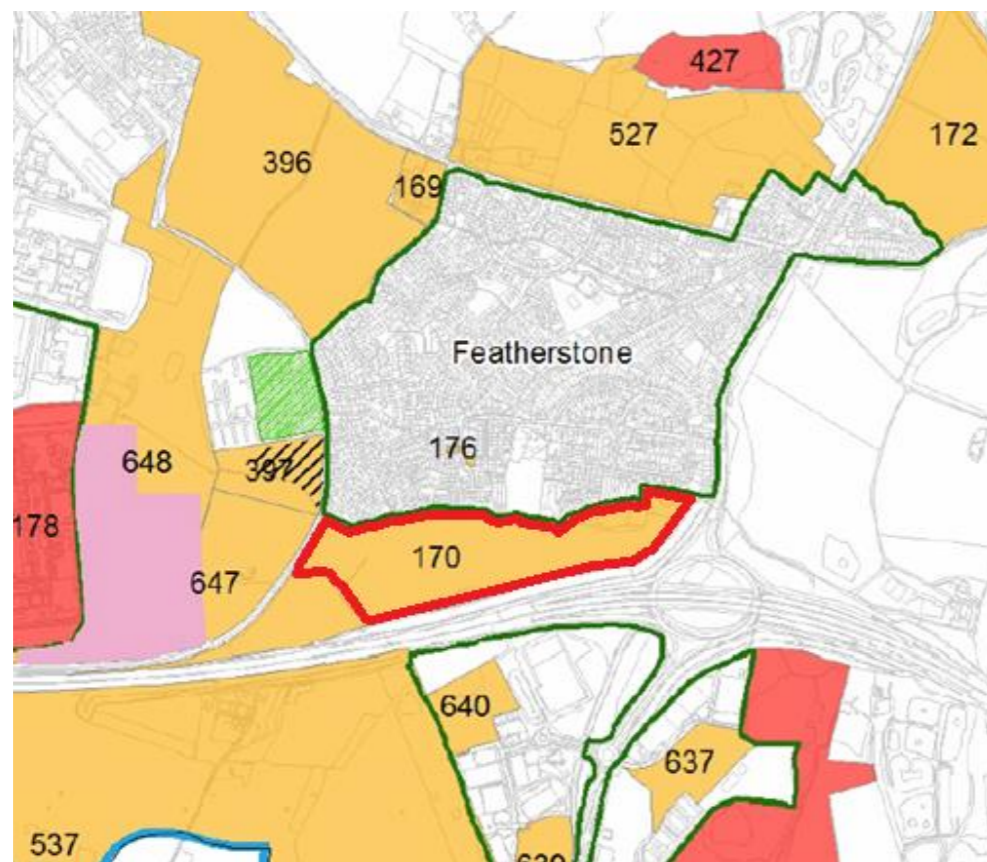


1.0 INTRODUCTION





Background

1.1 Pleydell Smithyman Limited has been appointed by Persimmon Homes (West Midlands) to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and Green Belt assessment of land on the southern edge of Featherstone. The 'Site' is outlined in red within Parcel 170 from the SHELAA on Plate 1 below. The purpose of this report is to accompany representations to South Staffordshire Council to promote the parcel for allocation as part of the Local Development Plan Review.

Plate 1: Extract of SHELAA 2018 (not to scale)



Key: SHELAA 2018 – RAG Score

-  Housing Allocation
-  Housing Safeguarded Land
-  2 - RAG score: Potentially suitable / not currently developable
-  1 - RAG score: Not suitable

1.2 The Site is currently situated in Green Belt (See **Figure 1** overleaf) and this report considers the impact of releasing the Site from Green Belt in terms of its functions and purposes. The assessment also undertakes an appraisal of the wider context in order to establish the likely indirect effects of development upon landscape character and visual amenity.

1.3 The Site and surrounding landscape context are illustrated on **Figure 1** overleaf and **Plate 2** below. The Site adjoins the southern edge of Featherstone and is located between Brookhouse Lane to the west and the A460 Cannock Road to the east. The M54 and eastbound junction 1 slip road adjoins the Site to the south.

Plate 2: Site Location (not to scale)



Scope of Work

- 1.4 The following key tasks have been undertaken:
- a) A review of the landscape planning policy context for the Site;
 - b) A desktop study and web search of relevant background documents and maps, including reviews of aerial photographs, Local Authority publications and landscape character assessments.

- c) Collated information about any relevant landscape and heritage designations;
- d) A field assessment of local Site circumstances including a photographic survey of the character and visual context of the Site and its surroundings during good weather conditions for LVIA photography in February 2020; and
- e) An analysis of the likely landscape and visual effects arising from allocation of the Site and the implications for the Green Belt.

Approach

1.5 Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) is comprised of a study of two separate but inter-linked components:

- Landscape character – which is the physical make up and condition of the landscape itself. Landscape character arises from a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of physical and social elements, aesthetic factors and perceptual aspects; and
- Visual amenity – which is the way in which the Site is seen and appreciated; views to and from the Site, their direction, character and sensitivity to change.

1.6 This appraisal does not represent a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of a specific development proposal, however it does take into account relevant principles contained in the following guidance, in order to present a transparent and accurate evidence base.

- ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ (GLVIA, 3rd edition) 2013; and
- Photography and photomontage in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Technical Guidance Note 06/19 (The Landscape Institute, 2019).

1.7 This Appraisal has been carried out by a Chartered Landscape Architect with over 20 years’ experience that includes many schemes in open countryside, settlement fringe locations and Green Belt.

2.0 LANDSCAPE POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) February 2019

2.1 The sections most relevant to design and landscape and visual matters are summarised below.

2.2 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF describes how strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for, among

other elements, the *‘(d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.’*

2.3 Section 12 of the NPPF details the planning policies and decisions should support the creation of high quality buildings and places. Paragraph 125 states *‘... design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics.’*

2.4 Paragraph 127 states that planning policies and decisions, should ensure that developments, amongst others:

- *‘will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and effective landscaping;*
- *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change...’*

2.5 In Section 13 ‘Protecting Green Belt Land’ paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that the essential character of Green Belts is their openness and their permanence, with the fundamental aim of preventing urban sprawl. Paragraph 134 sets out the five purposes which Green Belt should serve:

- *‘to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;*
- and
- *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.’*

2.6 Paragraphs 136 to 139 outline the national planning policy relating to the definition of Green Belt boundaries. Paragraph 136 states that,

‘Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans...’.

2.7 Paragraph 138 sets out what considerations should be taken into account when Green Belt boundaries are drawn up or reviewed. The paragraph states that *'where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.'*

(underlined: our added emphasis)

2.8 Paragraph 139 outlines the elements that should be considered when defining Green Belt boundaries. Paragraph 139 (f) states that plans should, *'define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.'*

2.9 Section 15 of the NPPF covers the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 170 states that the planning system should recognise the, *'b)...intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'*

Planning Practice Guidance: Green Belt (July 2019)

2.10 It is stated:

'Where it has been demonstrated that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, strategic policy-making authorities should set out policies for compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land. These may be informed by supporting evidence of landscape, biodiversity or recreational needs and opportunities including those set out in local strategies, and could for instance include:

- *new or enhanced green infrastructure;*
- *woodland planting;*
- *landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal);*
- *improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital;*
- *new or enhanced walking and cycle routes; and*
- *improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision.*

Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment (July 2019)

2.11 It is stated that *'Green infrastructure can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and 'blue infrastructure' such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies'.*

The guidance goes on to state that:

'Green infrastructure opportunities and requirements need to be considered at the earliest stages of development proposals, as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision, and taking into account existing natural assets and the most suitable locations and types of new provision.'

South Staffordshire Core Strategy (adopted December 2012)

2.12 The Core Strategy Plan Policies that are relevant to landscape and visual matters are summarised below.

Strategic Objective 1 To protect and maintain the Green Belt and Open Countryside in order to sustain the distinctive character of South Staffordshire.

Strategic Objective 2 To retain and reinforce the current pattern of villages across South Staffordshire, and in particular protect and retain the important strategic gaps between existing settlements in order to prevent the coalescence of settlements.

Strategic Objective 6 To ensure that all new development is sustainable, enabling people to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

Strategic Objective 8 To ensure the delivery of a minimum of 644 decent homes for members of the community including the provision of affordable homes which matches in type, tenure and size the needs of the residents of South Staffordshire and to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Strategic Objective 9 To meet local housing and employment needs, having regard to the Spatial Strategy for South Staffordshire, in a way that enables the existing villages within South Staffordshire to develop in a sustainable way that secures their future viability and prosperity, and supports the regeneration of rural communities and communities in neighbouring urban areas.

Strategic Objective 10 To support the urban regeneration of the Black Country Major Urban Area by distributing new housing and employment growth within South Staffordshire in a way that supports existing local communities and in particular discourages out-migration from the Black Country Major Urban Area.

Strategic Objective 14 To adopt a design-led approach to all new development to ensure that the distinctive character of the villages of South Staffordshire is maintained and enhanced and that attractive, well designed and safe places are created.

3.0 LANDSCAPE BASELINE

National Landscape Character Assessment

3.1 In 2005, the “Countryside Character Areas” identified and defined by the Countryside Agency were combined with the “Natural Areas” identified and defined by English Nature to form The National Character Areas Map, dividing England into 159 National Character Areas (NCAs), each of which is distinctive and has a unique ‘sense of place’. The map was subsequently revised by Natural England in 2012.

3.2 The geographical extent of NCAs and their accompanying descriptions form the broad national baseline for Landscape Character Assessment in England, informing further detailed assessment at a Regional, County and Local level. In this case the Site lies on the boundary between the Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau (NCA 66) to the west and the Cannock Chase and Cank Wood (NCA 67) to the east.

3.3 The Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau (NCA 66) is described, outside the urban areas as a plateau with an undulating landscape with large, open arable fields punctuated by areas of lowland heathland, acid grassland and small wooded streamside dells, locally known as dingles. Ridges, often tree lined, follow the variations in geological formations,

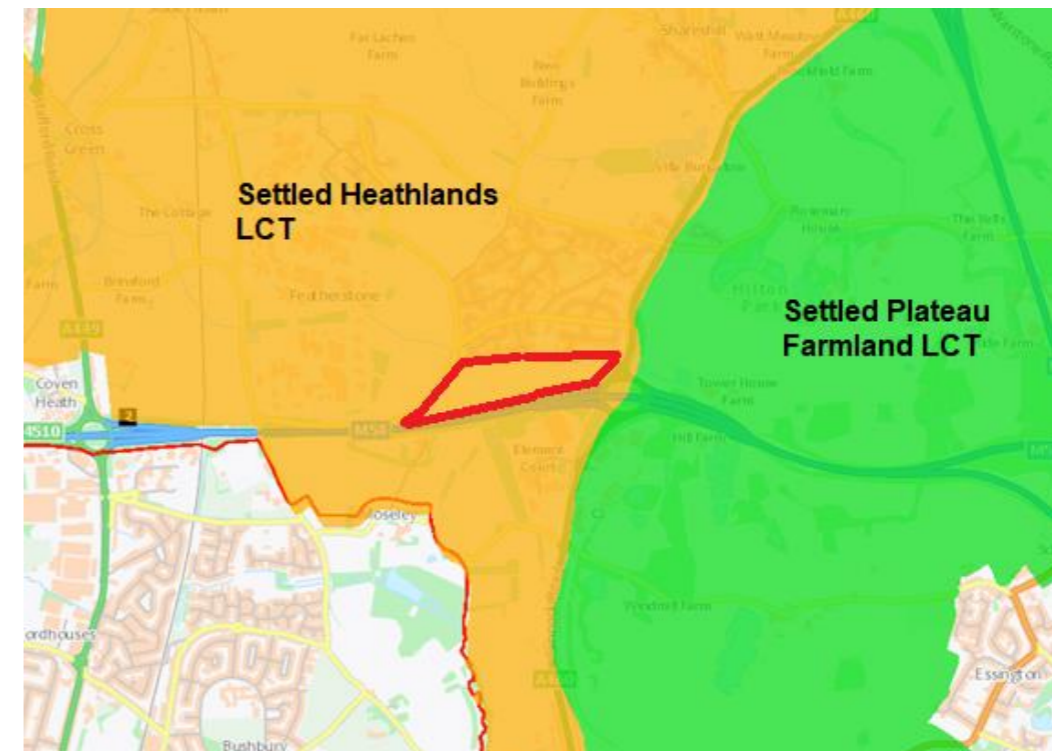
3.4 The Cannock Chase and Cank Wood (NCA 67) is described as containing canals as significant features and some major transport routes crossing the NCA. The current landscape is described as being extremely varied and including extensive areas of urban development predominantly in the south of the NCA.

Local Level Landscape Character Assessment

3.5 The Staffordshire Planning for Landscape Change and Character Assessment was adopted on 10 May 2001 as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Structure Plan 1996 – 2011. Although this plan has since been revoked, regard is still given as supplementary planning guidance. The extract at **Plate 3** opposite indicates the location of the

Site in relation to different landscape character type (LCTs). The Site is located within the LCT classified as ‘Settled Heathlands’. In addition, The eastern boundary of the Site is adjacent to the boundary of the ‘Settled Plateau Farmland’ LCT.

Plate 3: Extract of landscape character types in Staffordshire (not to scale)



3.6 The key characteristics of the ‘Settled Heathlands’ Landscape Character Type (LCT) where the Site is located and extending west and north of the Site, are summarised below with the most relevant key characteristics to the Site and surrounding area underlined:

- *Landscape of gently rolling landform with more pronounced slopes and undulations in places, allowing medium and long distance views across to urban edges or surrounding landscapes.*
- *The landcover pattern is no longer sufficiently strong to control views, for the most part consisting of a deteriorating irregular pattern of hedged fields with sparse, regularly spaced stag-headed hedgerow oaks and occasional ash.*
- *Hedgerows have generally deteriorated to become very gappy, or collections of individual overgrown thorns, or are missing altogether with large amounts of fencing.*
- *Areas where the field pattern is more intact and the landscape remains at a smaller scale, with hedgerow trees coalescing in the valleys to give a more wooded feel.*

- *The isolated presence of woodlands within the landscape has a strong localised effect on the visual quality of the area, with narrow broadleaved belts, ancient woodlands and estate plantations limiting views.*
- *The proximity of the urban edge strongly influences the general character of the landscape.*
- *Some areas retain a peaceful, strongly rural character of clustered farmsteads and roadside cottages despite that proximity, whilst others are busy, noisy areas, dissected by major transport corridors, railways, quarries and power lines which, associated with a rapid decline in the maintenance of the landscape, are resulting in a disjointed, neglected character.*
- *A network of winding ancient lanes makes the area readily accessible and subjected to commuter pressures. This, combined with encroachment of housing and industry urbanises the general character with deterioration of landscape quality most noticeable at the immediate urban fringe.*

(underlined: our added emphasis)

Landscape Sensitivity Review – South Staffordshire Council (2015)

- 3.7 The document was prepared to assist the Council in making decisions on which sites were to be taken forward into a Site Allocations Document (SAD). Natural England (2014) defines landscape sensitivity as the extent to which a landscape can accept change of a particular type (in this case new residential development) without unacceptable adverse effects on its character.
- 3.8 Land cover Parcels (LCP) were identified and a desktop study was made on sensitivity based on the following factors and an overall, high, medium or low rating was determined following assessment in the field.
- Designations;
 - Landscape characteristics;
 - Landcover;
 - Key views and intervisibility;
 - Skylines;
 - Tranquility;

- Visual and functional relationships;
- The nature of the settlement edge; and
- Receptors

- 3.9 A full explanation of the criteria is contained in the published document and the sensitivity definitions are reproduced below.

High

Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the LCP are very vulnerable to change and/or its intrinsic values are high and the LCP is unable to accommodate housing development without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very low.

Medium

Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the LCP are susceptible to change and/or its intrinsic values are moderate but the LCP has some potential to accommodate housing development in some situations without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are intermediate

Low

Landscape and/or visual characteristics of the LCP are degraded and/or its intrinsic values are low and the LCP can accommodate housing development without significant character change or adverse effects. Thresholds for significant change are very high.

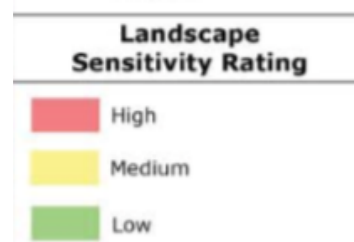
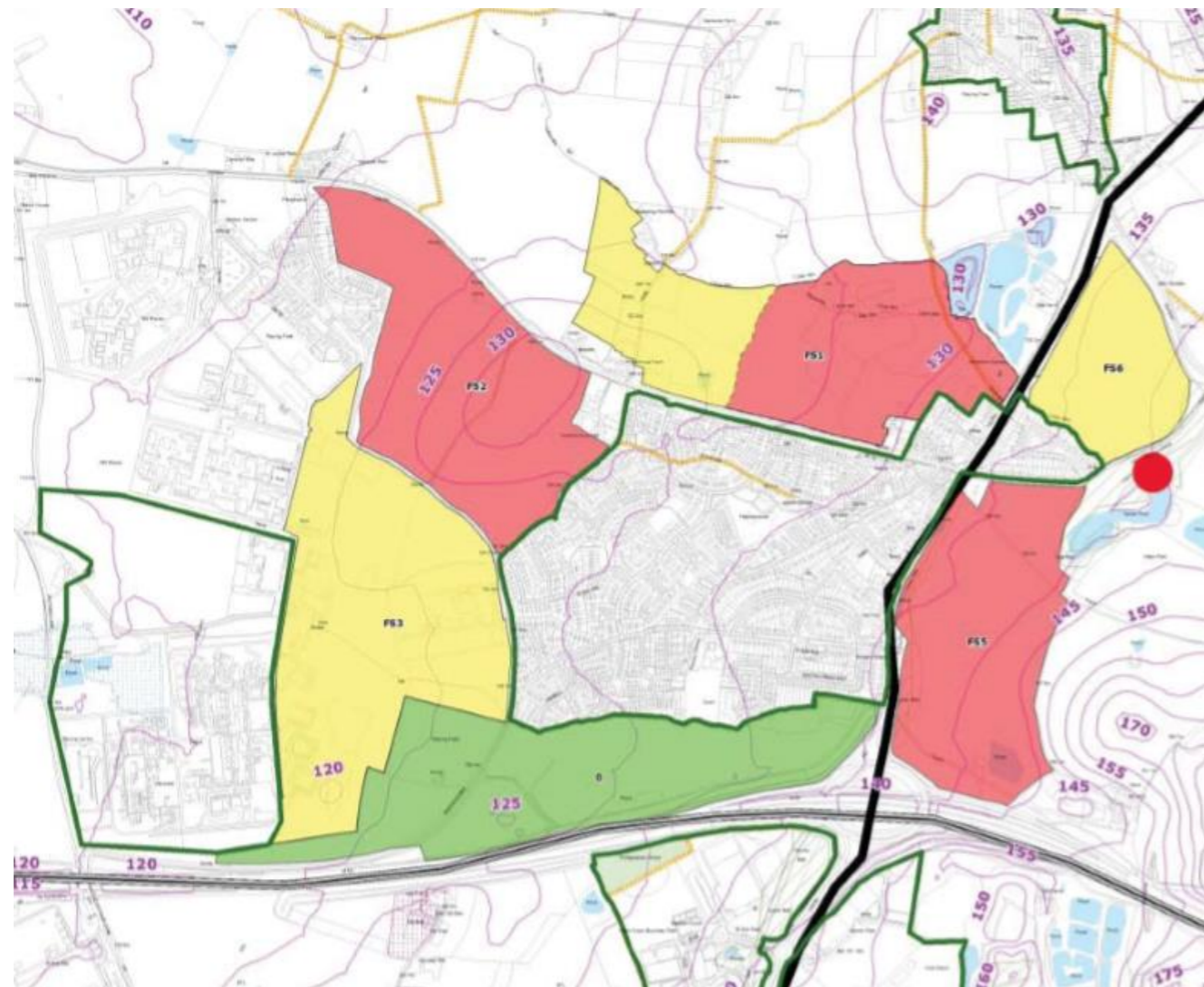
- 3.10 The Site falls entirely within Parcel FS5 of the Sensitivity Study with a smaller area extending west to cover the fields on the opposite side of Brookhouse Lane (see **Plate 4** overleaf). The landscape sensitivity to housing is assessed as Low, noting that all other land surrounding the settlement of Featherstone is rated at a Medium or High sensitivity. The evaluation justification states:

‘Well-screened from M54 by well-vegetated embankment. Urban influences form settlement edge and therefore relates well to the urban area. Development would be a logical extension to the settlement.’

In terms of the potential for mitigation and improvement of the settlement edge it is stated:

‘Any development should be concentrated to the east of Brookhouse Lane and would need to incorporate additional planting against the M54 corridor. Take account of Public Open Space proposal.’

Plate 4: Extract of Landscape Sensitivity Review (not to scale)



Landscape Character Assessment: review in the field

- 3.11 Published assessments are necessarily broad brush as they cover significant tracts of land. The particular landscape characteristics of a Site and relationship to surrounding context require review in the field.
- 3.12 The majority of the Site comprises a single large arable field with a smaller arable field located at the western end of the Site adjacent to East Road/Brookhouse Lane.

- 3.13 The Site is relatively flat ground that very gently slopes from east to west between 136m AOD to 121m AOD at a gentle 1:60 gradient. There is a similar fall from south to north across the Site with land draining into a minor watercourse along the northern boundary of the Site. Within the wider Study Area, the landform gently falls to the west in the vicinity of Featherstone prison and beyond the motorway embankment to the south the land rises by several metres across the Hilton Cross Business Park. To the north, the levels within the settlement of Featherstone are similar to the Site itself, whilst land to the east rises within Hilton Park to a high point of 172m AOD near Tower House Farm.
- 3.14 The full length of the southern boundary adjoins the M54 and M54 slip-road and comprises a belt of native deciduous woodland planting, typically 40m in depth that has been planted on an earth embankment several metres above the carriageway and Site. The embankment and planting also follows the western boundary of the Site where it lies adjacent to the junction 1 roundabout and the A460 Cannock Road.
- 3.15 To the north of the Site the boundary adjoins the modern housing estates of Featherstone and the grounds of the primary school. An intermittent strip of native tree planting follows a minor watercourse and at the northeastern end of the Site there is an area of outside storage and unauthorised traveller site and an uncultivated area of ground that has become invaded by scrub.
- 3.16 The western end of the Site adjoins East Road and Brookhouse Lane which are flanked by clipped hedgerows and frequent trees. The southwestern end of Parcel 170, comprising a triangular shaped arable field is outside the boundary of the Site and proposed Masterplan. Whilst this land is a natural part of the overall site it has been excluded from the proposed Masterplan purely because it is being acquired by Highways England as part of the M54 to M6 link road scheme.
- 3.17 The Site has a close visual and physical relationship to the adjoining settlement of Featherstone and views to the wider landscape to the south and east are restricted by mature woodland planting along the motorway embankment. Beyond Brookhouse Lane to the west there are medium-scale arable fields and blocks of coniferous woodland are located near the perimeter of Featherstone prison.
- 3.18 In summary, the field survey confirms that the landscape character local to the Site complies with the more general description for the wider area published in the Staffordshire Planning for Landscape Change and Character Assessment. However, residential development and the nearby major road corridors and prison have an important urbanising influence on local landscape character.

4.0 VISUAL BASELINE

Introduction

4.1 Photoviewpoints have been selected to best represent a range of representative views available from public vantage points towards the Site. It is recognised that there is always the potential to include more views; however the number and distribution has been selected to be representative of the range of views available where clear views of the Site or towards the Site boundary could be experienced. The viewpoints are summarised in **Table 1** opposite.

4.2 Views A to C were taken from within the Site to illustrate the relationship to the surrounding context (from locations without public access). Views 1 to 4 were taken outside the Site and are publicly accessible.

Views from the South

4.3 There are no public views from the south of the Site. The views taken within the Site and along the southern boundary illustrate the close visual relationship between the existing housing on the edge of Featherstone and the Site (see **Photoviewpoints A and C**).

Views from the North

4.4 The southern boundary of the Site abuts the wooded embankment of the M54 and motorway slip-road and visibility of vehicles on the route is almost fully restricted, even in winter, which restricts potential intervisibility between the Site and the edge of Wolverhampton. **Photoviewpoint B** illustrates views from the northern edge of the Site adjacent to the existing built up edge of Featherstone.

Views from the West

4.5 Brookhouse Lane passes the western boundary of the Site and there are clear views for road users of the built up edge of Featherstone with the modern estate housing seen in-between and behind the intermittent planting along the watercourse that defines the northern boundary of the Site (**Photoviewpoint 1 – part 1**). The southwestern boundary of the Site at this location is defined by a mature hedgerow either side of White Houses Lane (**Photoviewpoint 1 – part 2**), noting the route is currently overgrown and impassable.

4.6 Road users travelling from the edge of Featherstone experience the Site in the context of the nearby residential development (**Photoviewpoint 2 – part 1**). A low clipped native hedge of intermittent character defines the western boundary of the Site beyond which the mature planting along White Houses Lane defines the southwest boundary and views beyond the

southern boundary are curtailed by woodland planting along the motorway embankment (**Photoviewpoint 2 – part 2**).

Views from the East

4.7 The Site is screened by existing housing fronting the A460 Cannock Road, on the approach to Junction 1 of the M54 (see **Photoviewpoint 3**). Approaching Featherstone from Junction 1 an embankment with established tree cover prevents views into the Site (see **Photoviewpoint 4**).

Table 1: Representative Photoviewpoints

VP No.	Location	Distance / direction to the Site	Reason for selection.
Views within the Site (currently not accessible to the public)			
A	View northwards to western end of Site from southern site boundary	0m north	Illustrates the close visual connection between the Site and established residential development north of the Site
B	View southwards from northern boundary of Site	0m south	Illustrates the density of planting along the southern boundary with no views to the wider landscape, even in winter
C	View westwards and northwards from southern edge of Site	0m north	Illustrates the limited views to the wider countryside to the west and close visual connection to established residential development north of the Site
Views outside the Site (publicly accessible)			
1	View north-eastwards from Brookhouse Lane	>10m	Typical view of Site experienced by road users approaching Featherstone from Brookhouse Lane
2	View south-eastwards from East Road	>10m	Typical view of Site experienced by road users leaving Featherstone on East Road (merges into Brookhouse Lane).
3	View south-westwards from Cannock Road (A460)	50m	View approaching junction 1 of the M54 near the proposed bus/emergency access at the eastern end of the Site with properties, embankment and tree cover restricting views of Site
4	View westwards from Cannock Road (A460) near J1 of M54	75m	View approaching Featherstone from junction 1 of the M54 with embankment preventing views into the Site

5.0 MASTERPLAN

Built Elements / Layout / Rationale

5.1 The outline masterplan (see extract at **Plate 5** opposite) has been landscape led and builds upon the constraints and opportunities identified as part of the technical baseline analysis including:

- Transport;
- Landscape and Visual;
- Ecology; and
- Technical constraints including noise and the location of the high pressure oil pipeline and associated easements that passes through the Site.

5.2 The indicative scheme would deliver approximately 156 units over 4.86 hectares of net developable area at a net density of ~32 dwellings per hectare. The density is comparable with the existing housing estates adjacent to the northern boundary of the Site that accommodate a variety of detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings (within the development blocks the average plot size is 250m²). The built development would not exceed 2 storey's in height and would be contained within 10 residential blocks that would accommodate a mix of house types and tenures. Further details are provided in the vision document accompanying the submission.

5.3 The principal access would be created onto East Road/Brookhouse Lane and the spine road that passes through the Site would accommodate buses and a footpath/cycle route. The highway route connecting to Cannock Road (A460) would be emergency only and may also accommodate a bus gate, depending on the preference of local operators. Potential footpath links connecting the development to the existing settlement of Featherstone have been identified

5.4 An indicative area for attenuation is illustrated based on analysis on site topography, however the outline masterplan would have the capacity to accommodate attenuation elsewhere if required and sustainable urban drainage features including linear swales that are dry most of the year could be accommodated within incidental open space close to the development blocks and/or within the linear country park.

5.5 The linear country park comprises an area of 4.84 hectares, which is equivalent to the net developable area. The outline Masterplan illustrates three play areas comprising a central Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) and two Local Areas for Play (LAP), although the final

requirements would be subject to consultation with the Local Planning Authority. No formal sports provision is planned on site with a financial contribution made to provision or enhancement of off-site facilities if necessary.

Plate 5: Extract of Proposed Masterplan (update with final version – also see separate Plan for full details – Ref).



Landscape Proposals

5.6 Existing trees and hedgerows bordering the Site that are assessed to be in good health would be retained apart from a small section of clipped hedgerow that would be removed to accommodate the access onto East Road/Brookhouse Lane. The Masterplan has allowed sufficient stand-offs from proposed new development that in all cases extends well beyond the canopies of existing planting and will allow sufficient space for future growth. Any planning application would be accompanied by a tree survey to BS 5837 to identify the precise root protection areas required.

5.7 The principal landcover of the linear country park would be permanent grassland, with informal groups of native trees and opportunities for biodiversity enhancements including wildflower meadows. A high pressure gas main passes east-west through the Site and it is understood that associated easements would need to remain free of tree planting as well as built development.

6.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

Landscape Features

- 6.1 The Site comprises arable fields with the main landscape features including established hedgerows and woodland belts confined to the site boundaries and along watercourses. An area of overgrown scrub adjacent to the built up edge of Featherstone lies in the northeast corner of the Site. The masterplan would retain and sensitively incorporate the established field boundary vegetation into the layout and this would ensure that new housing would be well integrated into the wider landscape context. The overgrown scrub at the north-eastern corner of the Site would be removed together with a limited stretch of the low clipped hedgerow flanking East Road/Brookhouse Lane. It is anticipated that a native hedgerow could be reinstated behind the visibility splays of any new junction.
- 6.2 Significant new tree planting is proposed as part of the Masterplan as part of an informal linear country park between the spine road and the wooded embankment. Extensive areas of wildflower meadow would have ecological and amenity benefits greater on balance than the arable field they would replace. The new Green Belt boundary would be defined by the spine road and associated avenue planting with the new country park remaining in the Green Belt.

Landscape Character

- 6.3 As set out in the baseline section, the site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The Site is well related to the urban edge of Featherstone and would be contained by the vegetated roads corridors of East Road/Brookhouse Lane to the west and Cannock Road to the east. It is predicted that the majority of the Site's existing tree and hedgerow vegetation could be retained and incorporated into enhanced green infrastructure corridors as part of a sensitively designed layout. The masterplan would allow for a significant tract of land to be established as a linear country park with tangible amenity and biodiversity enhancement within the Green Belt.
- 6.4 In summary, the landscape led masterplan could deliver a scheme that could be accommodated on the Site without resulting in material harm to the wider landscape character.

Visual Amenity

- 6.5 As described in the baseline section of the report there is currently no public access to the Site and very limited public views from a short section of East Road/Brookhouse Lane to the west and restricted views of the access to the outside storage/unauthorised traveller site from Cannock Road to the east. Views from private dwellings within the modern housing estate on

the edge of Featherstone to the north are varied in nature ranging from open views at the western end of the Site to more restricted views towards the east, where planting along the water course and an area of scrub restrict intervisibility.

Views from the South

- 6.6 There are no public views from the south of the Site as the wooded embankment to the M54 restricts visibility.

Views from the North

- 6.7 At the western end of the Site there would be views of new housing from the southern end of the cul-de-sac of Penderell Close, however the majority of dwellings are orientated gable end to the Site. Even where direct views are available appropriate privacy distances to new development would be comfortably maintained and there would be opportunities for reinforcement planting along the site boundary where appropriate.
- 6.8 Views from the central part of the site include properties that lie close to the boundary off Whilmot Close where gable ends and the front of several properties face towards the Site. The rear of dwellings on the southern edge of Brook House Close face the Site, however ground floor views of the proposed development, where sensitivity to change is usually greatest, are typically restricted by retained tree planting along the watercourse.
- 6.9 Rear and side elevation views from South View Close, include retirement housing and the visibility of new built development on the Site would be restricted by tree planting along the watercourse. Views from the rear of dwellings on South Crescent include properties with long gardens that have mature tree cover restricting ground levels views of built development on the Site. Properties further to the east on South Crescent that back onto the current hardstanding and unauthorised traveller site would have views of new dwellings partially restricted by planting to rear garden boundaries.

Views from the West

- 6.10 Brookhouse Lane/East Road passes the eastern boundary of the Site. Currently there are clear views of the built up edge of Featherstone with modern estate housing seen in-between and behind the intermittent planting along the watercourse that defines the northern boundary of the Site. For a short section of the route on the approach to the settlement, there would be views of the proposed access road with new housing set back into the Site and visibility partially restricted by the retained roadside hedgerow and new tree planting.

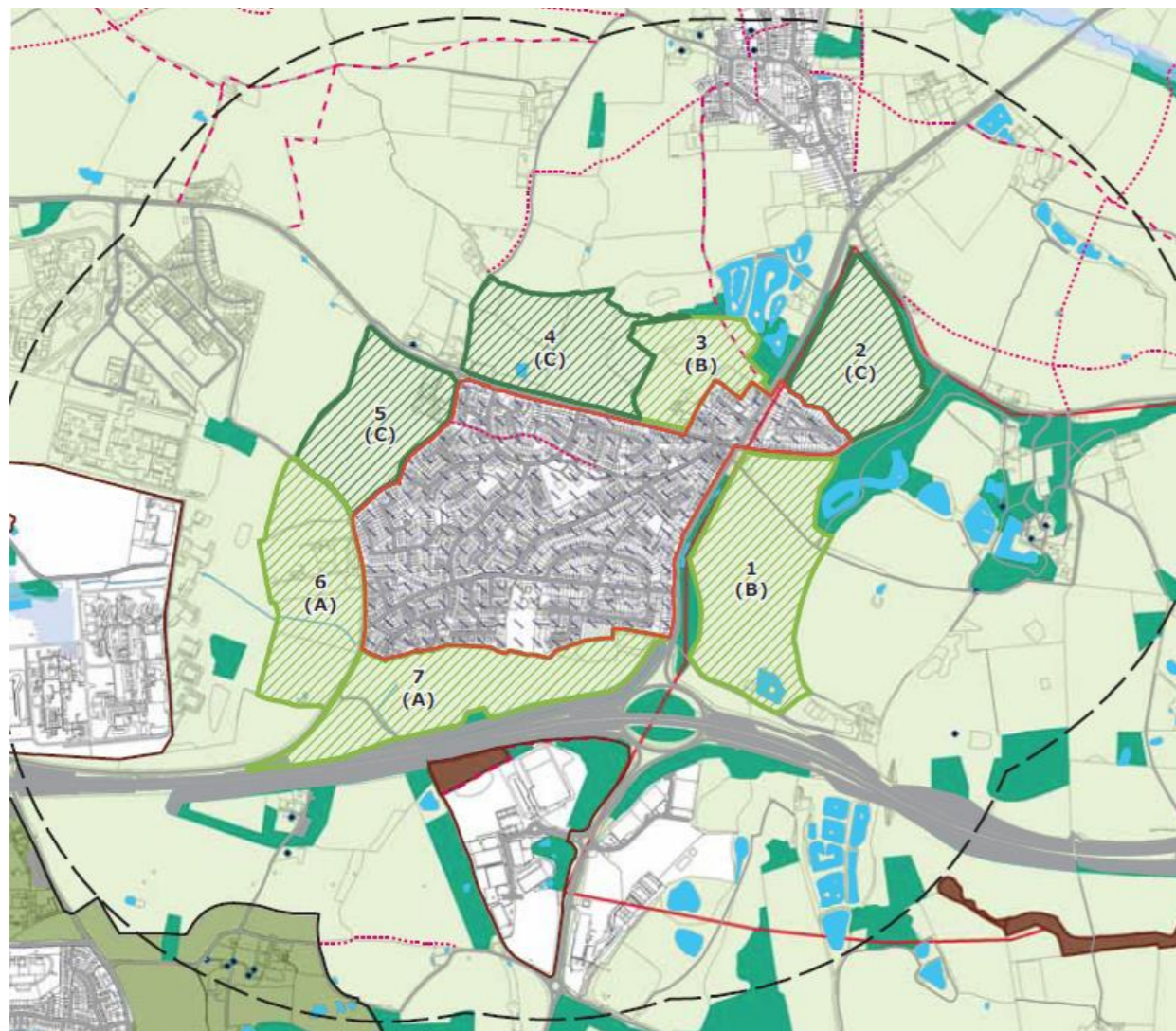
Views from the East

- 6.11 The Site is screened by existing housing fronting the A460 Cannock Road and the wooded embankment to Junction 1 of the M54. There would be fleeting views of the emergency access /footpath cycle route and a glimpse of built development at the northwestern end of the Site which would represent a negligible impact.




7.0 IMPACT OF RELEASING THE SITE FROM THE GREEN BELT

- 7.1 The South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review Method Statement was prepared by LUC and published in January 2014. The Review concluded the Site made a more limited contribution to Green Belt purposes. An extract of the plan covering Featherstone is included below along with extracts of the report (our emphasis is underlined and the current SHELAA references added in parentheses).

Plate 6: Extract of South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review Method Statement



Green Belt Parcels

-  Makes a considerable contribution to Green Belt Purposes
 -  Makes a contribution to Green Belt Purposes
 -  Makes a more limited contribution to Green Belt Purposes
- Relative Rankings A-E' –'Parcels ranked 'A' make the least contribution to the Green Belt and 'E' the most, for this settlement

4.17 “Seven parcels were identified around the settlement of Featherstone. Parcels 1 [n/a], 3 [eastern end of 527], 6 [397] and 7 [170] were deemed to make a contribution to the purposes of Green Belt. Parcel 7 [170] to the south of the settlement was deemed to be an exception to the general criteria in so far as the M54 borders the southern boundary of the parcel acting as a significant boundary between Featherstone and Hilton Cross ES and diminishing the significance of the two settlements' close proximity, i.e. there are limited views to and from Hilton Cross from parcel 7 [170] and Featherstone due to the raised M54 separating the two. However, the parcel is free from encroachment. Parcel 6 [397], although less than 500m away from the strategic employment site of ROF Featherstone to the west was also deemed to be an exception to the general criteria due to the fact that the land between the two 'settlements' had been sufficiently encroached by existing and former buildings as to reduce significantly the openness of the Green Belt. Parcel 3 [eastern end of 527] was considered not to make a considerable contribution because of the woodland and waterbody to the north east, which would prevent further encroachment of the countryside and merging with Shareshill to the north....

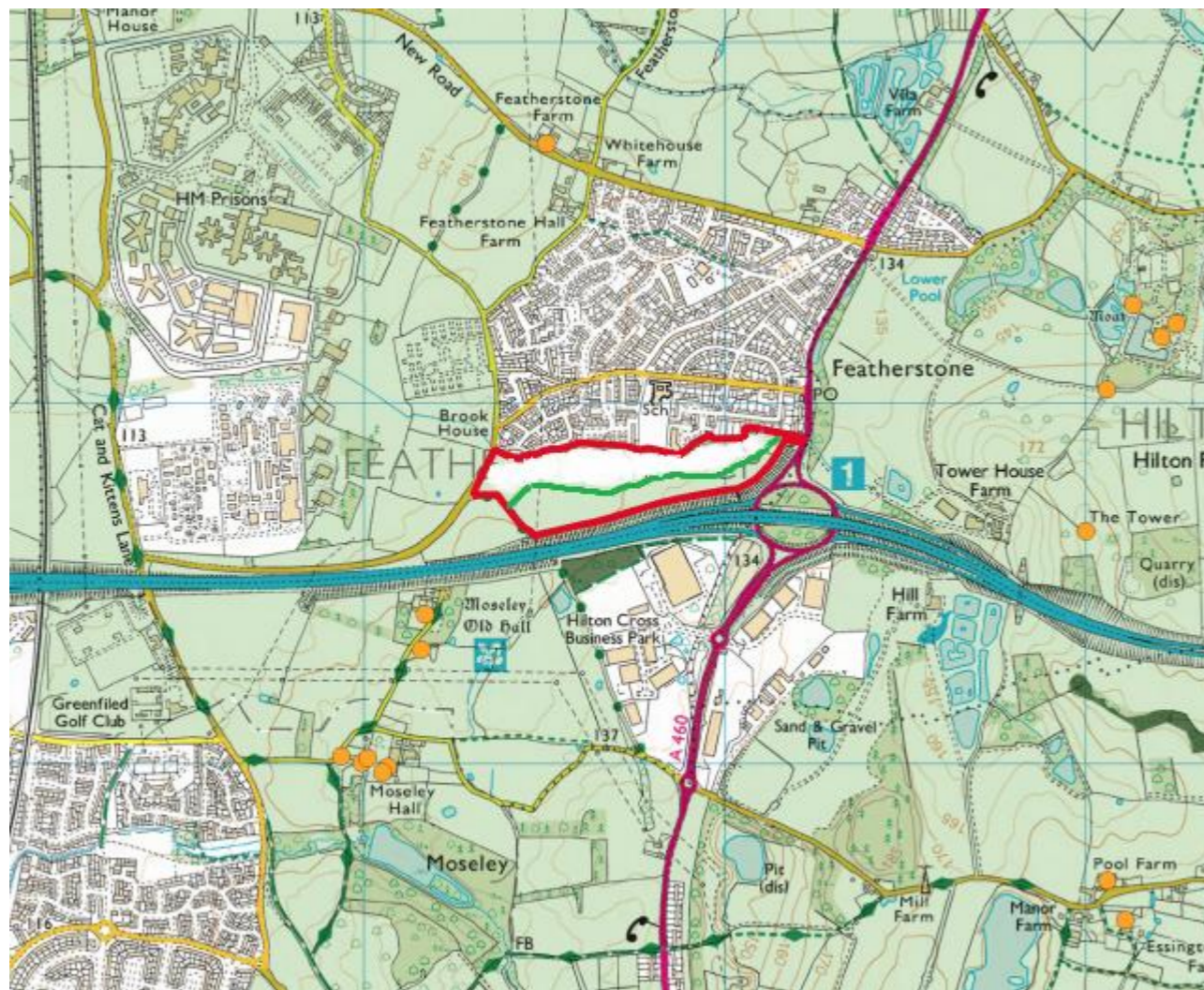
4.18 Parcels 2 [172], 4 [majority of 527] and 5 [169 and 396] to the north of the settlement were deemed to make a considerable contribution to the purposes of Green Belt, playing important separating roles. Parcel 4 [majority of 527] protects the countryside between Featherstone and the village of Shareshill to the north and parcel 5 [169 and 396] protects the countryside between Featherstone and ROF Featherstone, the small hamlet of Brinsford and the prison to the west. Parcel 2 [172] is in close proximity to the settlement of Shareshill to the north.”

- 7.2 The Site (Parcel 7) was considered to make the least contribution to Green Belt purposes of the land available around Featherstone, along with Parcel 6 to the west of Featherstone which comprises all of SHELAA Parcel 397 (housing safeguarded land) and Parcel 647, adjoining a more recent employment allocation. Development of parcels 397 and 647 would effectively create a continuum of built development, connecting the village of Featherstone with the prison

to the west. In conclusion, the allocation of the Site and the Site alone, would best preserve both the separate identity of Featherstone and the purposes of the Green Belt surrounding the settlement.

7.3 The presence of the gas pipeline and associated easements which are a constraint to built development have guided the evolution of the Masterplan. A new Green Belt boundary would naturally follow the southern edge of the spine road (see **Plate 7** below) with the proposed linear country park remaining in the Green Belt.

Plate 7: Revised Green Belt boundary (not to scale) - rough draft to be updated



7.4 The following section provides an assessment of the Site together with the amended Green Belt boundary against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out in paragraph 134 of the NPPF.

Purpose 1: To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.

7.5 The Site would be well related to the existing settlement of Featherstone to the north. The Site is bounded to the west by East Road/ Featherstone Lane and to the west by Junction 1 of the M54 and the A460 which both represent strong defensible boundaries. The proposed spine road and associated planting would represent a strong defensible and permanent Green Belt boundary, given the constraints of potential future built development of the oil pipeline and associated easements.

Purpose 2: To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

7.6 The nearest settlement to Featherstone is Wolverhampton. The Site is already physically and visually separated from Wolverhampton by the M54 corridor and associated wooded embankment and would not lead to any physical or visual coalescence between settlements. There would be a minimal reduction in the width of the Green Belt between the current settlement boundary of Featherstone and the closest point on the northern edge of Wolverhampton from ~720m to ~650m which has been minimised by retaining an informal country park along the southern edge of the development. The Hilton Cross Business Park to the south of the M54 is not located within the Green Belt, however it is also not part of the settlement of Wolverhampton and the physical and visual separation from the Site would be maintained.

Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment

7.7 It is acknowledged that the majority of the Site is currently under agricultural cultivation. However, the close relationship to the existing settlement edge of Featherstone to the north and the influences of major road corridors to the south and east combine to provide a strong urban fringe character. There is also a high level of visual containment as a result of the land parcel performing less well against this purpose than the wider open countryside. Given the clearly identifiable boundaries which would define the extent of built development, its planned release from the Green Belt for development would not result in encroachment into the wider countryside.

Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

7.8 There are no historic towns to consider in this assessment.

Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

7.9 The north-eastern corner of the Site is not in productive agricultural use comprising hardstanding with unauthorised traveller use and overgrown scrub. This area covers 1.64

hectares which is ~26% of the gross developable site area that is proposed to be removed from the Green Belt. Consequently development of the Site would have some benefit in assisting urban regeneration.

- 7.10 As stated above, Paragraph 138 of the NPPF sets out what should be taken into account when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt Boundaries, including whether the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land. The proposed Masterplan includes a Country Park that would represent approximately half of the existing site area. This would represent a significant improvement to the accessibility of the remaining Green Belt as there is currently no access to the site due to its agricultural use.

8.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Pleydell Smithyman Limited has been appointed by Persimmon Homes (West Midlands) to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal ('LVA') and Green Belt assessment of the 'Site' which comprises part of SHELAA Parcel 170 on the southern edge of Featherstone.
- 8.2 The Site is located in the Green Belt and adjoins the southern edge of Featherstone with the wooded embankment of the M54 and A460 Cannock Road to the south and east and Brookhouse Lane to the west. The site is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory landscape designations. The landcover of the Site is dominated by arable agricultural land and includes an area of scrub and outside storage/unauthorised traveller site. The Site is located on relatively flat ground that very gently slopes from east to west.
- 8.3 The Site has a close visual and physical relationship to the adjoining settlement of Featherstone and views to the wider landscape to the south and east are restricted by mature woodland planting along the motorway embankment. Beyond Brookhouse Lane to the west there are medium-scale arable fields and blocks of coniferous woodland are located near the perimeter of Featherstone Prison. Established residential development and the nearby major road corridors have an important urbanising influence on local landscape character.
- 8.4 The Landscape Sensitivity Review prepared by South Staffordshire Council in 2015 identified the Site as having a Low sensitivity to new housing, noting that all other land surrounding the settlement of Featherstone was rated at a Medium or High sensitivity. The study states that the Site is *'Well-screened from M54 by well-vegetated embankment. Urban influences form settlement edge and therefore relates well to the urban area. Development would be a logical extension to the settlement'*

- 8.5 The outline Masterplan would deliver approximately 156 units over 4.86 hectares of net developable area at a net density of ~32 dwellings per hectare. The density is comparable with the existing housing estates adjacent to the northern boundary of the Site that accommodate a variety of detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings.
- 8.6 The built development would not exceed 2 storey's in height and would be contained within 10 residential blocks that would accommodate a mix of house types and tenures.
- 8.7 A linear country park for informal recreation is proposed between the built development and wooded embankment. This proposal would represent an enhancement to the Green Belt and would be equivalent in area to the net developable area. The country park would include informal groups of native trees and opportunities for biodiversity enhancements including wildflower meadows.
- 8.8 It has been demonstrated that a landscape led masterplan could deliver a scheme that would be accommodated on the Site without resulting in material harm to the wider landscape character.
- 8.9 There is currently no public access to the Site and very limited public views from a short section of East Road/Brookhouse Lane to the west and restricted views of the access to the outside storage/unauthorised traveller site from Cannock Road to the east. Views from private dwellings within the modern housing estate on the edge of Featherstone to the north are varied in nature ranging from open views at the western end of the Site to more restricted views towards the east, where planting along the water-course and an area of scrub restrict intervisibility.
- 8.10 The South Staffordshire Partial Green Belt Review Method Statement was prepared by LUC and was published in January 2014. The Review concluded the Site made a more limited contribution to Green Belt purposes.
- 8.11 The Site (Parcel 7) was considered to make the least contribution to Green Belt purposes of the land available around Featherstone, along with Parcel 6 to the east of Featherstone which comprises all of SHELAA Parcel 397 (housing safeguarded land) and Parcel 647, adjoining a more recent employment allocation. Development of parcels 397 and 647 would effectively create a continuum of built development, connecting the village of Featherstone with the prison to the west. In conclusion, the allocation of the Site and the Site alone, would best preserve both the identity of Featherstone and the purposes of the Green Belt surrounding the settlement.

- 8.12 An assessment of the Site and amended Green Belt boundary concluded that the designation would still function in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas (purpose 1), would not contribute to settlement coalescence (purpose 2) and would have a very localised impact, resulting in no potential for encroachment into the wider countryside (purpose 3). Purpose 4 relating to historic towns is not relevant and development of the Site would have some benefits in assisting urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other land (purpose 5).
- 8.13 In addition, the creation of a Country Park to the southern half of the site would significantly improve the accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land, in accordance with Paragraph 138 of the NPPF.
- 8.14 This study accords with the independent reports carried out by, or on behalf of, South Staffordshire Council comprising the Green Belt Review Method Statement (2014) and the Landscape Sensitivity Review (2015).
- 8.15 In conclusion, by adopting a sensitive landscape led approach to development of the Site, a scheme of circa 156 units could be accommodated without any notable landscape and visual impacts. This development would also provide the opportunity for enhancement of Green Belt land as a linear country park for public amenity and ecological benefit.