

# Landscape & Visual Briefing Note

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Project: Land at Elm Tree Farm, Sellindge (7195)

June 2020

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1. It is understood that Quinn Estates are requiring initial input to support the principle of development and promotion for its site c.17.84 hectare (44 acres) on Land at Elm Tree Farm, Sellindge, for residential development, through the Folkstone and Hythe Local Plan Review. Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd has been commissioned to review potential landscape and visual matters and provide an overview of any likely landscape constraints and opportunities present within the site. A desktop study and site visit have been undertaken alongside a high level review of the landscape and visual situation in order to provide recommendations for developing the site and any necessary landscape mitigation that may be required.
- 1.2. This briefing note provides an overview of the baseline landscape and visual situation and potential landscape and visual effects providing further information to support the associated Landscape Opportunities and Constraints Plan attached. It is anticipated that a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will be undertaken at the appropriate planning stage.

## 2 Baseline Assessment

- 2.1. The site lies adjacent to northern edge of Sellindge, a village and parish in Suffolk, it is situated on the A20, which connects with Folkstone, approximately 11.63km to the south east and Ashford, that lies approximately 9.8km to the north west of the site. The site is an irregular shaped parcel of land that comprises, for the majority, of arable land. The land falls from the higher ground to the northern, eastern and southern boundaries to a watercourse / drainage ditch that runs on a roughly east / west axis through the site from the rear of properties off Swan Green at the southern boundary to the midpoint of the western boundary, defined by Moorstock Lane – the watercourse continues west and feeds an offsite waterbody.
- 2.2. As a result of agricultural intensification the majority of the internal historic field boundaries have been lost, this results in an open grain to the site. For the most part vegetation associated with the site is limited to the site boundaries, with mature hedgerow and hedgerow trees to the eastern and western site boundaries. The southern boundary is defined by a number of treatments, which include mature field boundary hedgerows and rear garden domestic boundaries where there is a significant variance in the boundary styles and types to include closed board fencing, post and rail and conifer hedge. The majority of the northern boundary is open as the site forms the southern part of a larger arable field; however the western section of the site boundary is defined by either post & wire fencing or native hedgerow.
- 2.3. Features of note within the landscape include a number of listed buildings adjacent to the southern site boundary and local landscape and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) located approximately 1.29km to the north east at the closest point. The listed buildings within the immediate setting of the site include;

- Elm Tree Farm house & associated Barn – both are Grade II listed, adjacent to the southern site boundary;
  - Lees Cottages – Grade II Listed, adjacent to the southern site boundary;
  - Guinea Hall - Grade II listed – located to the 65m to the south west of the site boundary, at the closest point, to the west of Moorstock Lane;
  - Moorstock House - Grade II listed – located to the 129m to the north west of the site boundary, at the closest point, accessed off Moorstock Lane; and
  - Holly Cottage - Grade II listed – located to the 65m to the south west of the site boundary, at the closest point, to the west of Moorstock Lane;
- 2.4. Further to these, there are residential properties backing onto the southern site boundary, located off Swan Lane, Swan Green and Downs Way that have potential views over the site. This existing development forms an urban backdrop / edge to the east and south of the site. There are a number of rural, single track narrow meandering lanes, which are bound by mature hedgerows, and dispersed residential dwellings / farmsteads situated within the localised setting to the north and west. The landscape to the east, beyond Swan Lane and to the south of Ashford Road, is currently subject to a number of planning approvals / under construction residential developments, refer **ASP1 & ASP2**. Once complete this will change the landscape character and visual environment of Sellindge and in part that of the site.
- 2.5. At present there is a single existing vehicular access point into the site, located along the southern boundary, off Ashford Road. Beyond that there is one further road which runs adjacent to the site, Moorstock Lane runs adjacent to the western site boundary.
- 2.6. The site and localised landscape are situated within a gently undulating shallow valley. The landform rises to approximately 75m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) within the wider arable field to the immediate north east, to the east along Swan Lane and the south around Potton Farm. To the west the landform rises beyond Moorstock Lane, to a localised high point of approximately 87m. More generally the topography within the local and wider landscape gently undulates between approximately 60 to 90m AOD to the east, south and west. Within the wider landscape to the north the landform rises notably. This higher ground, which lies within Kent Downs AONB, forms a verdant back drop to Sellindge from views in the wider landscape.
- 2.7. Overall, the immediate and local landform together with the mature vegetation structure and existing built form result in views towards/over the site being limited to the site and the immediate setting. However, there are glimpsed views of the site from the high ground within the local and wider landscape - to include the high ground with the Kent Downs AONB. However, where there are views of the site possible it is seen in the context of the surrounding existing and emerging development along Swan Lane and Ashford Road.
- 2.8. The location and context of the site is illustrated on **ASP1** Site Location Plan and **ASP2** Site and Setting Plan.

#### Vegetation Cover

- 2.9. Vegetation cover internally is for the most limited to field boundaries, with some remnant vegetation, within the northern part of the site, associated with historic field boundaries –

which have been lost as a result of the intense arable land use. There are some notable mature trees within the field boundary vegetation, especially to the west of the large barns associated with Elm Tree Farm. The field and site boundaries where defined by established hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees should be, where possible, incorporated into any future designs and there is substantial scope for creation of landscape enhancements through new native hedgerow, tree and woodland planting throughout the scheme.

- 2.10. Arable land use dominates the localised landscape setting to the north and beyond Swan Lane to the east of the site with pastoral fields located to the west off Moorstock Lane. The local and wider area, around Sellindge, is characterised by irregular arable and pastoral fields broken up with established mature hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees that define the field boundaries and align the road/lanes within the immediate and local more rural landscape, within which there are also a number of small to medium sized woodland blocks present.

#### Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

- 2.11. There are a number of footpaths within the site – PRoW HE295, HE296 & HE299 – and within the immediate and local area that provide a good level of connectivity and access between the existing settlement and the adjoining and wider countryside. The existing PRoW network provides a level of connectivity between the site, immediate and local landscape to the north, south and west. However, there is the potential to enhance these routes with the provision of informal footpaths and routes throughout the any proposed public open space.

#### Landscape Related Policy

- 2.12. The Core Strategy is a long-term plan bringing together the aims and actions of the government, local councils, residents, businesses and voluntary groups, by managing land-use and developments. The Shepway Core Strategy Local Plan was adopted as part of the statutory development plan for the district in 2013.
- 2.13. The Core Strategy is supplemented by the remaining detailed guidance in 'saved' policies from the Shepway District Local Plan Review 2006.
- 2.14. Saved policies contained within the Shepway District Local Plan Review: Policies Applicable 2013 Onwards, that are considered to be of relevance include: Policy SS3: Place Shaping and Sustainable Settlements Strategy; Policy CSD4: Green Infrastructure of Natural Networks, Open Spaces and Recreation; Policy CSD9: Sellindge Strategy; Policy LR8: Provision of new and protection of existing rights of way; Policy LR9: Open space protection and provision; Policy BE16: Requirement for comprehensive landscaping schemes and Policy CO24: Strategic landscaping around key development sites.
- 2.15. In June 2007, Shepway District Council adopted the Kent Design Guide 2005/06 as a Supplementary Planning Document. The guide has been prepared as part of the Local Development Framework for Shepway.
- 2.16. The Kent Design Guide seeks to provide a starting point for good design while retaining scope for creative, individual approaches to different buildings and different areas. It aims to assist designers and others achieve high standards of design and construction by promoting a common approach to the main principles which underlie Local Planning Authorities' criteria for assessing planning applications.

- 2.17. The site is not subject to any national or local qualitative landscape designations.
- 2.18. At the time of writing the council submitted the Folkestone & Hythe Core Strategy Review to the Secretary of State on 10 March 2020 for its Examination in Public; and is the final stage of the planning making process.

#### Landscape Character

- 2.19. The Landscape Assessment of Kent – 2004 - identifies that the site is located within Landscape Character Type (LCA) – *Sellindge Plateau Farmlands*.

- 2.20. The key characteristics of the LCA are identified as:

- ***“Flat to undulating plateau farmlands on good quality soils.***
- ***Open arable landscape with pasture locally important on more undulating ground.***
- ***Small copses and gappy hedgerows on undulating ground”***

- 2.21. The assessment describes the condition of the LCA as:

***“This is a fragmented landscape with little clear pattern and many visual detractors associated with road and rail transport corridors and linear development. Agricultural buildings and fences also detract from the view. The area is predominantly covered with intensive arable farmland with very limited potential for natural habitats. The condition of rural heritage features such as tree cover is poor and built form has a high negative impact on the area. Ragstone and brick vernacular buildings are overshadowed by recent built development.”***

- 2.22. The assessment considers the landscape sensitivity of the LCA as;

***“Historic land patterns are generally obscured or have no real function in the present landscape, with the notable exception of some estate landscape to the north of the character area. The flat landscape is apparent and has long views: visibility is therefore high. The sensitivity of the area is considered to be moderate.”***

- 2.23. The assessment sets out a number of landscape actions in regard to the LCA – these are;

- ***Create a new framework for this transitional landscape which respects the open, arable use, transport corridors and adjacent small scale character area patterns.***
- ***Existing built form and settlement edges need to be defined, and the impact of the many visual detractors needs to be controlled.***
- ***This landscape presents an opportunity to create new landscape features.***
- ***Restore ecological interest to selected areas of arable land by sensitive management.***

- 2.24. At a District level three landscape character areas have been identified within the Shepway District Council Core Strategy (2013) to **“help interpret the sustainable development needs within a large and varied district, and in particular as a tool to more clearly articulate strategic proposals in context.”** The site has been identified within Character Area SS1 North Downs.



- 2.25. The North Downs Character Area aims to: ***“accommodate development outside of the AONB... without material impact on its setting.”***
- 2.26. Shepway District High Level Landscape Appraisal (HLLA) – Feb 2017 – produced by AECOM, covers the whole of the Shipway District, which is a large and diverse coastal district. The purpose of the HLLA is to inform a strategic review of the likely relative impacts of strategic level development in various locations. The HLLA is intended to inform the opportunities and constraints for growth with regard to landscape character and visual amenity, alongside other key evidence based documents, as part of a partial review of the Council’s adopted Core Strategy Local Plan. Strategic level development is defined as residential development of at least 250 houses at an assumed density of 20 units per hectare.
- 2.27. The wider landscape to the north east, east, south and west of Sellindge and the site is identified as being within a Special Landscape Area (SLA), these are covered by policy **CO4: Special Landscape Areas** – within the Shepway Local Plan Review 2006 saved policies. The assessment identifies the site, immediate area and Sellindge itself as being located within Landscape Character Area (LCA) *09 Sellindge*.
- 2.28. The key characteristics of the LCA are identified as:
- ***“Gently undulating;***
  - ***Dispersed linear settlement alongside roads;***
  - ***Mixed agricultural landscape***
  - ***Moderate tree cover from hedgerow tree belts;***
  - ***Low tranquillity; and***
  - ***Sense of enclosure”***
- 2.29. The description of the LCA is:
- “The LCA comprises a gently undulating landscape north of the M20 motorway. It is a mixed agricultural landscape with small areas of pasture located on more undulating ground and around settlement, and larger arable fields in the north and close to the M20. Fields in the area are generally bounded by hedgerows and belts of trees. There is moderate tree cover in the LCA, giving some areas a sense of enclosure. Settlement in the area is focused around Sellindge, but extends in a linear manner along roads leading out of Sellindge. Roads through the LCA include the A20 and a number of minor roads, with settlement generally dispersed along the roads. Tranquillity in the LCA is affected by the M20 to the south.”***
- 2.30. The appraisal assesses the sensitivity of each LCA as a receptor is determined by combining judgements of the landscape’s value and its susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed. The assessment gives a total score of **0** for landscape value and susceptibility of the LCA which provides an overall sensitivity of **0**. This results in the LCA having a **Medium** sensitivity, which is defined as a ***“landscape where impact on landscape character and visual amenity will not necessarily be an obstacle to strategic level development, and where suitability is likely to be determined by other sustainability or strategic environmental considerations.”***

- 2.31. While the wider LCA is considered medium, the site itself forms only a small part of this area. The site is located on lower lying landform and adjacent to the existing settlement edge that would lower the sites susceptibility to the proposed type of development and therefore would reduce the overall sensitivity of the site and the immediate setting.

#### The Visual Environment

- 2.32. An initial site visit has been undertaken and the Photographic Record is appended to this briefing note. Views of the site are relatively localised given the gently undulating topography within the site and the immediate landscape, alongside the mature vegetation structure associated with field boundaries, lanes and built form within the localised setting. As a result, views across the majority of the site are largely restricted to the site, immediate setting. There are glimpsed views possible of the site from the higher vantage points within the wider area to the north within the Kent Downs AONB, however, these are long range views with any development within the site being seen in the context of the existing settlement edge.
- 2.33. The site is partially evident when approaching Sellindge along Ashford Road from the west, however, the combination of existing built form and landform limits views over the site from approaches along Ashford Road from the south east and Swan Lane to the east. The extent of the PROW network within the site itself alongside the open nature of the site allows for publicly accessible views across much of the site when within the site (Ref viewpoints 2, 3a & b, 4a & b and 5). Beyond the site, views over the site are possible from PROW HE295 which runs to the immediate north of the site (Ref viewpoints 6), HE366 located on higher ground to the west (Ref viewpoints 11) and
- 2.34. Opportunities exist to incorporate the existing network of routes within internal public open space, which would form part of a site wide green / blue infrastructure, that also provides wildlife, biodiversity enhancements and recreational benefits. The reinforcement and enhancement of the existing mature vegetated site boundaries with new hedgerow and tree planting to the northern boundary would create a more robust and defensible green edge to the proposed development and a sensitive and sustainable new village edge that would aid the assimilation of development into the receiving views.
- 2.35. Overall given the size of the site, it is visually well enclosed from the surrounding landscape and there are clear opportunities to further enhance the degree of enclosure.

### **3 Landscape and Visual Review and Opportunities & Constraints**

- 3.1. With a development of this type and scale there is a risk of adverse landscape and visual effects if the proposals are not carefully and sympathetically designed. However, it is envisaged that the development of this site will adopt a high quality, landscape-led approach ensuring that the proposals can be integrated without significant adverse effects upon the receiving landscape character or visual environment. Refer **ASP3** Landscape Opportunities and Constraints Plan.
- 3.2. Any development within the site should incorporate the following elements:
- Retain the existing field boundary hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees within the layout, where possible, create a characteristic and robust landscape setting for the new development with re-establishing green landscape edges to the site itself and within the

proposed green / blue infrastructure which will enhance the localised setting and maintain the rural character of the roads;

- Incorporate a comprehensive scheme of landscaping utilising locally native species including:
  - Creating a landscape framework that include where possible small areas of woodland and copses;
  - Create ecological diversity; and
  - Restore historical landscape framework in key areas immediately around the remaining farming settlements.
- Minimum of 10m offsets to be established along the existing settlement boundaries, to the east and south, to provide a robust landscape buffer from the adjacent land uses.
- Limit development to the below the 70m contour within the east of the site, with open space and wildlife enhancements to provide a landscape buffer, to include native structural planting that reflects the local character and mitigate potential harm to views / the setting of Elm Tree Farm and Lees Cottages – listed buildings within the site - and the local landscape character and in views over the site.
  - Respond to and respect the listed buildings Elm Tree Farm & Lees Cottages within and adjacent to the site boundaries.
  - Respond and maintain the character of rural lanes surrounding the site to the north and west and residential properties adjacent to the site boundaries;
- Significant areas of Public Open Space located on the higher ground to the north and east of the site and within and along the site boundaries, would create an appropriate transition between the proposed development, existing settlement edge and local rural landscape;
- Create opportunities to enhance public access to the countryside and the integration of the existing PROW network within the layout and Public Open Spaces.
- Incorporate a network of publicly accessible open spaces within the Site. This would not only assist in provision of formal and informal recreation facilities but break up the built environment and assist in placemaking;
- Create new, varied habitats that are characteristic of this landscape setting. In particular, native hedgerow, hedgerow tree and woodland planting should be incorporated into the landscaping scheme to reinforce the presence of this characteristic local landscape feature and to increase connectivity between the existing habitats off site;
- Adopt a positive outward looking layout to ensure that the proposals do not appear to be turning their back on the wider setting and create an appropriate transition between the built environment and wider landscape;
- Incorporate a simple palette of materials and architectural detailing that reflect the local vernacular.

- 3.3. The assessment of landscape opportunities and constraints will feed into the emerging masterplan to ensure that a sympathetic layout that respects its landscape and visual context can be achieved.
- 3.4. The proposed masterplan should retain the key hedgerows and hedgerow trees, where possible, associated with the site and its boundaries, as well as including further additional planting to ensure a mature landscaped context is created for the development. New areas of public open space and green / blue corridors through the site should form the settings of these features enabling the reinforcement of these positive landscape components. The Landscape Opportunities and Constraints Plan (**ASP3**) identifies these key areas. It is considered that the proposed landscape treatment, when combined with the existing retained vegetation, would ensure that the proposals benefit from a high degree of physical and visual integration, with the vegetation structure reflecting the local landscape character and providing a high level of visual containment.
- 3.5. The inclusion of an organic site layout would respond to the setting and provide an enhanced settlement character, that would allow the proposals to be seen as an integrated feature within the context of the wider rural setting.

## 4 Summary

- 4.1. As set out above, the site is not subject to any qualitative landscape designations, there is an existing element of development within the site with the existing settlement edge located adjacent to eastern and southern boundaries. The gently undulating valley landform, along with mature vegetation structure that characterises the site's setting and existing built form will assist the integration of future proposed built form within the site.
- 4.2. In addition, the adoption of a sensitive, landscape-led approach to the design development of the proposals would ensure that the proposals can be successfully integrated in this location without significant adverse landscape or visual effects.
- 4.3. As part of an iterative design process the defining characteristics of the local landscape and site context will inform the proposed layout to provide a cohesive development that responds sensitively to the existing landscape character and provides localised and wider landscape enhancements.
- 4.4. The nature of the current arable uses, the extent of mature vegetation associated with the field boundaries and the existing components within the site there is a clear opportunity for landscape enhancements. A landscape strategy should look to retain these features and provide a site wider strategy that provides a greater level of connectivity with the immediate and local landscape. These enhancements would provide a robust verdant setting to the proposed development and form a characteristic settlement edge of Sellindge.
- 4.5. Views of the site are relatively localised as a result of the gently undulating topography within the site and the immediate landscape in combination with the mature vegetation structure associated with field boundaries, lanes, and built form within the localised setting. As a result, views across the majority of the site are largely restricted to the site and immediate setting. There are glimpsed views possible from the higher vantage points within the wider landscape to the north that lies within the Kent Downs AONB, however, these are long range views with any development within the site being seen in the context of the existing settlement edge.

- 4.6. The Shipway DC HLLA identifies the site as being located within LCA09, this has been assessed as having a **Medium** sensitivity to strategic development. While the wider LCA is considered medium sensitivity, the site itself forms only a small part of this area. The site is located on lower lying landform and adjacent to the existing settlement edge that would lower the sites susceptibility to the proposed type of development and therefore would reduce the overall sensitivity of the site and the immediate setting.
- 4.7. Therefore, it is considered that the site has the capacity to accommodate a sensitively designed residential development which would not give rise to significant landscape or visual effects and is in line with adopted planning policy and the landscape actions set out within the published landscape assessments. Proposed development would not be out of context and presents opportunities to improve access to the countryside and recreational facilities, enhance the local and wider landscape and improve biodiversity through habitat creation.
- 4.8. It is considered that subject to the inclusion of the landscape elements outlined above, development on the site can be accommodated in this location without detriment to the localised or wider visual amenity and that the integrity of the receiving landscape character would be preserved, with proposed landscape features contributing positively to the identified landscape character.

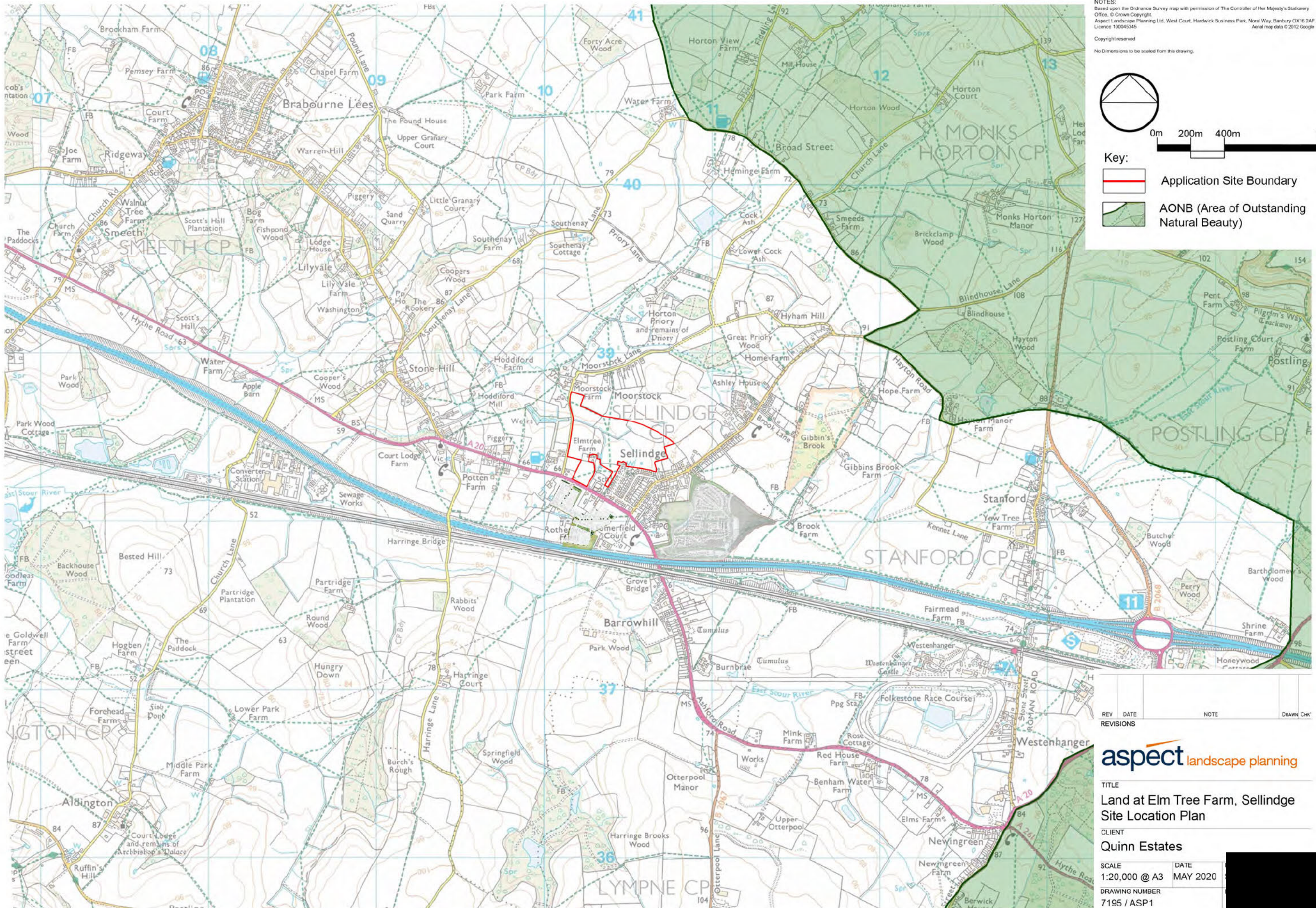
Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd

9<sup>th</sup> June 2020

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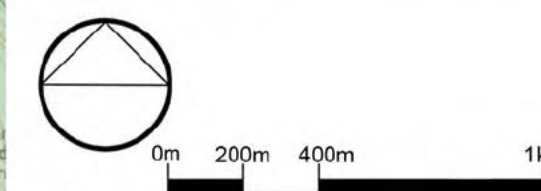
Plan ASP1 Site Location  
Plan ASP2 Site and Setting Plan  
Plan ASP3 Landscape Opportunities & Constraints  
Photographic Record





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- Key:
- Application Site Boundary
  - AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

REV	DATE	NOTE	DRAWN	CHK
REVISIONS				

**aspect landscape planning**

TITLE  
 Land at Elm Tree Farm, Sellindge  
 Site Location Plan

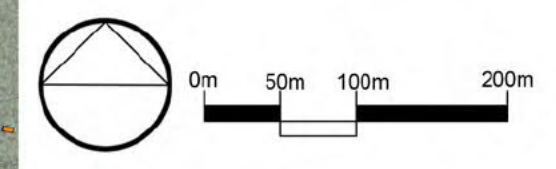
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SCALE	DATE
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7195 / ASP1	



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- Key:
-  Application Site Boundary
  -  Public Right of Way
  -  Listed Buildings



REV	DATE	NOTE	DRAWN	CHK'D
REVISIONS				

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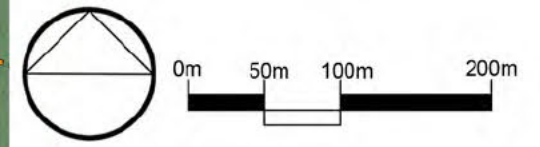
TITLE  
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 Site & Setting Plan

CLIENT  
 Quinn Estates

SCALE 1:5,000 @ A3	DATE MAY 2020
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- Key:
- Application Site Boundary.
  - Glimpsed views of the site from near surrounding areas
  - Built up urban areas providing visual enclosure of the site
  - Public Right of Way
  - M20 road corridor visually enclosing the site from the south.
  - Railway corridor.
  - Existing vegetation structure providing a high degree of visual enclosure to the site.
  - Areas with potential for enhanced planting to provide a substantial buffer to the development.
  - Areas for Enhancement
  - Potential views of the listed Farmhouse from public vantage points
  - Contours

Retain area as public open space, within which runs the existing footpath and proposed additional landscape planting to provide a soft verdant edge to the wider development.

Set development back from the northern boundary beyond an area of public open space. The northern boundary and open space to be defined by native hedgerow, tree and woodland planting to provide a soft landscape buffer to the site and establish a robust settlement boundary that reflects the wider edge to Sellindge.

Retain existing mature hedgerow along road to maintain character

Built form set back from southern boundary with a green landscape buffer established, to include new native hedgerow and tree planting that will enhance the site boundary and provide a degree of separation from the adjacent residential development.

Buffer / public open space land adjacent to Lees Cottage to preserve a level of openness



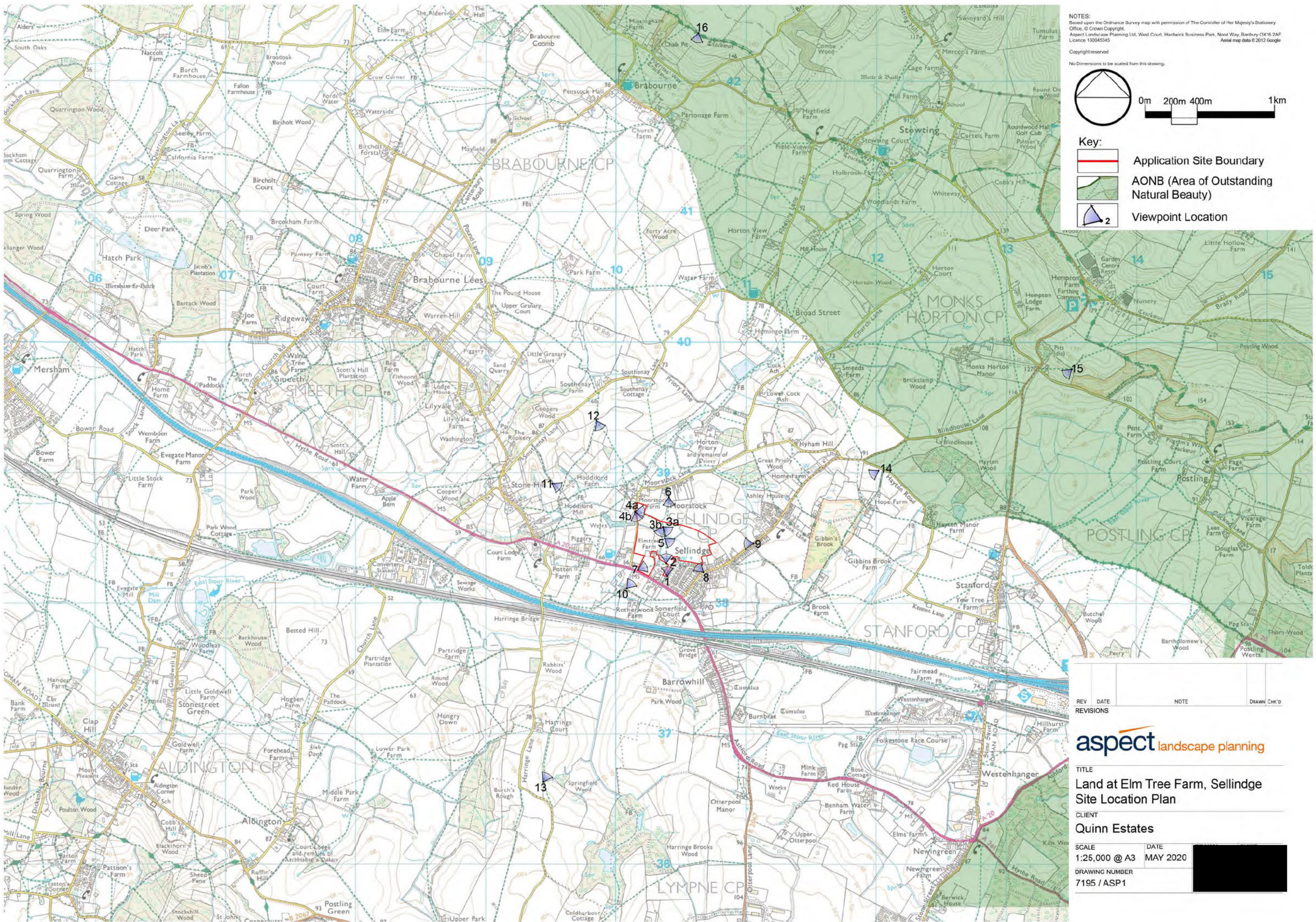
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TITLE  
 Main Road, Sellindge  
 Opportunities & Constraints Plan

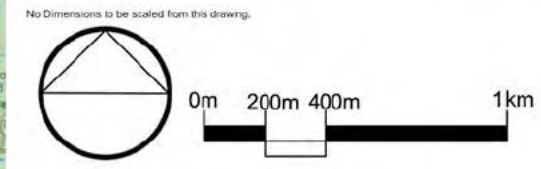
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

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- Key:
-  Application Site Boundary
  -  AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
  -  Viewpoint Location

REV	DATE	NOTE	DRAWN	CHK'D
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**aspect landscape planning**

TITLE  
**Land at Elm Tree Farm, Sellindge**  
 Site Location Plan

CLIENT  
**Quinn Estates**

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 MAY 2020

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**Viewpoint 1**



**Viewpoint 2**





**Viewpoint 3a**



**Viewpoint 3b**





**Viewpoint 4a**



**Viewpoint 4b**





**Viewpoint 5**



**Viewpoint 6**





**Viewpoint 7**



**Viewpoint 8**



Approximate extent of site  
beyond intervening vegetation



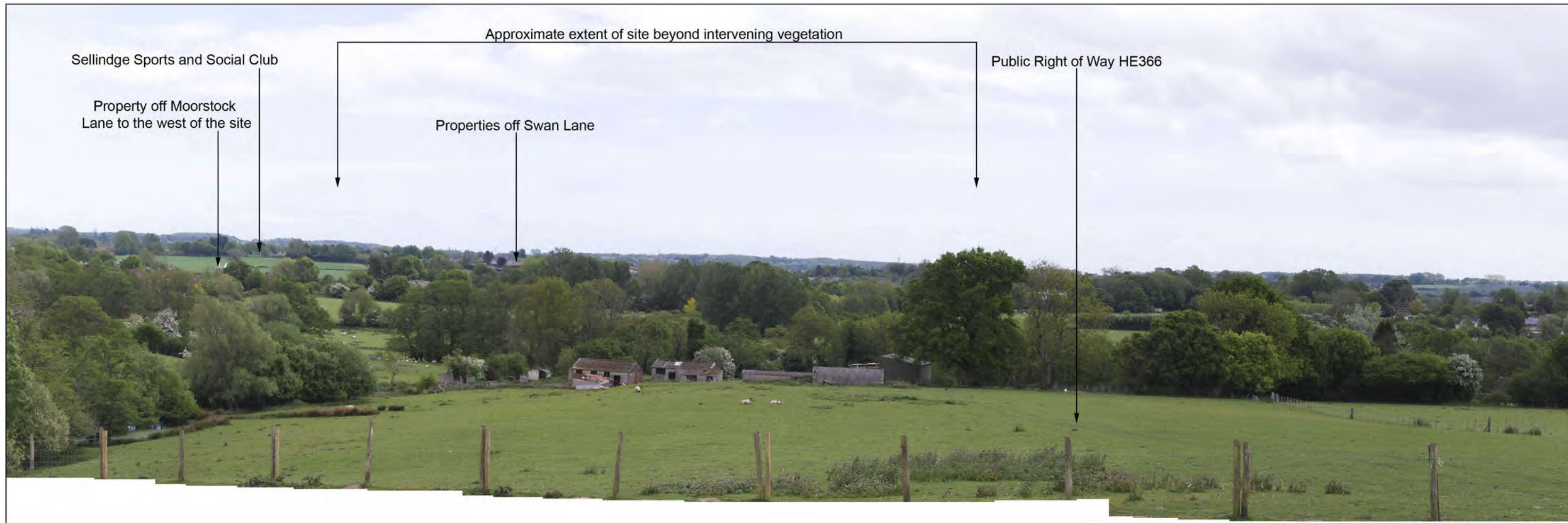
**Viewpoint 9**

Emerging residential development  
to the south of Ashford Road.

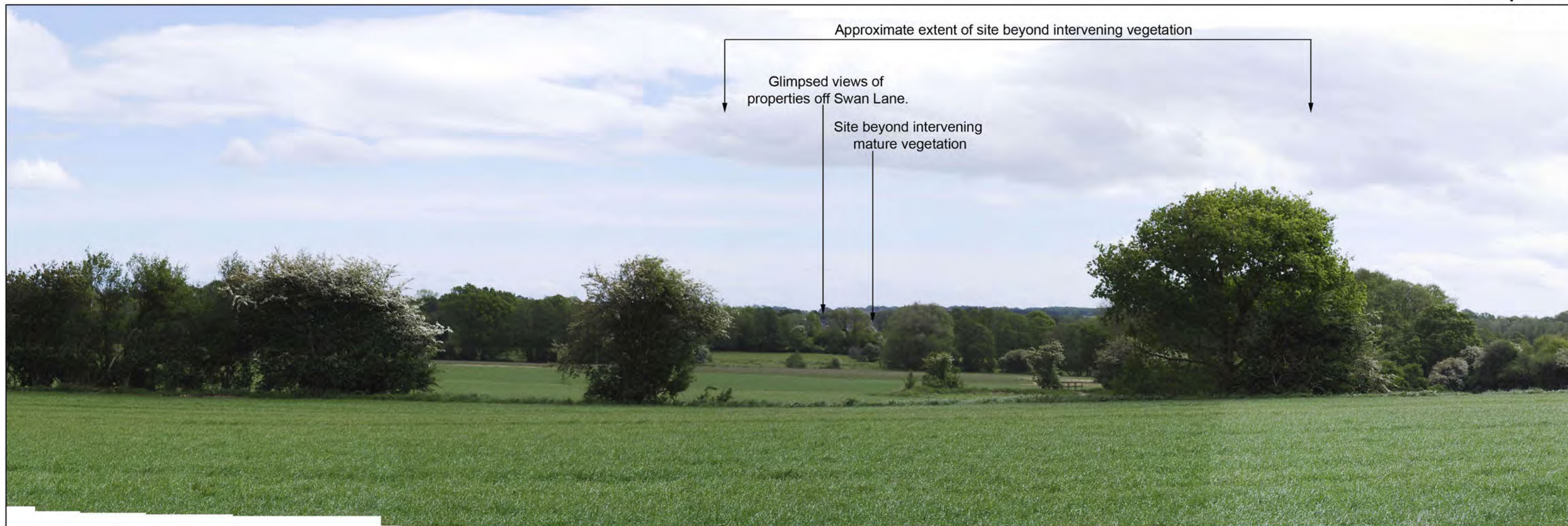


**Viewpoint 10**



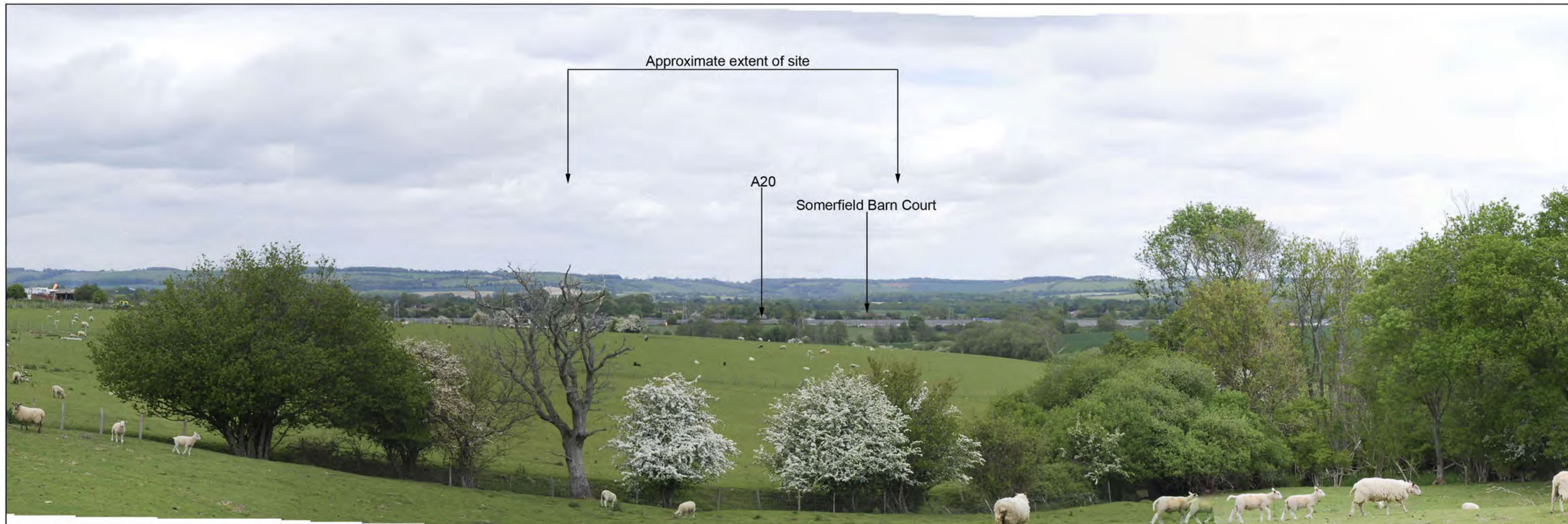


**Viewpoint 11**



**Viewpoint 12**



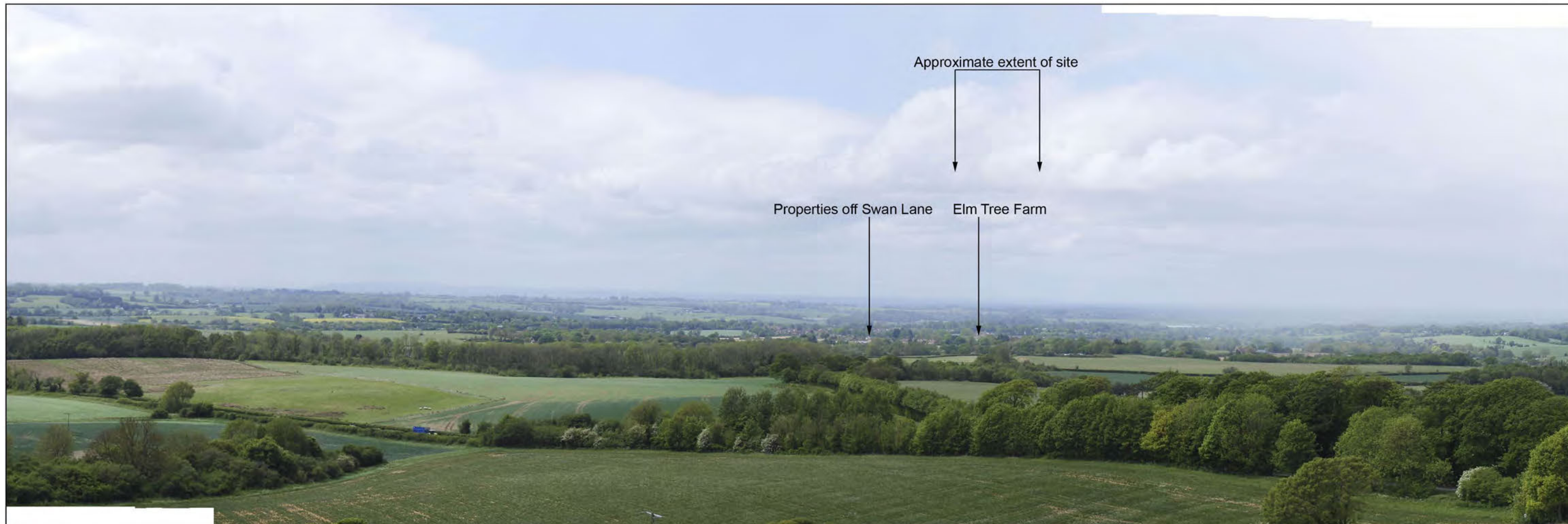


**Viewpoint 13**



**Viewpoint 14**





**Viewpoint 15**



**Viewpoint 16**