



**Landscape Character and
Visual Appraisal**

**Gatwick Green,
Land off Balcombe Road &
Fernhill Road, Crawley**

Date: January 2020

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LAND AT GATWICK GREEN, CRAWLEY

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This landscape appraisal has been prepared by Landscape Consultants, Allen Pyke Associates, who specialise in advising on the landscape and visual implications of potential development schemes.
- 1.2. The purpose of this appraisal is to assess the capacity of land located off the Balcombe Road and Fernhill Road in Crawley to accept development without causing harm to the existing landscape character and visual amenity of the proposed Site and its immediate setting.
- 1.3. The principle of new development on this land is being promoted to the Crawley planning authority following the recent proposal in the emerging Local Plan to remove an existing safeguarding policy and replace it with a wider Area Action Plan covering much of the remaining semi-rural land to the south and east of Gatwick Airport, including the area around the Balcombe Road.
- 1.4. The proposal has yet to be tested through public examination. Therefore, this assessment provides a high-level study putting the landscape case for use of the strategic landholding being assembled by Wilky Property Developments Ltd for a major new business campus to provide a range of world class commercial activities.
- 1.5. The title given to this area of land is 'Gatwick Green' and will be referred to as either 'the Strategic Site' or 'the Site' in this document.

2. APPROACH

- 2.1. The methodology used in the preparation of this appraisal has been carried out in accordance with the principles of best practice set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition, 2013' (GLVIA3) published jointly by the Landscape Institute and IEMA. Photographs are used to provide a range of representative viewpoints to illustrate the character of the Site and its immediate setting in accordance with the Landscape Institute Technical Note 06/19.
- 2.2. The study does not constitute a fully detailed Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) given that the proposals are being promoted at a policy level. It does seek to identify existing baseline landscape conditions and sensitivity of the key landscape elements to change (landform, landscape and cultural features, adjacent development, landmarks, key views and connectivity).
- 2.3. The appraisal will then provide recommendations for the form of development and provision of green infrastructure to mitigate or avoid the more significant potential effects.

2.4. Information gathering has been undertaken as a desktop review of published material and on Site investigations. A Site visit was undertaken on 29th November 2019, on a clear bright day when the absence of leaves on deciduous vegetation and woodland belts allowed the identification of the maximum zone of visual influence.

3. LANDSCAPE CONTEXT – THE SITE AND ITS SETTING (see Figures 1 & 2 below)

3.1. The Gatwick Green Site is located in the north-east corner of the Crawley Borough Council administrative area and is approximately 5km from the town centre. It lies to the south of the M23 motorway spur to Gatwick Airport, and the elevated junction 9 of the motorway. The spur road marks the boundary with Horley and the borough of Reigate & Banstead, while the motorway delineates the boundary with Tandridge District Council and open countryside to the east.

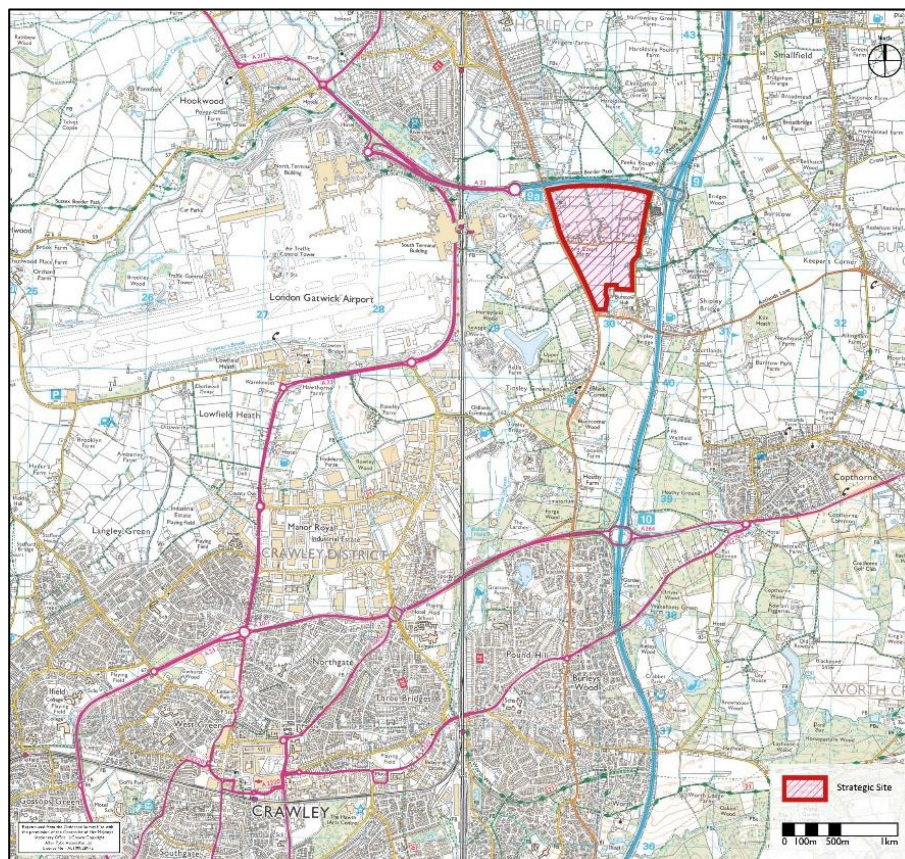


Fig.1: Location Plan

3.2. The strategic area is broadly triangular in shape and approximately 60 hectares in area. The northern boundary being contiguous with the M23 spur road, the western boundary running along the Balcombe Road (B2036), the eastern boundary running along Peeks Brook Lane, with the short southern tip touching Antlands Lane (B2037). The land is divided into two by Fernhill Road, a narrow unclassified lane that runs from west to east between the Balcombe Road and Peeks Brook Lane.

3.3. The landscape in and around the strategic area was once rural but has been heavily influenced over the past 70 years by three factors:

1. The expansion of the small West Sussex village of Crawley as a New Town in the late 1950s.
2. The transformation of Gatwick Airport since the 1950s into a major international airport.
3. The opening of the M23 in 1975, linking both Crawley and the airport to the national motorway network.

Land Use

3.4. The Strategic Site consists of a mix of small and medium sized fields used primarily as paddocks for horse and cattle grazing and its appearance is typical of many urban fringe areas. Within this matrix of irregular fields are located isolated groups of residential properties dotted along the roads that generally pre-date the formation of the New Town.

3.5. Fernhill Road and Peeks Brook Lane also contain a haphazard collection of small commercial enterprises that range from vehicular storage areas and light industrial works to a soil storage business and small office complexes.

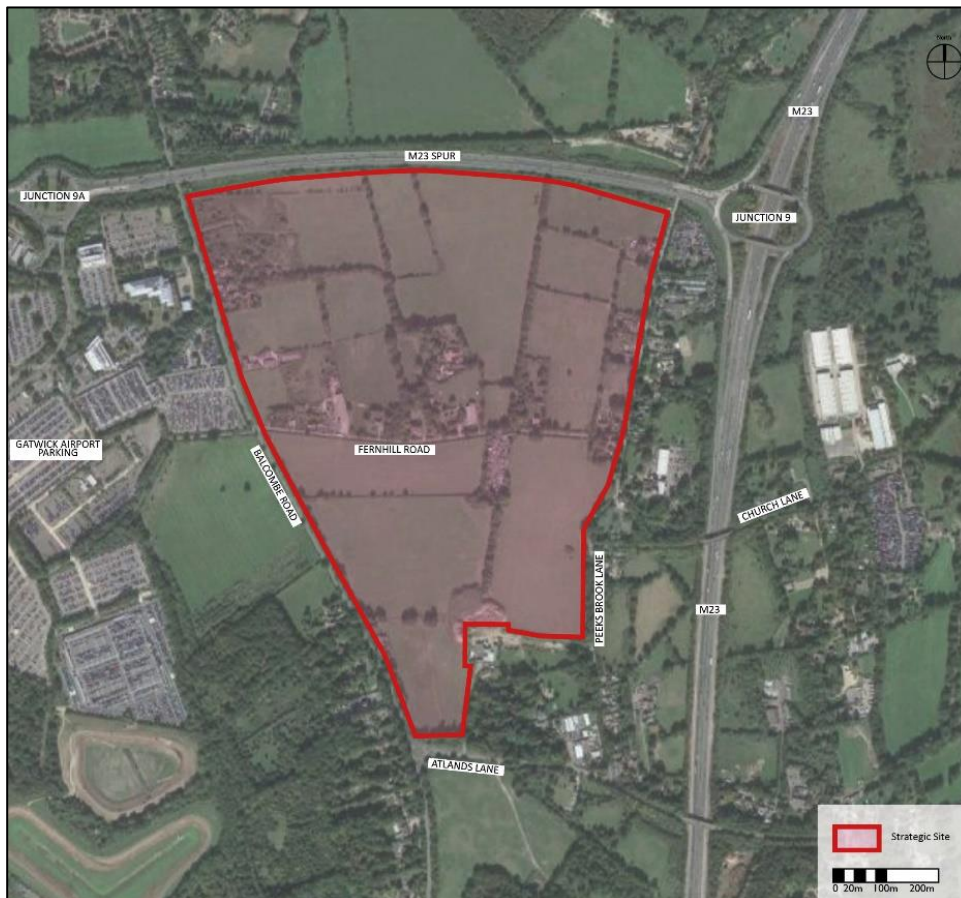


Fig.2: Aerial Photograph

Topographical Features & Vegetation

- 3.6. The ground is generally flat with a slight fall from Antlands Lane (61m AOD) down to the northern boundary beside the M23 spur (59m AOD). The ground is poorly drained with the clayey soils typical of the Low Weald being prone to seasonal flooding. The Natural England 'Agricultural Land Classification Map' for the Crawley area indicates the rural area around the Strategic Site to be a mix of the poorer 3 and 4 quality grades (within a scale of 1 [excellent] down to 5 [very poor]).
- 3.7. A particular landscape feature of the area is the woodland and shelterbelt cover along the road and more distant ridge slopes as well as the extensive, often clipped, hedgerows that surround a tight collection of historic enclosure fields. The cumulative effect is to create a strong sense of containment from boundary vegetation when travelling on the roads.
- 3.8. The elevated motorway junction and spur road embankment over Peeks Brook Lane are a prominent local feature that reinforces the sense of containment to the north half of the Site.
- 3.9. To the west of the Balcombe Road are located the extensive airport parking facilities, the main London to Brighton railway line and airport terminal buildings. The east-west alignment of the runway means the flight path passes directly over the Site area with the resultant noise and visibility of aeroplanes regularly passing overhead when either landing or taking off.

Connectivity

- 3.10. There is a distinct separation of the highway network between the high traffic movements on the motorway to or from the airport, and the secondary movement of local traffic on the Balcombe Road and Antlands Lane. However, the local roads providing access to the Site do not connect directly to the M23 or motorway spur road junctions.
- 3.11. The northern part of Peeks Brook Lane has become a cul-de-sac lane since the construction of the motorway but still provides access to a small number of older residential properties and an eclectic range of commercial enterprises set back from the road behind tall hedgerows and trees. The southern section provides local access via Church Lane over the motorway to the countryside to the east.
- 3.12. One public right of way runs northwards from Fernhill Road via Donkey Lane but was severed by construction of the M23 spur road and now continues along the motorway boundary to Balcombe Road. It passes under the motorway bridge before joining the Sussex Border Path on the Horley side of the spur road and reconnecting with the original footpath. The Sussex Border Path continues

along the north side of the motorway spur up the bridge over Peeks Brook Lane before travelling south along the road to Church Lane where it passes over the main M23.

- 3.13. There are no public footpaths crossing the southern part of the Site.

Planning Policies

- 3.14. The National Planning Policy Framework (2nd Edition, 2019)(NPPF) sets the criteria for local authorities to draft Local Plans and assist decision-making on planning issues. The NPPF places an overriding presumption in favour of sustainable development and for Local Plans to positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area.
- 3.15. The document provides guidance on achieving well-designed places, ensuring the effective use of land, and the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Chapter 15 deals with the protection of valued landscapes, soils and biodiversity sites, and provides a hierarchy for judging their status while stipulating the need to allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value. The chapter also confirms the need to assess the potential detrimental effects of development and extent to which their impact on the environment could be moderated.

Local Plan

- 3.16. This appraisal was produced when the Local Plan was under review with the emerging Local Plan at the Regulation 18 stage. The existing Development Plan comprises the adopted Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015 (CBLP), the Joint Minerals Local Plan (2018) and the Waste Local Plan (2014). The key policies in the CBLP affecting the Site include:

- **Policy GAT2** – Safeguarded Land;
- **Policy EC9** – Rural Economy;
- **Policy CH9** – Development Outside the Built-Up Area (the Site lies within the North East Crawley Rural Fringe);
- **Policy CH8** – Important Views (the Site lies within a long distance view from Target Hill);
- **Policy ENV1** – Green Infrastructure (the Site is part of a Biodiversity Opportunity Area) and;
- **Policy ENV2** – Biodiversity (the Site is part of a Biodiversity Opportunity Area).

3.15 The Site is safeguarded for a second runway for Gatwick Airport under Policy GAT2 of the CBLP.

3.16 The Site's location within the rural area of Crawley means Policy EC9 is relevant. Development proposals involving the loss of the best agricultural land (Grades 1-3a) are not permitted. The Site is classified as being in lower value 3 and 4 grade land classification, so development would not be contrary to this policy.

3.17 The Site sits outside the boundary for the 'built up area' of Crawley (Policy CH9). Development in such areas should meet a number of criteria, and mitigation and/or compensation must be provided if harm to the landscape character cannot be avoided. The Site falls within the North East Crawley Rural Fringe Character Area – within this Character Area, proposals are supported where they avoid or can mitigate visual/noise intrusion. The area has an important function to play in separating Gatwick Airport from Crawley and providing recreational links to northern Crawley town. The policy includes design criteria intended to take account of views, visual amenity, landscape features and local character.

3.18 Policy CH8 seeks to protect and/or enhance long distance views, one of which crosses the north western half of the Site and extends from Target Hill to the south west of Crawley. The Target Hill viewpoint location in CH8 lies at the junction of Hobbs Road and Edrich Road in the Broadfield Neighbourhood area. From road level distant glimpsed views over or between houses are possible from more elevated locations but the town centre, and taller buildings around the airport and the Strategic Site, are screened by substantial blocks of tall intervening vegetation. The policy requires development not to obstruct the foreground of this view and should protect or enhance any feature towards which the view is directed. Proposals must be justified by the use of view montages or cross sections but it should be noted that the Strategic Site is located at the distant northern edge of this view rather than the foreground.

3.19 The existing undeveloped parts of the Site are located within the 'Gatwick Woods Biodiversity Opportunity Area' (BOA) and are subject to green infrastructure (GI) and biodiversity policies. Any

future proposals for the Site will need to include a comprehensive GI and landscape assessment and demonstrate compliance with the policy. However, the BOA is ranked in the third and lowest level of the hierarchy of biodiversity designations, so moderating the effect of the policy

- 3.20 Policy ENV1 'Green Infrastructure', requires the protection and enhancement of the green network in the Borough and supports development that protects and enhances green infrastructure. This means that boundary hedgerows and trees within the Strategic Site must be retained; any gaps filled with new planting and losses (for access etc) compensated through additional planting; provide additional green links within the Site and to adjacent hedgerows, and where possible incorporate open space and pedestrian links.
- 3.21 Policy ENV2 'Biodiversity', requires a net gain in biodiversity in BOAs as well as the incorporation of features to support biodiversity in development proposals.

Crawley Local Plan Review

- 3.22 The Council conducted a consultation on the Crawley Borough Local Plan review 2020-2035 (CBLP review), which closed in September 2019. The Regulation 19 pre-submission version is due to be issued for consultation on 20 January 2020. This is likely to contain a revised approach to land use policy around the Airport, with the CBLP review removing the Safeguarded Land (and related policy) and instead, identifying the land for an Area Action Plan (AAP) to address any robust future needs of the airport alongside the future economic and social aims of Crawley.
- 3.23 The newly proposed Policy SD3 'North Crawley Area Action Plan' covers the large tract of land stretching around the southern and eastern perimeter of the airport; with the eastern section including the Strategic Site. The review of the AAP will take into consideration the landscape, visual, heritage and environment assets, including ancient woodland and nature conservation sites but it is assumed the policy will seek to maximise development but retain, wherever practicable, important or significant existing features.
- 3.24 The Development Plan and emerging Local Plan policies are consistent in the general protection of landscape character and landscape features as well as emphasizing the importance of good design, the incorporation of green infrastructure into new developments and maintaining local distinctiveness by reflecting the positive character of both man-made and natural features.
- 3.25 In addition to local planning policies, any new development around the airport would have to comply with specific operational restrictions. The flight path to and from the Gatwick runway passes over

the central part of the Strategic Site and any new development would need to comply with building height and public safety considerations. These would include factors such as 'take-off climb' and 'landing approach' zones as explained in the Civil Airport Authority's (CAA) publication CAP 168. Although the Site does lie within the 15km CAA 'Safeguarding Area', the indications are that the Strategic Site is sufficiently distant from the runway to avoid any major restriction on building heights.

Landscape and Other Designations

- 3.26 The Strategic Site is not located within any national, statutory or local landscape designation. The entire administrative area of Crawley, including the Strategic Site, also lie beyond the London Metropolitan Green Belt boundary, which stretches as far south as the neighbouring local authorities of Tandridge, Mole Valley and Reigate & Banstead. While the adjacent Low Weald countryside to the east and south of the M23 is attractive it is only the landscape to the south of the town that lies within the High Weald AONB. The Strategic Site is remote from the AONB and does not form part of its setting.
- 3.27 The Site is a Biodiversity Opportunity Area but is not subject to any other statutory or local nature conservation or environmental designation.
- 3.28 The Strategic Site is not located within any of the Borough's 'Areas of Special Local Character' or a statutory 'Conservation Area'. However, two listed buildings on Donkey Lane and a building of local significance on the north of Fernhill Road lie within the Strategic Site area. Five other similarly designated buildings of local significance also lie on or adjacent to Peeks Brook Lane and Antland Lane near to the Site boundary.

Landscape Character

- 3.29 The landscape character of the Strategic Site and wider area has been examined at national, county and local levels.

National Level

- 3.30 Crawley is located in the Natural England national character profiles within the 'Low Weald' character area (No.121). The Low Weald is described as being a broad low-lying clay vale which runs around three sides of the High Weald through Kent, Sussex and Surrey. Over such a large area there is local variation but the profile does make specific reference to the Gatwick, Crawley and Horley area as having urban influences. This is distinctly different to the overall character area where there

is a predominately pastoral and tranquil landscape containing small towns and villages scattered among an intricate mix of woodland, coppice, tree-lined watercourses, grassland and hedgerows.

- 3.31 The national profile identifies a number of landscape opportunities that include the incorporation of high quality green infrastructure and buffering of zones within planned new landscapes around predicted growth areas across the region – especially around settlements such as Crawley.

County Level

- 3.32 At a regional level West Sussex County Council produced their 'Land Management Guidelines' in 2003. The landscape around the west and northern parts of Crawley, including the airport and Strategic Site, lie within area LW8: 'Low Weald Northern Vales'. This area is described as a narrow clay vale running between low wooded ridges that contain a mixed landscape of shaws, hedgerows and pasture overlain by road and rail corridors. Crawley, Horsham and Gatwick Airport are noted for their dominant, strong suburban and urban fringe influences.
- 3.33 The overall sensitivity of this character area is considered to be 'moderate' with the thick hedgerows, hedgerow trees and occasional woodlands reducing its visual sensitivity. Key issues associated with change to the landscape include: visual & noise impact from Gatwick Airport, traffic pressures, localised visual impact of urban fringe uses (horse paddocks, smallholdings and small scale industrial uses), urban development and loss of hedgerows.

Local Level

- 3.34 The Crawley Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was published by the Borough in 2012. The overarching purpose of the LCA was to conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the landscape from its recognisable and consistent features. For Crawley this also meant the need to accommodate change to meet social, economic and environmental objectives.
- 3.35 The study described the tight administrative boundary around the town with the near completion of the New Town development strategy and expansion of the airport to agreed limits. The remaining sections of countryside within the town boundary are regarded more as continuations or edges to the extensive surrounding High and Low Weald rural landscapes in neighbouring local authorities rather than separate character areas.
- 3.36 The two remaining significant areas of rural landscape are located between the existing settlement edge of the town and the airport boundary. The land to the south of the airport is identified as 'Area 1: Upper Mole Farmlands Rural Fringe' and the area to the east as 'Area 6: North East Crawley High

Woodland Fringes’. However, the study confirms that both areas are set within the lower lying Low Weald landscape.

3.37 Area 6 includes the Strategic Site and is defined by the main London to Brighton railway to the west, the M23 motorway to the east, and the M23 spur to the north. To the south, the recent residential expansion of the Pound Hill Neighbourhood north from the A2011 means that the character area has been halved in size since production of the report in 2012. The assessment for the character area repeats verbatim the judgements made in the County assessment, including the conclusion that the overall area is of ‘moderate’ sensitivity to change.

3.38 The Area 6 LCA does recognise that the M23 creates a negative boundary that with limited access prevents a positive integrated relationship between Crawley and the wider countryside. Whilst highlighting the strong suburban influences of Crawley and Gatwick Airport, the study also considered that the condition of the landscape to be in decline because of visual/noise intrusion. There is no detailed analysis of the different land uses and their effects on the character of the LCA but a number of ‘key issues’ are identified:

- Visual and noise impact of Gatwick Airport and the M23;
- Pressures of traffic on rural lanes;
- Potential for increased recreational pressure;
- Localised visual impact of urban fringe uses, including development of horse paddocks, airport car parks, smallholdings and small scale industrial uses; and,
- Pressure from further urban development.

3.39 Nevertheless, the study states that this area is of ‘high landscape value’ due to its proximity to the urban area. It is presumed that this judgement is made on the scarcity of this type of landscape within the Borough boundary rather than an evaluation its intactness, condition, appearance or low status in the hierarchy of landscape designations, as set out in the NPPF.

3.40 Had such an analysis been undertaken, the remaining semi-rural areas in the LCA would at best be attributed a moderate sensitivity; whereas the airport land and piecemeal development in and around the Strategic Site would have attracted a lower sensitivity rating and, consequently, possess a higher capacity to accommodate change.

Visibility

3.41 The zone of visual influence for the Strategic Site wraps tightly around the adjacent road boundaries because of the extensive network of tree and hedgerow cover along with the well-established internal field boundary vegetation. To the west of the Balcombe Road the clipped roadside

hedgerows allow filtered views across fields towards the tops of larger airport buildings but, in contrast, the large short and long term parking areas are at ground level and are screened by tall intervening vegetation.

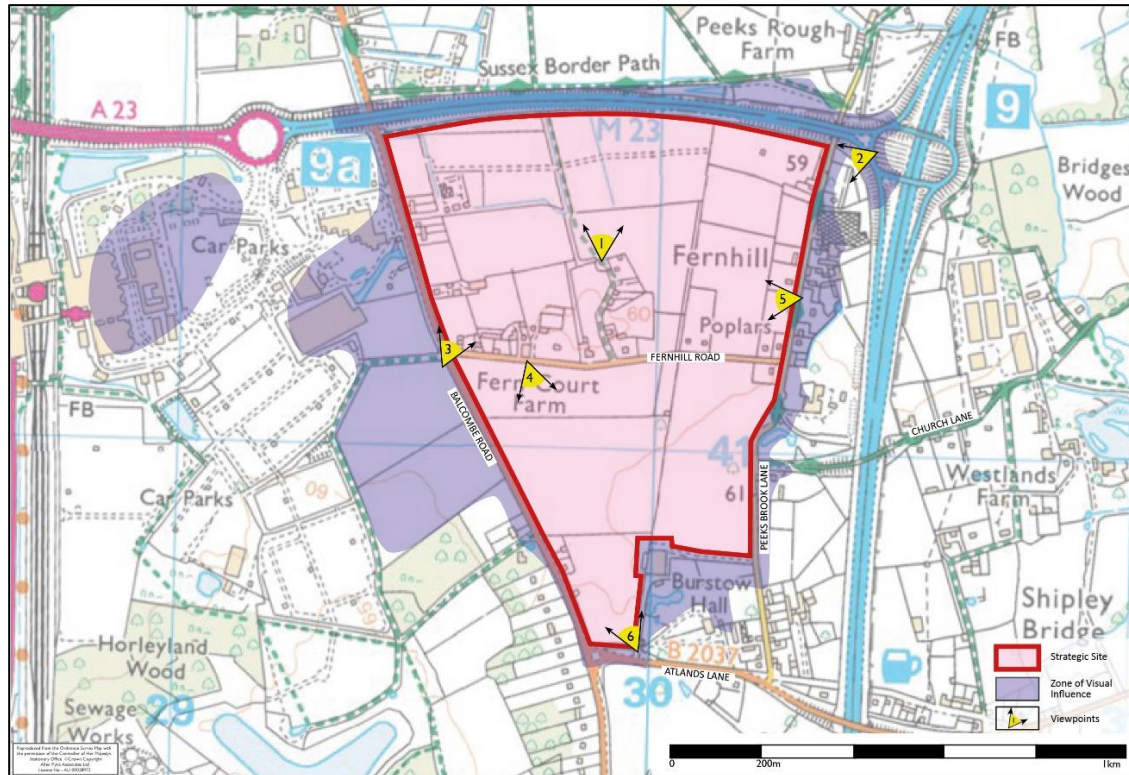
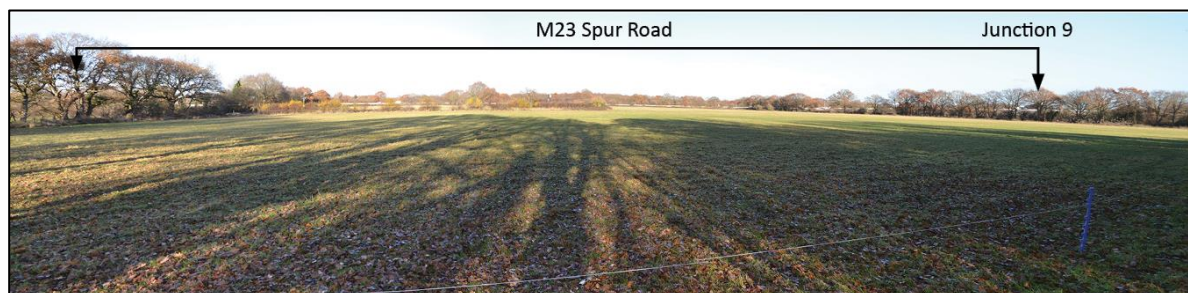


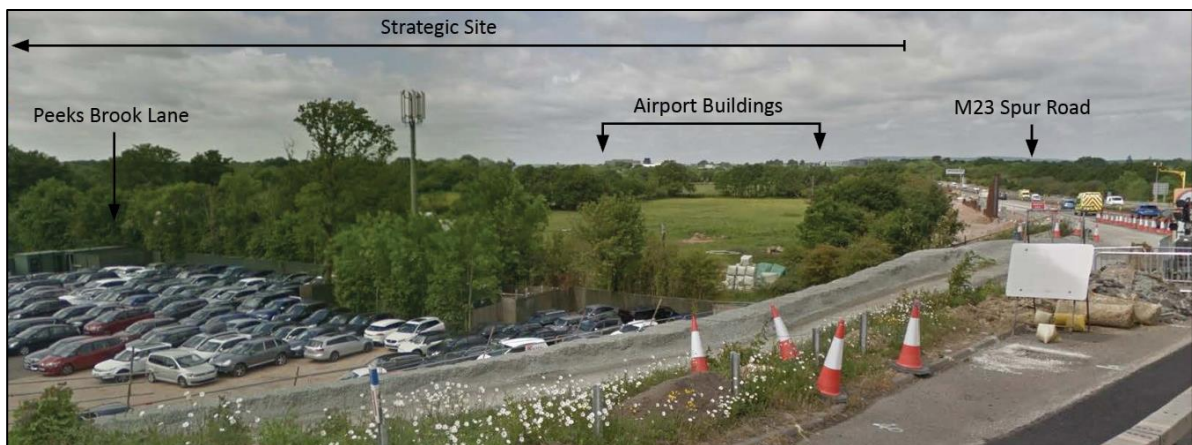
Figure 3: Zone of Visual Influence & Viewpoints

3.42 The extensive roadside and field boundary trees and hedgerow vegetation within the Strategic Site prevent longer views across the Site area as well as screening reverse views into the Site from the surrounding landscape. Glimpsed views into parts of the Site can be obtained from short breaks in taller roadside vegetation or at field gates. The density of this vegetation also provides an effective screen in winter months although filtered views of the grazing land beyond the road boundary hedgerows can be obtained in some roadside locations.



Viewpoint 1: Donkey Lane footpath looking north towards the M23 spur road and Horley

3.43 The elevated M23 motorway junction, spur road and associated vegetation form a significant barrier to views out of the Strategic Site to the north (View 1, above). Fields to the north of the spur road add to the visual separation between the Strategic Site and the settlement edge of Horley. Views into the northern part of the Site are obtained from the elevated western edge of the motorway junction and the spur road. Vegetation on the motorway boundary embankment partially screens the grazed fields in the foreground but solid lines of vegetation across the Strategic Site prevent views further south (View 2).



Viewpoint 2: Elevated M23 Junction looking south across the Strategic Site (Google 'Street View' image)



Viewpoint 3: Balcombe Road and Fernhill Road junction looking into small field in the Strategic Site

3.44 Some views into adjacent parts of the Site are possible from the busy Balcombe Road and the footpath running along the western side of the road around the Fernhill Road junction (View 3, above). To the north, the Site is screened by existing residential properties and vegetation lining the road. To the south, tall hedgerows and a continuous line of trees screen views throughout the year. Where short gaps do occur in the roadside screen, further field boundary vegetation prevents more distant views into the rest of the Site (View 4, below).

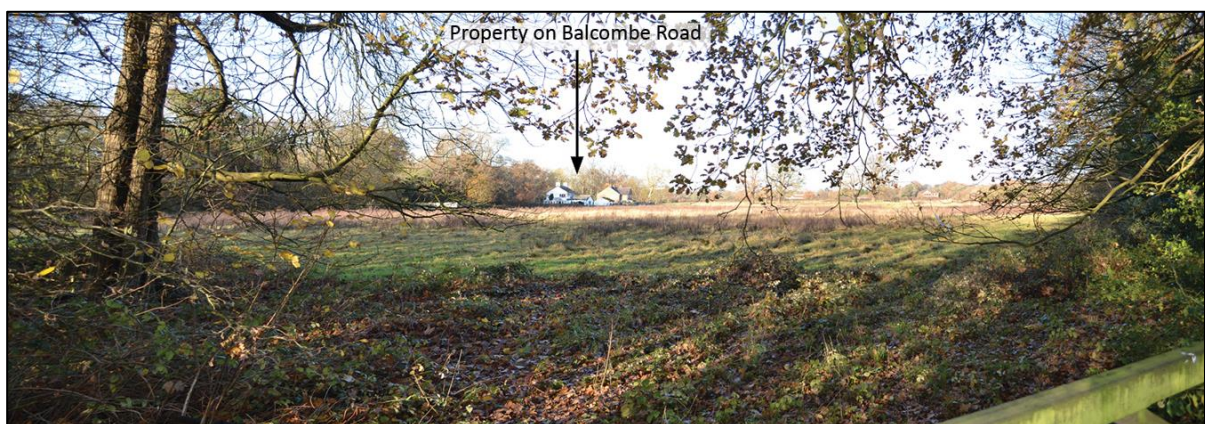


Viewpoint 4: Fernhill Road looking south across part of the Strategic Site



Viewpoint 5: Peeks Brook Lane with glimpsed view of a small enclosed field within the Strategic Site

3.45 Peeks Brook Lane is narrow and also lined with mature trees and hedgerow vegetation allowing only occasional glimpses into the Strategic Site, where further field boundary vegetation screens wider views (View 5). Properties along the road also tend to be screened by this vegetation. The short Antlands Lane boundary consists of a broad belt of mature trees that screen views into the Site from the road but limited views can be obtained from an access track off the road (View 6, below).



Viewpoint 6: Antlands Lane Site boundary beyond the dense woodland screen on the road frontage

- 3.46 Taller buildings associated with the airport, particularly the terminal buildings and hotels form occasional reference points above the treed skyline from the motorway spur (View 2, above) and major roads around the terminal areas. This intermittent mix and type of development in combination with the gazed land and surrounding road infrastructure in and around the Site creates the appearance of a piecemeal and uncoordinated urban fringe landscape.
- 3.47 Although the Strategic Site is generally well screened from adjacent road, longer views are only possible from elevated locations on the motorway and where footpaths cross larger fields. Views are generally undistinguished but there still remains some visual value to the urban fringe land around the Strategic Site despite the incongruous urban elements.
- 3.48 Within the Crawley settlement boundary, views of fields and rural activities are a diminishing feature, but are still a common component of the extensive, and largely unaltered, Wealden countryside surrounding the town.
- 3.49 The high levels of screening reduce the sensitivity of views to change. The views into and out of the Strategic Site, as illustrated in the representative viewpoints above, are generally of moderate sensitivity but there are localised views of older commercial buildings, parking and external storage areas that are of low sensitivity.

4 PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The Strategic Site forms part of a larger semi-rural area that has been safeguarded for many years as part of the proposal for a second runway at Gatwick. The necessity to protect this land has been removed by a government decision to locate additional runway capacity in the South East of England at Heathrow Airport in West London.
- 4.2 Crawley Borough Council has responded by proposing in its Local Plan Review (in late 2019) the removal of the safeguarding designation covering all the land between the town's settlement boundary and the airport. The area previously included in the 'Upper Mole Farmlands Rural Fringe' and 'North East Crawley High Woodland Fringes' LCAs would be to be amalgamated under proposed Policy SD3 into the 'North Crawley Area Action Plan'. The policy commits the Council to starting consideration of the AAP within three months of adopting of the emerging Local Plan.
- 4.3 Whilst the policy is at an embryonic stage, and there is no guarantee either the policy or emerging Local Plan will remain unaltered, SD3 does establish the potential for development in part or whole of the proposed AAP. If the work planned to start after adoption were to go ahead then the Strategic

Site would form an important part of that review of potential development areas and associated implications for the landscape, heritage and other environmental assets.

- 4.4 In light of SD3 this Landscape Appraisal has identified the significant, but limited, baseline landscape and visual constraints associated with the Strategic Site. The second part of the study provides conceptual recommends for a landscape led approach to guiding development on the Strategic Site as a high quality and appropriate commercial gateway for both Crawley and international travellers using the airport. An essential part of this input is to incorporate from the outset a landscape framework that will assist the integration of the built form into the landscape, mitigate the potential effects of construction, enhance existing landscape and topographic features, improve biodiversity, create better connectivity and add to the recreational opportunities in the area.
- 4.5 Given the landscape and visual context for the Strategic Site, it has to be accepted that development of the existing agricultural land will inevitably have a permanent effect on the character and visual perception of the area. However, with sensitive design and appropriate mitigation that accords with planning policy guidance, future high quality development on the Strategic Site is capable of becoming a very positive addition to the local landscape as well as delivering an enhanced range of attractive landscape, environmental and amenity benefits.
- 4.6 The potential change in planning policy does present a unique opportunity to create a comprehensive approach to the inclusion of the Strategic Site in the Borough's plans for economic growth. Any future assessment of the Site's potential should consider:
1. The protection and augmentation of important landscape, heritage, and other environmental features;
 2. Provision of a strong and integrated Green Infrastructure network that retains existing vegetation of merit, preserves the character and appearance of the area, and maintains existing connections with surrounding tree belts and hedgerows;
 3. The sympathetic assimilation of development into the landscape;
 4. The mix of development opportunities to maximise future growth potential; and,
 5. Improvements to highway and pedestrian networks to meet future needs.
- 4.7 The design approach should involve continued collaboration between the design team for the Strategic Site, the local authority and other key stakeholders to achieve the aims of the AAP. The scheme proposals would also need to fully respect the landscape and local distinctiveness of north-east Crawley, and maximise the opportunities presented by the Site. The evolution of the design needs to be part of an iterative process that meets the long term economic and social aspirations of the whole community.

5 SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Policy Constraints

- 5.1 The Strategic Site is located 5km to the north-east of Crawley town centre, immediately to the south of the motorway spur road leading from junction 9 of the M23 to Gatwick Airport.
- 5.2 The planning policies governing development are set out in the Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015. The Regulation 19 pre-submission version of the Borough's emerging Local Plan is due for consultation in late January 2020. With the ending of Government plans for a second runway at Gatwick Airport, the Local Plan review is to contain a revised approach to land use policy around the airport. This is likely to involve the removal of the Safeguarded Land designation, which includes the area covered by the Strategic Site.
- 5.3 A small number of general planning policies restricting development, including the Safeguarded Land (Policy GAT 2), will be superseded if the proposed North Crawley Area Action Plan (Policy SD3) is adopted as part of the new Local Plan.
- 5.4 The Strategic Site is not covered by any statutory or local policies designed to protect scenic quality or beauty of the natural landscape. The only environmental policy designation affecting the Site is the local Gatwick Woods Biodiversity Opportunity Area listed under Policy ENV 2. Within the Strategic Site there are also two Listed Buildings and one building of local significance. The proposed AAP review will take into consideration the implications for all existing environmental and cultural assets.
- 5.5 Proposals for the Strategic Site would be judged by the planning authority at the time of any future submissions for compliance with general landscape policies governing the design and protection of the landscape features, green infrastructure and biodiversity.

Land Use

- 5.6 The Strategic Site consists primarily of low-lying agricultural land in the poorer 3 and 4 quality classifications. The underlying clay soils are subject to seasonal flooding and restrict their use mainly to grazing and paddocks.
- 5.7 Whilst planning policies have limited development in and around the Strategic Site, there are a significant number of residential and small commercial properties along the local roads bounding and crossing the land (Balcombe Road, Fernhill Road and Peeks Brook Lane). These properties

generally pre-date the creation of the New Town but many have been adapted to support smaller scale airport activities with light industry, offices, storage and parking facilities.

Landscape Character

- 5.8 The Strategic Site does not lie within any statutory landscape, nature conservation or heritage designation and is located beyond the London Metropolitan Green Belt, which does not extend into the Crawley administrative area.
- 5.9 The northern part of Crawley lies within the Low Weald landscape character area, a rural landscape type recognised at both national and local levels. LCAs are not planning policy designations but their description of the landscape components and management objectives are used as part of the evidence base for making planning decisions.
- 5.10 The Strategic Site is located within the local 'North East Crawley High Woodland Fringes' LCA. The amount of countryside remaining within the Borough boundary is limited and generally restricted to the safeguarded land around the airport. While this area contains many of the features associated with the surrounding Low Weald landscape the significant presence of urban elements, proximity to Gatwick Airport and horse grazing give the Strategic Site and its immediate setting a distinct urban fringe quality.
- 5.11 The Crawley Landscape Character Assessment considers the overall sensitivity of the Woodland Fringes LCA to be moderate with the enclosure created by substantial hedgerows and belts of tall vegetation reducing visual sensitivity to change. This Landscape Appraisal agrees with this assessment.
- 5.12 The Woodland Fringes LCA also suggests the area to be of high landscape quality but since the publication of the Borough's study in 2012 the southern part of the area has been used to form part of the expanded Pound Hill residential neighbourhood. This Landscape Appraisal, therefore, considers that the remaining urban fringe character and airport land uses in and around the Strategic Site can at best be considered to be of moderate landscape value.

The area around the Strategic Site still possesses the typical dense hedgerow and woodland cover described in the wider LCA. This existing screening vegetation allows only a limited zone of visual influence that wraps tightly around the Site and gives the land a good capacity to accommodate development. On-site belts of tall vegetation also block long or open views across the Strategic Site. The proposed future development would be designed to retain and enhance existing vegetation,

which would be reinforced by major new planting within the green infrastructure and public open spaces.

Access constraints

- 5.13 Crawley and the airport are well connected to national road and rail networks. However, the secondary local road network around the Strategic Site has no direct access to the M23; the construction of which has affected the connectivity of some adjacent roads and footpaths.

Future Development

- 5.14 The inclusion of the Strategic Site in the preparation of the North East Crawley Area Action Plan would create a unique opportunity to unlock the potential of a substantial and sustainably located piece of land whose development would provide a significant stimulus to future economic growth for Crawley, Gatwick Airport and the sub-region.
- 5.15 Development of green field land will inevitably alter the character and appearance of the Strategic Site. Sensitive regeneration of this undistinguished landscape has the potential to create a coordinated, high quality development that is not only appropriate to its gateway location beside the main highway approach to one of the world's leading airports, but should also benefit the perception of the wider setting.
- 5.16 The design of development on the Strategic Site will require a comprehensive and collaborative approach with other key stakeholders in response to the new Area Action Plan proposals. The Strategic Site has the capacity to accommodate exemplar development, reinforce the existing historic pattern of the landscape and enhance the existing sense of arrival into the north eastern section of Crawley. The design principles should respect the character of the surrounding rural area, enhance the existing matrix of tall hedgerows and woodland cover, and set any new business campus within an attractive and vibrant landscape framework.
- 5.17 This green infrastructure should not only contribute to the creation of an imposing setting for the new development but also provide landscape buffers and a range of interlinking multifunctional spaces for recreation and new footpath connections. An integral SuDS drainage system would increase the substantial opportunities for enhancement of wildlife habitats and biodiversity across the whole Strategic Site and encourage use of the amenity areas by the wider community.