



**Project:** Goring Neighbourhood Plan  
Landscape Capacity Study  
Supplemental Report

**Project Ref:** 1603  
**Date:** January 2017

This document has been specifically prepared as a supplement to the Goring Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Capacity Study, which was produced for Goring-on-Thames Parish Council in September 2016. The September 2016 Landscape Capacity Study is referred to throughout this supplement as the GNP Landscape Capacity Study.

## Introduction

- 1 Following production of the GNP Landscape Capacity Study, the GNP Steering Group and Goring on Thames Parish Council considered landscape and visual issues (and other matters) in relation to potential development proposals for some of the sites under consideration.
- 2 It is understood that the proposals received from developers for consideration are non-binding but that proposals are nevertheless representative of the scale, scope and context of what is likely to be submitted for development approval.
- 3 In mid-November 2016, the GNP Steering Group then asked us to:
  - examine the proposals presented by developers to the GNP Steering Group in November 2016 for specific sites, namely GNP sites 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13;
  - review these development proposals and mitigation measures in the light of both our findings and the expert opinions of landscape consultants retained by some of the developers, particularly where the expert opinions differ from ours;
  - set out whether we consider our findings to be the most appropriate where differences have been expressed, and if so, why; and
  - if the detailed proposals and mitigation measures put forward by other consultants are to be preferred to any extent, to explain our reasons for changing position.
- 4 The key question that the GNP Steering Group asked us to address is whether the proposals in their current, or in a more limited, form, can meet the acceptability thresholds defined in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study.
- 5 The GNP Steering Group also asked us to examine *specific questions* related to specific sites, which are set out (*in italics*) below, under the relevant headings.
- 6 It is important to understand at the outset that the GNP Landscape Capacity Study was undertaken at a high level and in order to maintain a 'level playing field', setting a consistent threshold for acceptable development from a landscape and visual impact perspective. We were

- not at that point asked to consider any specific development proposals for individual sites as part of that assessment.
- 7 Throughout, sites have also only been examined from publicly accessible land, public rights of way, and public highways; we have not had the benefit of access to private land. This point is returned to in relation to comments on site GNP6, below.
  - 8 It is also important to appreciate that we have not been asked to prepare a detailed landscape and visual impact assessment of any of the development proposals for any of the sites in question. Our focus has been on providing advice and guidance to the GNP Steering Group about landscape and visual issues and mitigation opportunities.
  - 9 We have reviewed the documents provided in relation to each site and have undertaken additional site survey work specifically in respect of GNP5 and GNP6, where differences of opinion are being discussed. This site survey work was undertaken in late November 2016, following leaf-fall, and therefore these sites have been re-considered at the time of maximum visibility.
  - 10 All of the proposals supplied to us are at significantly reduced densities from the 25 dwellings per hectare 'benchmark' used in the Landscape Capacity Study. This is to be welcomed as, notwithstanding the need to ensure efficient use of land, this means that development proposals with a better 'fit' with surroundings have come forward for consideration. It also creates improved opportunities for mitigation, as is evidenced by the plans now submitted.

## Manor Road sites: GNP 3 and GNP 13

Documents provided:

GNP 3 Presentation

GNP 13 Concept  
GNP 13 Planning Statement 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2016 copy 1  
GNP 13 Ecology Report  
GNP 13 Final Tree Survey Report  
GNP 13 email 8 Nov 2016  
GNP 13 2<sup>nd</sup> email 8 Nov 2016

- 11 We were asked to *consider whether the truncated developments and commitment to preservation of trees and hedgerows would be sufficient to meet mitigation requirements for the respective sites.*

## Site GNP 3

- 12 Development is limited to the area which falls within Flood Zone 1, whilst the site area that falls within Flood Zone 2 is proposed to be green space, and it is important that this is maintained. However, as stated in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study, flood risk assessment as required by the Environment Agency and other statutory authorities is not within the scope of the GNP Landscape Capacity Study nor covered by this supplementary report.

- 13 The plan presents housing at a density of 10 dph, which provides a good fit with surrounding built development, particularly the adjacent development on Elmcroft. A density of 10 dph is well within what would be acceptable in relation to the surrounding area. The plan does not confirm this, but it is assumed that the height of these houses will be limited to 2 storeys; limitation of house heights to a maximum of 2 storeys should be an absolute requirement to protect the visual amenity of neighbouring residents.
- 14 The plans also present a good landscape framework and provide protection for Manor Road trees by setting the development well away from tree root protection zones (RPZs) and also by locating the entrance close to the north-west corner of the site. Care needs to be taken in selecting which tree to remove to create the entrance. Removal of one tree may be insufficient to achieve the entrance, when detailed design matters are developed. Not all of the avenue trees are of the same quality and similar form. A detailed tree survey is required to ascertain whether it is possible to remove a poorer quality tree (or trees) and to ensure that the higher quality trees are retained.
- 15 Development of GNP 3 has some implications for Manor Road, where highway improvements may be needed, which may include, for example, renewal of surfacing, installation of kerbs and a new drainage system. These changes will alter the rural character of the lane, and engineering work may impact adversely on the RPZs of the avenue trees.
- 16 The plan indicates some new tree planting along Manor Road. Unless there is a real gap to be filled, trees planted close to or within the tree canopy of the existing mature trees are very unlikely to establish well and will in any case grow towards the light, probably resulting in poor specimens. (Avenue rejuvenation is invariably best done by clear felling and wholesale replanting). These trees might therefore be better placed in small groups or clumps within the meadow area or associated with the curves in the drive.
- 17 The landscape buffer should be a mix of native hedgerow and native lowland woodland-edge tree species. A hedgerow should be planted that could be brought into traditional hedgerow management, to promote a dense boundary with good longevity. Planting within the core of the site should include medium to large size tree species, as the plan indicates, and the development layout should allow sufficient space for these trees to enable them reach maturity without them becoming a nuisance or obstruction.
- 18 Any 'improvements' to Manor Road itself need to be carried out with great sensitivity. Design detailing and engineering solutions that respect the rural character should be sought. These should avoid, wherever possible, the use of urban elements such as concrete kerbs. Assuming that re-surfacing of part of Manor Road will be carried out as part of the development, permeable road surface would not only reduce the need for conventional drainage system, but would also help to reduce changes to the water catchment of the trees' root systems and so help in their conservation.
- 19 Future management of Manor Road trees and also of the proposed site landscape needs to be ascertained. A 'sink fund' to meet the future costs of site management may be needed. The proposals include a meadow, which will need mowing – infrequent but important. New planting includes trees, hedges and native shrubs, and the question of how to protect the landscape buffer in the medium to long term needs to be considered. This may need to be planted and managed outside the private gardens to prevent householders removing it and opening up the boundary, and also to ensure it is managed in a coherent way. How this would be achieved needs to be ascertained.

- 20 In summary, therefore, the scope of the development indicated in the proposal submitted, with the commitment to the preservation of the trees and hedgerows, goes a long way towards meeting the mitigation requirements for this site. However, there are a number of detailed matters that need to be carefully considered and which will be critical in determining whether a firm proposal is acceptable or not. Development of the type and density indicated is likely to be suitable, subject to site specific conditions that should include the following:
- A detailed tree survey in accordance with the current BS (BS5837: 2012), not only as a basis for tree protection proposals, but also to inform and confirm the selection of the tree(s) proposed for removal to create the site entrance;
  - Limitation of building heights to a maximum of 2 storeys in order to protect the amenity of neighbouring residents;
  - An arboricultural impact assessment of the development proposal including any landscape treatment, footpaths, drainage and services runs, to demonstrate how the mature trees will be safeguarded from construction impacts. Assuming that Manor Road will be resurfaced, this should include an engineering solution that protects the avenue trees' root systems and water catchment area, such as a permeable road surface for Manor Road;
  - A design detailing solution for Manor Road and the new entrance road that maintains the rural character of the lane, avoiding use of concrete kerbs and urban engineering styles;
  - A landscape buffer of appropriate native hedgerow and lowland woodland-edge species, with medium to large size trees within the core of the site;
  - A secure proposal to facilitate future management and maintenance of the open space, including the meadow area, the planting carried out as mitigation, and the Manor Road trees as well as other site vegetation.

## Site GNP 13

- 21 We note that development proposed for this site falls within Flood Zone 2. As stated in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study, flood risk assessment as required by the Environment Agency and other statutory authorities is not within the scope of the GNP Landscape Capacity Study nor covered by this supplementary report. However, there are some implications for landscape and visual amenity, for example, mitigating for flood risk may result in the need to elevate any development on this site above the flood zone limits. This is discussed further, below.
- 22 The proposal for site GNP13 comprises four semi-detached houses, designed to read visually as two detached houses, so as to be in keeping with the larger existing houses along Manor Road. At a density of 13.3 dph, both the density and the form of the proposed buildings provides a good fit with the neighbouring settlement.
- 23 Tree planting on the public open space is to be welcomed as it will help with visual mitigation. As for site 3, species which form medium to large size trees at maturity should be chosen, and native species are preferable. It is important that the planting to the south-west of the drive does not form a solid block, but that trees are placed carefully in staggered groups, as indicated on the plan.
- 24 The east boundary would be better planted as a hedgerow with occasional trees, following guidance as given for the landscape buffer for GNP3 above. Again, it would be beneficial if a means of bringing it in to a traditional hedgerow management regime could be identified.

- 25 To minimise visual impacts for neighbouring residents and over a wider area, it is important that the height of the buildings is no higher than two storeys measured from the existing ground level. However, the buildings are in Flood Zone 2, and therefore they would have to be raised up in order to avoid potential flood risk. The implication of this requirement is that to avoid the total building height being raised above the average height of a 2 storey house, the development may need to be limited to single storey. Grading and shaping of landform to provide an elevated platform for buildings to be sited on, so as to be within flood risk limits, may also affect RPZ's of Manor Road's trees.
- 26 Proposals would bring traffic further down Manor Road than for GNP 3. Development of GNP 13 therefore potentially has more extensive implications than the adjacent site for Manor Road, as highway engineering improvements such as re-surfacing and installation of kerbs and drainage may be needed at least as far as Access A but probably all the way down Manor Road lane to Access B. These changes would alter the rural character of the lane, and may impact adversely on the root zones of the avenue trees.
- 27 As for site GNP3, any 'improvements' to Manor Road itself therefore need to be carried out with great sensitivity. Design detailing and engineering solutions that respect the rural character should be sought. These should avoid, wherever possible, the use of urban elements such as concrete kerbs. A permeable road surface would not only reduce the need for conventional drainage system, but would also help to reduce changes to the water catchment of the trees' root systems and so help in their conservation.
- 28 A detailed tree survey should be undertaken and the root protection zones (RPZs) for the mature trees calculated in accordance with the current BS (BS5837: 2012). All construction needs to be kept outside the RPZ including any footpaths, services runs, drainage runs, etc. not just the house footprints. From the outline plan, it looks as if the houses might need to be sited slightly more to the south west to avoid RPZs. A detailed plan of the proposal including any landscape treatment, footpaths, and services or drainage runs should be shown in relation to the calculated RPZs.
- 29 Future management (and eventual replacement) of Manor Road trees and also of the proposed site landscape needs to be ascertained, as for GNP3. A 'sink fund' to meet the future costs of site management may be needed to secure this.
- 30 Noting that the flood risk is not addressed as part of the GNP Landscape Capacity Study nor within this supplemental report, development of this site as envisaged, with appropriate mitigation, is likely to be acceptable from a landscape and visual amenity viewpoint. Mitigation requirements of this site, however, need to be met through careful response to a number of detailed matters which are critical in assessing whether a firm proposal is acceptable or not. However, development should be subject to site specific conditions that should include the following:
  - A detailed tree survey in accordance with the current BS (BS5837: 2012), as a basis for tree protection proposals;
  - An arboricultural impact assessment of detailed plans of the proposal including any landscape treatment, footpaths, services and drainage runs, to demonstrate how the mature trees will be safeguarded from construction impacts. Assuming that Manor Road will be resurfaced, this should include an engineering solution that protects the avenue trees' root systems and water catchment area, such as a permeable road surface for Manor Road;

- A design detailing solution for Manor Road and the entrance and egress to the site that maintains the rural character of the lane;
- Limitation of building heights to a maximum of 2 storey building height above existing ground level including any stilts or embankments, in order to protect the visual amenity of neighbouring residents;
- A native hedgerow with occasional hedgerow trees along the east boundary;
- A secure proposal to facilitate future management and maintenance of the mitigation planting and green space, including the ongoing care of the Manor Road trees and traditional hedgerow maintenance for the new hedge planting.

## Land off Gatehampton Road: GNP 1, GNP8, GNP7

Documents provided:

GNP 1 DRAFT Concept Masterplan 03.11.16  
GNP 1 Concept Masterplan Explanatory Notes  
GNP 1 developer's location photo  
GNP 1 edp plan 2 2772\_09  
GNP 1 edp plan 2772\_08  
GNP 1 email 14 Nov 2016  
GNP 1 Goring Site Access – Change Priority  
GNP 1 revised submission 14 Nov 2016

GNP 7 Summary of Key Points Actions

GNP 8 Site 8 with landscape buffer Nov 2016  
GNP 8 Ecological Assessment Report  
GNP 8 email 13 Nov 2016

## Sites GNP 1 and GNP 8 (combined site proposal)

- 31 Potential developers for these sites have produced proposals alone and together.
- 32 We were asked to *give these proposals and expert evidence proper reconsideration and see if there is any reason to amend our conclusions.*
- 33 The development proposals for GNP1 divide the site roughly into three. The most northerly section is proposed for housing, which would run up to the boundary of Goring's Sheepcot Field recreation ground. The central section might be given over to a new school site with community orchard and allotments and a community woodland or some other community use. The southerly portion might provide public open space.
- 34 The GNP Landscape Capacity Study identified this site as being unsuitable for development for a number of reasons. They may be summarised as follows:
  - Development would result in the loss of openness along the western edge of the Chilterns AONB escarpment;
  - It would interrupt the continuity with the wider pattern of open rolling fields that rise up to form the Chilterns scarp to the east;

- It would compromise the rural setting of the conservation area of Gatehampton by reducing the 'green gap' between Goring and Gatehampton;
  - It would be at considerable variance with the layout, mix, scale and appearance of the surrounding landscape;
  - It would introduce elements considered to be uncharacteristic of the attributes of the receiving landscape;
  - It would be substantially damaging to a high quality or highly vulnerable landscape, causing it to change and be considerably diminished in quality;
  - It would be very visible from the western slopes of the Chilterns AONB;
  - It would be very visible from the scarp slopes of the North Wessex Downs AONB, intruding into an otherwise uninterrupted rural panorama;
  - It would degrade visual amenity for walkers using the extensive network of paths in this area, including the Chiltern Way and the Thames Path;
  - It would degrade visual amenity for users of Goring's Sheepcot Field recreation ground.
- 35 The plan as presented does not show how these impacts could be mitigated. Creation of woodland along the north-east boundary of the site, as indicated, might have some filtering effect on views from the Chilterns Way immediately adjacent, but would do little to reduce the visual impact on views from more elevated ground to the east. Although housing development is proposed for only about a third of the site, this part of the site is elevated. Development would still be visible over a wide area, and would still be unsuitable for the reasons set out above.
- 36 The explanatory notes submitted with the development proposal argue that proposed woodland would be beneficial from a landscape as well as from a biodiversity and habitat gain viewpoint.
- 37 Ecological assessment is outside the scope of this report. However, habitat and landscape are obviously closely inter-related. This proposal would deliver replanting and strengthening of hedgerows on this site, which are currently in decline, and would offer scope for new hedgerows and native woodland planting. These measures would undoubtedly have biodiversity benefits as well as improving the landscape structure.
- 38 The developer also refers to the fact that this area is a Conservation Target Area for the restoration of lowland calcareous grassland habitat and states that creation of such habitat within the existing arable land would help meet this target. This statement is undoubtedly true, but the proposal itself does not include any commitment to grassland habitat restoration nor does it address the practical realities of the significant shift in land management practice that would be needed to achieve this.
- 39 In examining the proposal to create new woodland, reference needs to be made to the Chilterns AONB Landscape Character Assessment. The explanatory notes accompanying the proposal observe that "*the host landscape type and its neighbouring types have significant proportions of woodland*" and that the AONB Management Plan (2014) notes the declining woodland cover and the need for new woodland planting.
- 40 While this is true, it is also the case that the Chilterns AONB Management Plan contains a series of policies relevant to development proposals which were reviewed in Section 3 of the GNP Landscape Capacity Study. These policies all take as their starting point the conservation of the Chiltern's special character and qualities. The site falls within the Chilterns AONB landscape character area 8, the Chilterns escarpment, and is considered to be typical of the more open escarpment areas, rather than the intimate wooded folds found in the more sharply incised parts of the scarp.

- 41 Woodland along the eastern edge of the site, as indicated on the plans, would form a barrier within the open sweep of landscape rising up the Chilterns scarp and would thus restrict longer views and compromise important visual connections. The woodland planting proposed would exacerbate landscape impacts by causing additional adverse change to the prevailing landscape character. It also fails to mitigate the visual impacts for neighbouring residents, users of Goring's Sheepcot Field recreation ground, and upon longer views, since it is not integrated within the area for development nor used to provide a buffer or filter between the development site and adjacent residents and amenity land. Even if a matrix of extensive planting were to be integrated within the area indicated for development, this would not mitigate the impact on visual amenity of longer views nor on landscape character of this part of the AONB, which would still be adversely affected.
- 42 Even in its amended form, therefore, this development proposal remains unsuitable for this site. We can therefore see no reason to amend the conclusions reached in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study in relation to this proposal.

## GNP 8 (stand alone proposal)

- 43 We were asked to give this proposal consideration in relation to the questions posed in the Introduction at paragraphs 3 and 4, above, and to provide a response to the GNP Steering Group.
- 44 In addition to the combined development proposal, a separate stand-alone proposal for Site 8 has been submitted, comprising five buildings, 4 detached and 2 semi-detached houses, set in a broad semi-circle facing Gatehampton Road. The hedgerow along the roadside would be conserved, and trees planted around the site's south-east, north-east and north-west sides, perhaps in conjunction with a hedge, to create a 10m wide 'landscape buffer'.
- 45 The Landscape Capacity Study identified the importance, in landscape and visual terms, of the 'green gap' between Goring and Gatehampton, in maintaining the separation of the two settlements and the contribution that it makes to Gatehampton's relative remoteness and isolation. Development on Site GNP 8 would extend southwards from the current village edge along Gatehampton Road.
- 46 The effect of any development extending southwards from the current village boundary would be to weaken and erode the 'green gap' that forms the countryside setting of both Goring and Gatehampton. It would also reduce the openness and compromise the important visual connections with the wider landscape, altering the expansiveness and cohesion of the prevailing landscape character.
- 47 The proposal to mitigate the visual effect of housing on this site by landscape buffer planting around the perimeter was considered in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study, which concluded that perimeter planting would have only a limited mitigating effect on longer views due to topography and angle of view, and it would also compromise the important open visual connections with the wider landscape.
- 48 The visual effect of any development on this site would be the extension of Goring into open countryside. Any erosion of the 'green gap' between Goring and Gatehampton is to be opposed, as it will set a precedent for continued expansion of Goring southwards into the 'green gap'. The

GNP therefore needs to protect the present line of the southern edge of the village and any development to the south of the existing village settlement area along Gatehampton Road should be strongly resisted. We therefore conclude that development of this site remains unsuitable.

## GNP 7

- 49 The owner of this site does not have professional advisors, so no plan has yet been produced. A note of a meeting discussion confirms that the owner is prepared to be flexible on the number of houses and to limit building on this site to about four new dwellings, the building line to match the edge of the house opposite on Gatehampton Road. This would mean that houses would run in a line perpendicular to Gatehampton Road, facing towards the village, with rear gardens taking up the rest of the narrow site.
- 50 We were asked to give this proposal consideration in relation to the questions posed in the Introduction at paragraphs 3 and 4, above, and to provide a response to the GNP Steering Group.
- 51 It seems to us, looking at the space available (judged from aerial photos), that there is insufficient space to develop the row of four houses proposed, particularly when access requirements are taken into account. From the space available, if matching the building line opposite, it looks to be quite tight even for a single house. A single house would, however, be in keeping with adjacent development.
- 52 The visual effect of any development on this site would be the extension of Goring into the countryside. Any erosion of the 'green gap' between Goring and Gatehampton is to be opposed, as it will be difficult to make arguments for where development south of the village along Gatehampton Road ceases. The GNP therefore needs to protect the present line of the southern edge of the village. This could remain as it is, or it could be moved slightly to the south in the form of a single, narrow, house, to match the building line opposite on Gatehampton Road, as proposed. Any development further south of the existing building line of the house opposite on Gatehampton Road should be strongly resisted.

## Wallingford Road sites: GNP 5 and GNP 6

Documents provided:

- GNP 5 Goring – Photo markup
- GNP 5 Presentation
- GNP 5 Presentation pages rotated
- GNP 5 Presentation.pdf.webarchive
- GNP 5 Village Analysis
- GNP 5 HDA response to Bramhill
- GNP 5 Illustrative Housing low-res
- GNP5 Ecological Appraisal
- GNP 5 Summary of Phase II Ecology Survey
- GNP 5 Topography 1
- GNP 5 Topography 2
- GNP 5 Visibility and site analysis
- GNP 5 Photo 6
- GNP 5 Photo 11

GNP 5 Photo 18  
GNP 5 Photo 19  
GNP 5 Photo 20  
GNP 5 Photo 21  
GNP 5 Photo 22  
GNP 5 Photo 23  
GNP 5 Photo 24

GNP6 Presentation  
GNP 6 Methodology HAD  
GNP 6 Goring – Photo markup  
GNP 6 HDA Response to Bramhill  
GNP 6 HAD Review of Landscape Capacity Study  
GNP 6 Photo 1  
GNP 6 Photo 2  
GNP 6 Photo 3  
GNP 6 Photo 4  
GNP 6 Photo 5  
GNP 6 Photo 6  
GNP 6 Photo 7  
GNP 6 Photo 8  
GNP 6 Photo 9  
GNP 6 Photo 10  
GNP 6 Photo 11  
GNP 6 Photo 12  
GNP 6 Photo 13  
GNP 6 Photo 14  
GNP 6 Photo 15  
GNP 6 Photo 16  
GNP 6 Photo 17  
GNP 6 Photo 21  
GNP 6 Photo 23  
GNP 6 Village Analysis

These sites have been presented to GNP Steering Group as a pair, but their appropriateness for development continues to be assessed separately.

## GNP 5

- 52 We were asked to *provide a response to the consultant's report, and specifically to consider:*
- 1) *Are there any reasons why it would be unacceptable to have a small development in the lowest (SW) corner of this site hidden by landscape mitigation to the North and East and the railway embankment to the West?*
  - 2) *If an area could be developed, what mitigation would be desirable?*
  - 3) *What is the maximum size of the acceptable developable area in hectares?*
- 53 We have undertaken a second round of survey work to review the visibility of this site in the light of HDA's visibility analysis and their argument that, since the lower parts of the site are less visible than the more elevated areas, therefore, development on the lower parts of the site with mitigation is visually acceptable. HDA's report asserts that the '*restricted development footprint*

*would be screened by the surrounding vegetation and would sit comfortably in the context of the existing settlement of Goring'.*

- 54 We re-examined the site from the open access land on higher ground at Lough Down and Lardon Chase; in views across the valley floor from the A417 Streatley to Wantage road and from the A329 Streatley to Wallingford road. We also walked the relevant sections of the Thames Path and the Ridgeway, and checked potential visibility from various properties including those identified by HDA.
- 55 It has been useful to re-visit the area after leaf fall to look at the visual position in the winter season. We appreciate that HDA's visual assessment may have been done during summer months, but in our opinion, the site is more visually prominent than HDA's analysis indicates. Since it was taken out of arable rotation, the field has been colonised over the last few years by ruderal vegetation, which has a brown colour in long distance views. This helps to reveal the site in longer views. The presence of the railway gantries helps to judge the relative heights of the proposed housing and how the development would appear in the landscape.

### Existing settlement context

- 56 Generally, in views from the valley floor, Goring's settlement area tends to disappear into the trees; characteristically, houses are visible only as groups of two or three buildings or rooftops viewed between and above the trees. The density of trees within the settlement area and along the Thames Valley corridor, combined with topography and angle of view, is sufficient to provide a strong filtering and/or good screening effect. The settled area of the village is therefore largely hidden from view from the surrounding countryside, apart from in views from the more elevated vantage points around the village. This holds true even in late November when trees are at their barest.
- 57 The existing settlement edge for this part of Goring is clearly defined by the hedge and trees that create a strong landscape boundary on the north side of 91 Wallingford Road. Here, there is a sharp transition between the settled area and the open countryside.
- 58 To the north of the site, there are only two more fields before South Stoke. This group of fields creates a 'green gap' that plays an important role in separating the two settlements. However, the rising land of GNP5, and the elevated land beyond it to the east (on the opposite side of the B4009 Wallingford Road) is particularly important in the longer views eastwards across the Thames Valley, since it is both more visible and also separates the small hamlet of Spring Farm from Goring. Even though it has now been developed into a small community, Spring Farm still 'reads' in the landscape as a farm that is separate from Goring and appropriate in a rural landscape.
- 59 Furthermore, developing GNP5 potentially opens the door for the other two fields to come forward for development, the effect of which will be a ribbon of housing along the River Thames corridor and the joining of South Stoke to Goring. This would compromise the setting of South Stoke as well as Goring, and eliminate the tract of Chilterns AONB landscape that maintains and defines them as separate settlements. This is to be avoided, as it would have a severely detrimental effect on the landscape of both the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs AONBs and on visual amenity in the area.
- 60 Site GNP5 'reads' as part of the AONB countryside, and, in particular, as a key part of the 'green gap' between Goring and South Stoke. The effect of the 'green gap' is especially evident in

elevated views from Lough Down and Lardon Chase, from where the settlement edge of Goring and the well-defined transition into open countryside is particularly apparent. The effect of the 'green gap' can also be appreciated from the B4009 Wallingford Road, when, on approach to Goring, a long view over GNP 5 opens up. This view reveals the expanse of the North Wessex Downs across the Thames Valley, a panorama that is not possible to obtain from anywhere else along the road.

### Screening qualities of surrounding vegetation

- 61 Vegetation along the river and rail corridor west of GNP5 has been thinned; an apparent policy trend of vegetation removal along the railway line has been exacerbated by further clearance associated with the recent installation of electrification gantries and catenaries. This means that east-west views across GNP5 are more open than perhaps they were in recent years; and therefore the site benefits less from screening by surrounding vegetation than HDA's report implies.
- 62 Contrary to HDA's assessment, the site is visible across the Thames Valley from Greenlands Farm and Highcrofts to the north-west; from two properties to the west at Ridge Roads on the A417; and from the house at Streatley Farm, also to the west. As well as being visible in views from the A329 Wallingford Road, as shown, it is also visible from the A417 north of Streatley. Houses on Rectory Road, Streatley, including Westfield House, Ivy Lodge, Hawthorn Cottage, Lough Cottage, and Elmleigh, have clear views over the Thames Valley towards the site, some direct and some oblique depending on house orientation. Some of the houses on Wantage Road and Townsend Road also have views towards the site, most of which are, however, filtered, oblique and / or from upstairs or rear windows.
- 63 Absence of vegetation enables the stunning long view across Site GNP 5 to the North Wessex Downs. Adding vegetation would be counter-productive to conservation of this view. Although the proposals for this site acknowledge the presence of this view, the view line that is incorporated in the proposals would narrow the view by the introduction of avenue trees; the direction of the view is not reflected accurately in the alignment of the avenue; and in any event, tree planting as well as development within the site would result in this important vista not being maintained.
- 64 In longer views from the A417 Wantage Road and the A329 Wallingford Road, GNP 5 is also visible, and the B4009 Wallingford Road at the east of the site can clearly be seen. While the higher ground is more prominent, development on the lower ground would nevertheless still be visible, and, since the land rises from west to east, the effect would be of rooftops rising up above one another.
- 65 The site is very visible from the Ridgeway Path west of the site. There would be close views of the development from the section of the Ridgeway to the west of the site. Housing would be sited on rising ground between the lowest south-west corner of the site and the more elevated B4009. Development would block views across the site to the hillside further to the east, where the landform rises up to form a curving skyline characteristic of the AONB. Housing on even the lower parts of this site would therefore have the effect of removing the rural aspect of eastwards views from this section of the Ridgeway path and of extending the built envelope out into the AONB countryside.
- 66 In the summer months, views from the Thames Path are obscured by vegetation (as we stated in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study) but in the winter, it is possible to see the upper parts of the

railway gantries clearly between and above the tree line, and therefore to judge that roofs of housing on the site may well also be visible from the riverside footpath. The railway gantries provide a useful 'benchmark' in judging the likely heights and visibilities of roofs and elevations.

### Potential for small development in the lowest (SW) corner, and Desirable mitigation, if appropriate.

- 67 As a result of the reduced screening properties of the existing vegetation, the houses proposed for GNP 5, although on the lower parts of the site, would nevertheless be visible from both the Ridgeway and from the Thames Path.
- 68 In longer views across the valley floor, the integrity of the 'green gap' would be compromised by any development on GNP5, however limited in extent. Development on the south part of the site, although less prominent than development on the highest parts of the site, would nevertheless be visible over a wide area, and would have an adverse effect on the landscape experienced by walkers using the two national trails, particularly on those using this stretch of the Ridgeway.
- 69 On the approach to Goring from Wallingford, once past the group of Spring Farm Barns and Cottages where vegetation provides enclosure around this hamlet, the landscape opens out into an uninterrupted rural panorama to the east and west of the road. The village is not currently visible from the Wallingford Road between Spring Farm and 91 Wallingford Road; as stated above, Goring benefits from a very strongly defined transition from rural to settlement at 91 Wallingford Road.
- 70 This panorama, which provides a stunning approach to Goring, should continue to be protected from encroachment by built development. Any development of GNP5, however low on the site it is located, would disrupt this panorama by introducing an urban element into an otherwise rural landscape, and would extend Goring's built area into this rural landscape.
- 71 There is a potential counter-argument that the gantries and catenaries along the railway line have already impacted on the rural character and therefore the change in character is less relevant. However, the introduction of one 'alien' element, in our view simply makes conservation and protection of the rural characteristics more important, particularly given the AONB status of the landscape.
- 72 It is not just the views of GNP5 itself that are important, it is views that the area affords across the site to the surrounding countryside, to more distant countryside and to the undulating horizon, that is such a strong component of the landscape character of this area. This is important both in close views, for example from the Ridgeway Path, where there are views over the field to the open countryside beyond, and for more distant views, across the valley floor and from more elevated ground, where GNP5 is particularly important in defining the edge of Goring and in maintaining a sweep of open countryside to the north of the village.
- 73 We do not, therefore, agree that new housing on this site 'would sit comfortably in the context of the existing settlement', nor that a 'restricted development footprint would be screened by surrounding vegetation'. In fact, tree planting on this site, in conjunction with development, would obliterate one of the most appealing and attractive vistas across the Thames Valley to the North Wessex Downs from the B4009 Wallingford Road, a principal road 'gateway' to Goring. There is no area of the site which could be effectively partitioned from the rest to permit partial

development without an unacceptable impact on landscape and views. In conclusion, site GNP5 remains unsuitable for development because new housing on this land would be too visible.

## GNP 6

- 74 We were asked to *provide a response to the consultant's report, and specifically to consider:*
- 1) *Are there any major landscape or visual impact issues with access from GNP6 to Wallingford Road across the triangle in the NW corner of the site? No other road access is possible.*
  - 2) *What mitigation, if any, would be desirable for the road access there?*
  - 3) *If road access at that point is mitigated with, for example, hedges or trees, would it also become acceptable to build houses in the triangle along Wallingford Road as shown in the concept drawings?*
  - 4) *Is there any further mitigation which would make limited development of that triangle acceptable in addition to use for the road?*
  - 5) *Is there anything in relation to the orchard which would counter the developer's statements about it and justify its retention?*
- 75 This site is particularly hard to assess without access to the land, but we have made extensive observations from Wallingford Road and footpaths. We understand that representatives of the GNP Steering Group have now been given access to the site, and wish us to attend a site visit to consider certain aspects of the proposal and the site 'on the ground'. This is currently being arranged but this report is being prepared before the visit takes place.
- 76 The proposed layout plan generally appears on paper to respond well to the site topography and to identified landscape and visual constraints as identified from maps and documents. The proposals will be reviewed again when we have had the opportunity to access the site. However, it is very clear that site specific conditions will be needed to protect visual amenity for neighbouring residents and those viewing from greater distance.
- 77 The development will be visible from the higher ground west of Streatley. HDA's report states that 'as it is surrounded by existing development on three of its four sides ... development of GNP6 would be seen as a 'rounding off' of the settlement pattern of Goring, thus not having a significant effect on the setting of the North Wessex Downs'. Nevertheless, new development on this site will be visible from the open access ground around Lardon Chase and Lough Down. For example, the new development at Icen Close, which is located just to the east of GNP6, is particularly prominent and eye-catching in these views due to housing density, insensitive choice of materials, and lack of planting to integrate buildings into landscape. It contrasts sharply with the appearance of most of Goring's settled area, where houses are set within what appears, at a distance, to be a wooded landscape – or at least, a heavily tree'd one. Any development on GNP 6 would require careful conditions to ensure that it looks appropriate, that it 'sits' within a landscape context that harmonises with the rest of Goring, and that it does not stand out starkly in views from the surrounding area.
- 78 New tree planting integrated within the development, as is indicated on the current plan for GNP6, is therefore very important, as it will, in time, enable development to blend in with the wider settled area of the village. It is also important that trees along the south boundary of GNP6, are conserved and where possible, new trees to provide 'successors' planted; this is also indicated on the current plan.

- 79 However, visibility of the development from the B4009 Wallingford Road on the approach to Goring remains an issue; it is important that the development is seen only within the context of the existing settlement of Goring and does not encroach upon the open countryside.
- 80 HDA anticipate that 'the tops of the new houses on the main site would be visible, though this would only suggest the presence of the village beyond the shallow ridge, without it being fully revealed'. The series of cross sections submitted confirms that while development above the 65m contour may not be visible, development up to the 70m contour certainly will be visible.
- 81 The curving, flowing landform of the ridge line to the immediate north of the site creates a clear horizon line in views from the Wallingford Road, that is important as it is so characteristic of the downland landscape. On the approach to Goring from Wallingford, once past the group of Spring Farm Barns and Cottages where vegetation provides enclosure around this hamlet, the landscape opens out into an uninterrupted rural panorama to the east and west of the road. The village is not currently visible from the Wallingford Road between Spring Farm and 91 Wallingford Road, being completely hidden by the ridge line to the east and by dense vegetation to the west.
- 82 The appearance of the curving ridge line against the skyline east of the road is strongly characteristic of this part of the AONB and is therefore also important. The immediately surrounding undulating landform complements the more distant landforms of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 83 This panorama, which provides a stunning approach to Goring, should continue to be protected from encroachment by built development. It is therefore important that rooflines of the main body of site GNP6 are kept out of sight below the ridge line and that this is enforced through a site-specific condition.
- 84 It is not sufficient to rely on tree planting for screening mitigation, since this will take a considerable period of time (a generation) to become established; during winter months it is likely to provide a filtering rather than a screening effect (unless a particularly thick plantation is formed).
- 85 Development proposals should therefore:
- Be modified to ensure that settlement ridge lines, roofs, chimneys, etc., are not visible above the ridge line in views from Wallingford Road, particularly from between Spring Farm Barns / Cottages and 91 Wallingford Road but also from the road to the north of the Spring Farm hamlet. At this detailed layout stage, localised variations in landform and site layout become critical and the precise boundary of acceptable development may not, therefore, lie along a 5m-interval contour, but may vary dependent on localised topography. Achieving this may mean making some adjustment to the housing footprints shown on the current proposals plan but might also be achieved by lowering roof lines of buildings along the northern edge of the proposed development, for example, by some single storey (accessible housing?) and / or by use of dormers for the second storey.
  - Be presented with a series of cross sections to confirm that this can be achieved. These need to be explored at the 'worst case' as well as the 'best case' locations, including section lines from the more elevated sections of the Wallingford Road immediately to the south of Spring Farm Cottages, as well as from the lowest sections of Wallingford Road selected for the current cross sections provided by the developer. Sections should encompass

development along the northern boundary and particularly the north-east part of the site where the crest is lower.

- The eventual appearance of trees planted along the northern boundary of the site also needs to be considered. At present, the proposed mitigation planting will result in a tree line along the entire length of the horizon line. If the curving crest of the ridge could be maintained clear of vegetation, this would maintain the characteristic open land against the horizon, framed with vegetation to the east and west.

## New access road and

### Mitigation of access road

86 With careful design and mitigation, there is potential to grade the new access road and its surrounding landform, so that it does not stand out in the landscape and visual impacts of the new road on views from the B4009 Wallingford Road approach to Goring are kept to a minimum.

- Development proposals, therefore, need to give care and attention to proposals for grading and profiling, which should enable the road to 'sit' down into the landscape, for example, between banks as it rises up the slope, as is characteristic of lanes in this area. Visibility splays will be needed at the junction, which will mean that the junction with the B4009 will need to be more open to allow for sightlines.
- Plans show some planting outside the 'red line' site boundary, which indicates some additional landtake that is a welcome addition and which changes the viability of the proposed road access. Further additional landtake will be required to achieve appropriate grading of the access road and its immediate environs, and a landscape 'buffer' on its north side.
- The creation of a small copse in the curve of the access road on the north side of the triangle is hinted at on the current plan; planting here could be strengthened which, in views from the B4009, would link visually with the stand of trees associated with the garden boundaries to the south and would thus also improve integration of the access road into the wider landscape.
- It is important to ensure active management of the roadside vegetation on the east side of the road approaching the triangle, to conserve and strengthen the screening effect that it provides. This hedge, with its occasional groups of trees, cuts off the view of the road going up the hillside, until the entrance to the access road is reached. If parts of this hedgerow must be removed for traffic sightline purposes, then it is important that it is re-planted along the revised road verge / bank (see also notes below in relation to proposal for houses on triangle).

## Development of the 'triangle' along Wallingford Road and

### Mitigation of limited development of that triangle

87 The GNP Landscape Capacity Study recommended that there should be no development on the triangle. The study had to assume a building density of 25 dph and the likely impacts that would arise from development of that density on this small triangle of land.

- 88 The proposal now put forward is very different in terms of development pattern. It fits with adjacent and opposite houses: the new houses would be in alignment with existing houses to the south, and would front on to existing houses on the opposite side of Wallingford Road. HDA states that *'although the changes in these views experience by users of Wallingford Road entering Goring would be marked with the proposals in place, they would be consistent with views of properties opposite and adjacent'*. Clearly there will be an impact on neighbouring properties, particularly those immediately to the west on the opposite side of the road, but this site already reads as part of Goring's built environment 'envelope'. Although visible in longer views across the valley from some places (e.g. they are potentially just visible from Lough Down), in longer views they will appear similar to the houses adjacent and opposite, where rooftops are visible above and between trees
- 89 The hedgerow along the east side of the B4009 Wallingford Road is important, as it provides screening of the area of the triangle on the approach to Goring from the north. References in the GNP Landscape Capacity Study to the hedge alongside Wallingford Road need to be clarified. The triangle itself is bounded along Wallingford Road by a post and rail fence, with a low but dense hedge along the north-east side of the enclosure. North of the triangle along Wallingford Road, there is a dense roadside hedge which, because of the angle of the view, provides effective screening of the triangle area in views from the road when approaching Goring. References in the GNP Landscape Capacity Statement to a good quality hedge that provides some visual mitigation for development on the triangle are to the one further north, which provides screening of oblique views from the road.
- 90 Off-site mitigation is now being proposed. If the road access is adequately mitigated, with both on and off-site mitigation (including grading around the access road and new junction, see above) there would be a consequential benefit in mitigation terms in relation to the potential houses on the triangle, both in terms of localised grading to achieve a sympathetic landform and in terms of planting. Visibility splays from the junction will need to be considered at the detailed design stage, which might limit potential for mitigation through planting.
- 91 With good mitigation, this line of 4 houses (2 detached and 2 semi-detached) meets the threshold for acceptable development.
- 92 Mitigation should include:
- The existing hedgerow and groups of trees along the roadside assists with mitigation of oblique views of proposed houses on the 'triangle'. It is important that this hedgerow is conserved, strengthened and extended up to the new access road.
  - A new hedgerow along the B4009 to the south of the new access road junction is also needed across the frontage of the proposed houses which will provide some mitigation of change to visual amenity for the houses to the west, immediately opposite the triangle. The hedgerow should include single trees and groups of trees, as is evident along the field boundary further to the north.
  - Every effort needs to be made through building design to ensure that impact of change on visual amenity for residents opposite is minimised. There is a need to ensure that houses on the triangle are set back from the road, in line with the existing adjacent house, and the heights of the buildings should be restricted. Roof lines should be kept as low as practicable and building height should be no higher than the height of the house next door, potentially

causing roof lines to appear to drop down across the 'triangle' because of the way that the land falls.

- A group of trees on the corner of the access road between the proposed houses and the new junction will be very important in softening views of the new development in the approach to the village. This would be further strengthened by tree planting at the corner of the new access road, north of the junction, as is indicated on the current proposal plan. Trees should be a native species that reach a medium to large size at maturity.
- Groups of trees, in keeping with the distribution of trees in gardens along the Wallingford Road, would be preferable on the road frontage, rather than the line of evenly spaced trees indicated on the current plan. These should include tree species that will be medium to large size at maturity.

### The old orchard

- 93 This area is on private land and therefore we have been unable to survey it; we reported the presence of the old orchard based on a search of the 'MAGIC' mapping website. HDA's report rightly points out that this is not a statutory designation. Neither does this orchard benefit from any statutory protection. However, old orchard trees are known to be ecologically rich habitats and are also rapidly declining habitats in this country. HDA report that this orchard has '*significantly declined, with the majority of trees and habitat removed to allow space for horse stables, a sand covered ménage arena and grazing areas*'. What remains, therefore, may be considered to be even more vulnerable and worthy of conservation. HDA state that '*only a small area remains ... which contains 16 trees, some of which are a young age. The proposed development of GNP 6 envisages incorporating a number of these existing trees within its design*'.
- 94 As noted above, it is intended that there will be a site visit to GNP 6, and one of the things that will be reviewed on site is the remnant orchard. Pending the site visit, however, we recommend that:
- All viable orchard trees should be protected and conserved, and their species identified;
  - New fruit trees of heritage varieties appropriate for this part of the country should be provided.
- 95 These could be integrated into gardens or remain in publicly accessible areas. The possibility of a community orchard could also be considered. Whichever approach is taken, some thought needs to be given to provision for maintenance, including pruning which is a skilled job.