) and/or human (for example settlement and development) in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another*" (Ref 1).
- 1.4 The report divides the landscape into areas of common landscape character, listing the key landscape characteristics and landscape and visual sensitivities of each area. This analysis will highlight areas of the Parishes which are sensitive and of low landscape capacity where future development would be inappropriate. Landscape sensitivity and value may not be completely uniform across an entire character area and therefore the capacity across a character area may vary slightly. This is commented on in Section 5 where particularly relevant.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 A comprehensive desk-top assessment of the local area was undertaken to form the basis of the assessment and assist in identifying the parishes' landscape character areas. The desk study data considered included the following:

- Geology and soils;
- Topography;
- Land use (based on aerial photography);
- Regional landscape character areas;
- District landscape character and capacity assessments;
- Historic landscape characterisation;
- Development Plan designations including local landscape, nature conservation, and heritage designations;
- Key public rights of way (e.g. long distance footpaths) and notable view points;
- Areas at risk of flooding.

2.1.2 The data was analysed and set out in working plans, tables, figures and text, and used to review the existing landscape character assessments and provisionally subdivide the single District character area into draft landscape character areas appropriate to the Parish scale. The study area boundary has been defined as the combined boundary of the two parishes, however the landscape beyond the study area boundary was also considered to ensure character areas were fully defined.

2.2 Field Assessment

2.2.1 The assessment is underpinned by field assessments carried out during June 2015 by an experienced Associate Landscape Architect, assisted by another Landscape Architect and overseen and reviewed by the Director of Landscape.

2.2.2 Field assessment involved travelling extensively throughout Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford Parishes and the immediate surroundings, with extra focus on the relationship between the villages and the surrounding landscape including the influences of the River Cam and the ridge rising to either side of the valley. This involved recording variations in landscape character including (list is not exhaustive): local topography, existing land uses and vegetation structure, condition of landscape elements (trees, hedges etc.), streams/ditches, character of the built edge of settlements, intervisibility between settlements, local landmarks and visual detractors, and key views. A working photographic record was produced to support the survey work.

3 GREAT AND LITTLE CHESTERFORD PARISHES LANDSCAPE STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The aim of landscape structure analysis is to identify the main elements which contribute to the character, structure and setting of the settlement. This section includes an evaluation of the existing Landscape Character Context (section 3.2, Plan HDA 1 and Appendix 1) and the local landscape context of the Parishes, (section 3.3) which looks at the settlements of Great and Little Chesterford in detail and sets out our initial analysis of the area (Plans HDA 1 – 3).

3.2 Landscape Character Context

3.2.1 There are national, regional and district scale landscape character assessments that cover the landscape within and around Great and Little Chesterford Parishes. The national scale assessment has not been analysed for this assessment, as more detailed data is available. The Essex County Landscape Character Assessment undertaken in 2002 (Ref 2) places Great and Little Chesterford Parishes within North West Essex Chalk Farmland (A1) area. Key characteristics of this area are:

- Strong rolling landform of broad round-backed ridges;
- Large-scale arable farmland;
- Panoramic views from ridge tops;
- Dispersed blocks of woodland and isolated copses;
- Sparse settlement pattern, with small linear villages alongside stream courses.

3.3 District Assessment

3.3.1 The Parishes are within the county of Essex, but are bordered to the north by South Cambridge District, Cambridgeshire. Within Essex County, the parishes fall within Uttlesford District. A joint Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was commissioned by Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council in 2005 (Ref 3). The LCA places Great and Little Chesterford Parishes within one Character Area – A1 – Cam River Valley. It is characterised by:

- Rolling, open landscape with wide views on higher ground;
- Chalky boulder clay geology;
- Large common-fields of the Cambridgeshire and Midland type (rare in Essex);
- Well vegetated riverbanks, with shrubs and trees along the riverbank;
- Low hedges and a few trees, mainly in small copses.

3.4 Great and Little Chesterford Villages and the Local Landscape Context

(See Plans HDA 1 - 3)

- 3.4.1 Great and Little Chesterford Parishes are located in the Uttlesford District of Essex, approximately 3 miles north of Saffron Walden and approximately 20 miles south of Cambridge. The Parishes are centred around the settlements of Great and Little Chesterford, located within the River Cam valley, between the B184 Walden Road/Springwell Road and B1383 London Road. The Parish boundary extends north to the southern edge of Hildersham Wood (Hinxton parish in Cambridgeshire), east to Great Chesterford Common (Hadstock parish in Essex), south-east beyond Chesterford Research Park (Saffron Walden parish in Essex) and south to just below Springwell Farm (Littlebury parish in Essex). The western boundary of the parishes is, for the majority of its length, defined by the Cambridge to London mainline railway. However, to the west of Great Chesterford, the boundary extends west beyond the railway to incorporate Smock Mill House and a section of the M11 motorway. The parish of Great Chesterford also extends west beyond the M11 to the west of the Stump Cross junction into a triangular piece of land with a sewage works on its northern edge. (See Plans HDA 1 and 3). The nearest villages are Ickleton, 1 mile to the west, Hinxton, 2 miles to the north-west, Littlebury, 2 miles to the south, Little Walden, 2 miles to south-east and Hadstock, 3.3 miles to the east. The high ground of the plateau, forming the north-eastern and eastern parts of the parishes, are devoid of settlement, other than occasional farmsteads. Saffron Walden is the nearest town, located approximately 3 miles to the south of Little Chesterford and accessed via the B184, which forms the eastern boundary of both villages.
- 3.4.2 The topography of the Parish is split between the river valley, along which the villages are located, and the steep slopes and plateaus, which lie to the north-east through to the south-east of the villages. For the purposes of this report, the plateau from the north-east to south-east is referred to as the Chesterford Ridge and the plateau and slopes to the south-west to west are referred to as Strethall Ridge (including Coploe Hill and Heavy Hill) on the opposite side of the Cam valley. The area of the parishes to the east of the B184 is visually dominated by the chalk downs and Chesterford Ridge, whereas to the west of the B184, the landscape is more visually contained and influenced by urbanisation. The landform and drainage of the Parishes are an integral part of the local landscape character and provide a unique sense of place.
- 3.4.3 Great and Little Chesterford Parishes have a number of heritage assets including five scheduled monuments and the historic core of Great Chesterford village itself, much of which is designated as a Conservation Area. The remnants of the Roman fort and town (1-3) are designated as Scheduled Monuments, as are the remains of a Romano-Celtic temple (4) and an ancient moat (5). The Conservation Area covers the majority of Great

Chesterford village and contains approximately 65 listed buildings, which showcase a range of styles and reflect different time periods. There are 9 listed buildings in Little Chesterford, and 6 listed buildings elsewhere in the parishes. The Churches of All Saints (Great Chesterford) and St Mary the Virgin (Little Chesterford) date back to the 13th Century and the villages have been in existence since at least the Saxon Period. There has been a school in Great Chesterford since 1514.

3.4.4 Great Chesterford village has a number of local amenities including a doctor's surgery, primary school, church, community centre, local store, and pubs. The community centre also provides outdoor facilities for village residents. Little Chesterford has a small village hall (on the High Street).

3.4.5 The land use within the Parishes is predominantly arable agriculture, with some grazing pasture to the east of Great Chesterford Community Centre. The fields in pasture are generally horse paddocks and are of a smaller scale than the arable fields, which are large, open and expansive. The arable agriculture is intensive, which has led to the large field sizes with few boundaries. Where boundaries do exist these are generally hawthorn hedgerows. There are blocks of woodland throughout the Parishes, some of it ancient woodland, as listed by Natural England (Ref 4), which is of historic importance, while other woods are more modern. Much of the woodland is on the hill-slopes or plateau which provides a sense of enclosure in the otherwise open landscape. The River Cam (or Granta) flows south to north through the Parishes. A corridor of land, between 4m and 200m wide, forms the extent of the 1 in 1,000 year flood zone of the River Cam (as defined on the Environment Agency website). The Parishes have numerous minor watercourses including streams, field drains and ponds. The river is a significant feature within both villages and has shaped the settlement pattern, transportation routes and open spaces within the villages.

3.4.6 Chesterford Research Park started life as a manor house in 1856, and was used as such until about 1925-36 when it was unoccupied and fell into disrepair. It was used as a hospital and ammunition store during the Second World War, until an explosion caused it to close. It again fell into disrepair, until it was sold in 1952, and was made into a Research Park, with laboratory and office accommodation. It has extensive parkland surrounding its many buildings. Despite its ridge top location, most views into the Research Park from the villages are restricted by the surrounding woodland.

3.4.7 Numerous public rights of way cross the Parishes allowing public access and enjoyment of the landscape. The Icknield Way Trail is a 110 mile historic route that runs from the Peddlars Way National Trail in Suffolk to the Ridgeway Trail in Buckinghamshire, (which is a variation on the Icknield Way path). This Trail allows access for horse riders and

cyclists, as well as walkers. 5.5km of the Icknield Way Trail crosses Great Chesterford parish, between Great Chesterford Common and Junction 9 of the M11. Where the Icknield Way Trail leads up the slopes of the Chesterford Ridge and Strethall Ridge, it is often open in places and users are afforded panoramic views. The rights of way between the villages of Great and Little Chesterford and to the south of Little Chesterford are aligned along the vegetated watercourses and are much more intimate and enclosed in character.

3.5 Great and Little Chesterford Parishes– Key Elements

- **Water:** Great and Little Chesterford are riverside villages. The water source is a principle reason why they became settled. The pattern of the villages is set perpendicular to the course of the river, with the routes of the major roads and the railway also influencing settlement pattern, though the positions of these are primarily dictated by the shape of the river valley.
- **Heritage:** There is a considerable amount of historic interest, both within the villages as part of their built form and present in the surrounding landscape, as identified in the five Scheduled Monuments. The built heritage is reflected in the local vernacular and the materials used in construction including brick, thatch and pargetting.
- **Location and character:** The villages are nestled in the River Cam valley. The plateaus and ridges above the villages help to visually contain the villages. The M11, which runs to the west of the parishes, cuts through the Strethall ridge, predominantly in cutting, but for some sections, traffic is visibly prominent from some viewpoints in the parishes on the eastern side of the valley. The characteristics of the landscape within the villages are a key contributor to the 'sense of place' of the villages.
- **Views:** Due to the open nature of the landscape and the dramatic changes in topography, there are important views from the villages up to Chesterford Ridge and to the opposite valley side to Strethall Ridge. From the ridges, there are impressive views across the valley landscape, to which the villages contribute.
- **Nucleated and compact settlement pattern** largely contained by a mature landscape structure.

4 PARISH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS: ANALYSIS, CAPACITY APPRAISAL AND PHOTOGRAPHS

4.1 Landscape Characterisation

4.1.1 Drawing on the initial desk study, landscape structure analysis and the field assessment, the study divides the landscape into Parish scale landscape character areas of specific landscape character. Great and Little Chesterford Parishes have been divided into 18 Local Landscape Character Areas. These have been shown and listed on Plan HDA 4 and Plan HDA 5.

4.2 Analysis of Parish Scale Landscape Character Areas

4.2.1 The characteristics of each Parish-scale landscape character area are analysed against criteria identified in Topic Paper 6 of the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, along with identification of any designations, and consideration of the historic landscape characterisation of the area. This information forms the basis for the landscape sensitivity and landscape value assessments. A detailed methodology for the analysis can be found in Appendix 2. The landscape value, sensitivity and capacity assessments of each Parish scale character area are found in Appendix 2 and are summarised below. The following is a list of the Parish landscape character areas identified within Great and Little Chesterford Parishes.

- 1 Chesterford Ridge**
- 2 Chalk Upper Slopes**
- 3 Chalk Lower Slopes**
- 4 Chesterford Research Park**
- 5 River Cam Floodplain**
- 6 Transport Corridor Farmland**
- 7 Little Chesterford**
- 8 Great Chesterford Historic Core**
- 9 Great Chesterford Archaeological Farmland**
- 10 Great Chesterford Housing (Northern)**
- 11 Great Chesterford Industry**
- 12 Great Chesterford Housing (Southern)**
- 13 Mill House Farmland**
- 14 Great Chesterford Backlands**
- 15 The Chesterfords Hinterland**
- 16 Little Chesterford Backlands**
- 17 Springwell Farmland**
- 18 Bordeaux Pit Farmland**

For each character area there is a description of landscape character, the key issues facing the character area, a breakdown of landscape and visual sensitivity, the landscape value of the area and the resulting landscape capacity.

5 SUMMARY

- 5.1 Landscape capacity is defined as the extent to which the landscape is able to accommodate change without significant effects on landscape character, reflecting the inherent sensitivity and value of the landscape. A landscape of high sensitivity or value therefore has a low landscape capacity.
- 5.2 In order to assess the sensitivity of the Great and Little Chesterford Parish character areas to development, assumptions have been made as to the likely built form of any new development areas. It has been assumed that dwellings would generally be a maximum of two storeys in height. There would be open space provision and a landscape framework with tree planting of appropriate scale, building on an existing landscape framework which could achieve a good fit in the landscape and form a logical extension to the villages, in keeping with the existing settlement pattern.
- 5.3 Sensitivity and value ratings range from Major, Substantial, Moderate, Slight to Negligible. Areas judged to have Major or Substantial sensitivity or value indicate that development would have significant detrimental effect on the character of the landscape. Development in these character areas should only be on a very small scale and proposals would need to demonstrate no adverse impacts on the setting to settlement or the wider landscape, and be consistent with Local Plan policy. The landscape sensitivity and landscape value tables, along with assessment criteria and scoring for each character area are shown in Appendix 2.

7 REFERENCES

- Ref 1 - Countryside Agency (now Natural England)/Scottish Natural Heritage (April 2002), *'Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland'*
- Ref 2 - Chris Blandford Associates (2003); *'Essex Landscape Character Assessment.'*
- Ref 3 - Chris Blandford Associates (2006); *'Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assesments'*
- Ref 4 - Natural England/Defra Magic Map Website (2015); *'www.magic.gov.uk'*.
- Ref 5 - Essex County Council Historic Environment Branch (2009) *'Historic Environment Character Areas – Uttlesford District Historic Environment Characterisation Project.'*

**Appendix 1 – Uttlesford District Council – Landscape Character Types and Local Landscape
Character Areas within Cam Valley**

Note: Pages with local character areas not within Great and Little Chesterford Parishes have not been included

Appendix 2 – Analysis of Landscape Capacity