

KNOWLE, DORRIDGE AND BENTLEY HEATH NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Potential Solihull Local Plan Housing Allocations: Hampton Roads Sites

Site Specific Landscape and Visual Appraisal

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Crestwood Environmental Ltd.
1 & 2 Nightingale Place
Pendeford Business Park
Wolverhampton
West Midlands
WV9 5HF

Tel: 01902 229 563

Email: info@crestwoodenvironmental.co.uk
Web: www.crestwoodenvironmental.co.uk

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 Crestwood Environmental Ltd ('Crestwood'), a Registered Practice of the Landscape Institute, were commissioned on behalf of the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum, to appraise landscape and visual constraints in relation to potential Housing Allocations being proposed as part of the Solihull Local Plan, with this report specifically considering land off the Hampton Road ('the Site'), at the northeastern extents of Knowle.
- 1.1.2 Crestwood have been commissioned by the KDBH Neighbourhood Forum to provide landscape and visual consultancy support, with the objectives being:
- To inform the Forum's responses to the Solihull Draft Local Plan;
 - To inform the preparation of draft Concept Master Plans for the development of the Hampton Road and/ or the Arden Triangle sites in the event that these sites are confirmed allocated for housing and community use development in the Solihull Local Plan; and
 - To inform responses to planning applications affecting the KDBH Plan Area during the Plan Period.
- 1.1.3 The KDBH Neighbourhood Forum wishes to ensure that adverse impacts on landscape character, in the Green Belt locations, is minimised and that any new development seeks to improve the quality of the surrounding landscape and public access.
- 1.1.4 It is noted that this report forms part of a series of documents or advice notes being prepared for the KDBH Neighbourhood Forum both in relation to differing aspects of the commission and differing potential housing allocation sites.

1.2 THE SITE AND POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1.2.1 The Site is considered as being promoted as a development allocations for a potential sports 'hub', with enabling residential development, with reference to a report dated January 2016 produced by Savills entitled "*Proposed relocation of Knowle Football Club and enabling residential development*", on behalf of a Family Trust, Demrastore Ltd and Knowle Football Club; hereby referred to as the 'Savills Report'.
- 1.2.2 The potential allocation comprises two broad landholding areas as shown at Plate 1, comprising:
- the existing Knowle FC and adjacent woodland, east of Hampton Road; and
 - land north of Chantry Heath Crescent, west of Hampton Road.

Plate 1 Site Location as promoted by Savills



1.2.3 A Potential Development scenario has been outlined by Savills and is shown at Plates 2 and 3. With reference to Plate 2, for the purposes of this report land at Parcels A & B will be referred to as '**Area A**' and Parcels C, D & E will be referred to as '**Area B**'.

Plate 2 Potential Development Parcels



Plate 3 Potential Masterplan



1.3 METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Landscape and visual assessment 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.

1.3.2 This appraisal, carried out by a suitably qualified Chartered Landscape Architect, is conducted with regard to the principles set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition ('GLVIA3'), (Landscape Institute/Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013), Topic Paper 6: Techniques for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, January 2004), as well as other relevant guidance.

- 1.3.3 The appraisal undertaken is proportionate to scope of the commission (i.e. to provide landscape and visual support to the KDBH Neighbourhood Forum), such that concise ‘outline’ advice can be provided in respect of landscape and visual considerations.
- 1.3.4 Crestwood have undertaken an appraisal of key landscape and visual characteristics of the land, and potential constraints to the Potential Development, which included the following key tasks:
- A desktop study and web search of relevant background documents and maps, including reviews of aerial photographs, LPA publications and other landscape character assessments;
 - Collated information about any relevant landscape designations, such as National Parks, and those parks and gardens listed on Heritage England’s national register;
 - A brief field assessment of local site circumstances including a photographic survey of potential views from within and towards the Site, undertaken in July 2018 (refer to Appendix L1); and
 - An outline analysis of the constraints, and likely effects of the Potential Development, including potential mitigation and restoration, on landscape and views. (A Landscape Constraints Plan is provided at Appendix L2).
- 1.3.5 Key Green Belt considerations and constraints are also summarised in this report.
- 1.3.6 As the scope of the commission relates to the development draft Solihull Local Plan, at this stage, a review of the landscape policy/planning context for the Site falls outside the scope of this appraisal, however, consideration has been given to the presence of any local landscape designations currently defined by the Local Planning Authority (Solihull Metropolitan Council). Current extant planning policy does not indicate any local landscape designation policy.
- 1.3.7 Reference to the national planning policy is made where relevant to inform recommendations in the report.
- 1.3.8 A cumulative assessment falls outside the scope of this report.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS

- 1.3.9 The Site’s boundaries relate to plans of the Prospect Area provided by the Client prior to the survey. Any subsequent amendments to the boundary may alter recommendations made in this report if amended plans are provided following the survey. Limited details in relation to proposed working and phasing are currently available; the Site has been considered as a whole in relation to the general principles of development.
- 1.3.10 No permission to access the Site was given prior to the site visit. Site walkovers are undertaken from Public Rights of Way and Public Highways only.

2 BASELINE SITUATION

2.1 LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

- 2.1.1 The land is not nationally designated in respect of landscape importance (i.e. National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc.). The land does not fall within 2km of any such designation.
- 2.1.2 No part of the Site lies within or near to a non-statutorily, locally designated landscape.
- 2.1.3 Whilst not a landscape designation, the Site does fall within the Green Belt.

2.2 REGISTERED PARKS AND GARDENS

2.2.1 No part of the Site lies within a Registered Park or Garden, with none falling within 2km of the Site.

2.3 LISTED BUILDINGS, SCHEDULED MONUMENTS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

2.3.1 A formal assessment of the historical setting of these heritage features falls outside the scope of this report and the professional experience of the report author. Irrespective of this, to help ascertain whether there were potential landscape-related effects of the Potential Development on heritage features the following was determined, with reference to information contained in the Savills Report.

2.3.2 The land does not fall within a Conservation Area. Knowle Conservation Area is circa 200m south of the Area A at its closest point, which follows the route of the High Street/Warwick Road. Crestwood generally concurs with the Savills Report that there appears to be limited direct landscape or visual connectivity to the Conservation Area or its immediate setting, due to intervening development and screening. The Savills Report states *“the existing club site and fields [Area A] might be considered to contribute to its rural village character. Therefore, some mitigation on the approach to Knowle along Hampton Road could be provided if necessary. This will reflect and enhance the semi-wooded character and appearance of Hampton Road, thus sustaining the rural character of the village”*.

2.3.3 Notwithstanding wider considerations, the landscape treatment of the Hampton Road corridor on approach in to Knowle and towards the Conservation Area is a key landscape and visual consideration, to ensure any development retains ‘the Rural Village character’ and preserves the transition between the settled area and adjacent countryside to the north of Knowle.

2.3.4 No Scheduled Monuments fall within the Site or in close proximity.

2.3.5 There are no listed buildings within the Site. The Grade I listed Grimshaw Hall, lies circa 140 north of Area A and 100m east of Area B. The relative importance of the Site to the setting, both in terms of intervisibility and historic landuse, must be assessed in detail from a Cultural and Heritage perspective to assess the potential for adverse impacts.

2.3.6 Henwood Hall (Grade II) is located circa 640m north of Area B, within a countryside setting. This listed building has the potential for intervisibility with the northern half of Area B. There are further listed buildings, within Knowle, within circa 400m northwest of Area B, within the wider settled area. These features should also be assessed from a Cultural and Heritage perspective.

2.3.7 The Grand Union Canal is a non-designated heritage asset which forms the northern boundary of Area B. The Grand Union Canal Walk Long Distance Path follows the route of the canal and would be a highly sensitive visual receptor.

2.4 ANCIENT WOODLAND

2.4.1 There are no areas of ancient woodland within or in close proximity to the Site.

2.5 ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION

2.5.1 The land does not contain or overlap any national or international designations for ecological conservation. No other national or international designations fall within the study area.

2.5.2 Area B is bounded to the west by a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) covering an adjacent woodland area

west of Purnell's Brook. The current Solihull MBC Nature Conservation Strategy proposes the LWS be extended to cover all tree cover either side of Purnell's Brook and a field within the southwestern extents of Area B. The Grand Union Canal is also a proposed LWS.

2.5.3 A LWS is circa 130m east of Area A, adjacent to a local watercourse.

2.6 PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND OPEN ACCESS LAND

2.6.1 There is no 'Access Land' within the Site in close proximity to the Site. No Registered Common Land or has been identified within or adjacent to the Site. The Site does not comprise, nor appear in close proximity, to a Country Park, Millennium, Village or Doorstep Green.

2.6.2 A public footpath follows a track leading east west between Wychwood Avenue and Hampton Road through the southern half of Area B. The eastern extent of this footpath is lined by mature trees and hedgerow cover on either side. The alignment of the footpath is orientated directly towards Grimshaw Hall and it is worth assessing if the track of footpath is related to the historic setting of Grimshaw Hall.

2.6.3 There appears to be an informal or 'permissive' footpath route linking northwards through the centre of Area B towards a 'coal bridge' crossing the Grand Union Canal. Fieldwork indicated this route to be relatively well defined, with regular use.

2.6.4 The Grand Union Canal Walk LDP follows the towpath on the north side of the Grand Union Canal. From fieldwork, the northern boundary of Area B appears well tree lined and vegetated limiting potential for expansive or unfiltered views; albeit winter views may be more prevalent. The route and the canal generally fall below the levels of the Site, which rises in level southwards away from the canal.

2.6.5 There is a small parking area at the north eastern extents of Area B.

2.6.6 Area A comprises the existing Knowle FC. There is no 'public access' to the Site. A public footpath falls to the south of Area A, separated by a mature hedge and tree line, only affording filtered views in to Area A.

2.6.7 There are no National Cycle Routes within or adjacent to the Site. The Grand Union Canal towpath was observed to be well used by cyclists during fieldwork.

2.6.8 Hampton Road lies immediately adjacent to both Areas A and B and is a key transport route connecting rural and countryside locations north of Knowle, in to the village. Area B is hedge lined along Hampton Road, which does limit visibility to an extent. Area A is well tree lined which provides a visual barrier filtering views. These features combine to provide a relatively well vegetated road side, providing a rural urban interface travelling in and out of Knowle.

2.7 WATER COURSES AND WATER BODIES

2.7.1 Purnell's Brook forms the western boundary of Area B, which is a local landscape feature forming part of the wider LWS and is illustrative of local topography.

2.8 LOCAL LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

Area A

2.8.1 The southern two thirds of Area A comprises the Knowle FC pitch, training area, some flood

lighting, small parking areas and stands/club buildings at the eastern extents of the parcel.

- 2.8.2 The northern extent of Area B comprises a partly cleared area of mixed woodland.
- 2.8.3 Area A is relatively flat rising slightly to the north, falling at levels around 121-124mAOD.
- 2.8.4 Area A appears relatively well bounded by mature hedgerow and/or tree cover to the north (south of Grimshaw Hall), at the western boundary with Hampton Road and at the southern boundary (north of a recent housing development to the immediate south), albeit the southern boundary is relatively narrow.
- 2.8.5 There is a cricket ground to the immediate east of Knowle FC, with a line of intervening tree cover. There is residential development west of Area A, on the opposite site of the Hampton Road.

Area B

- 2.8.6 Area B is an undulating and rolling area of agricultural land, generally arable in use. During fieldwork, the northern half of Area B had been hay cut with hay bales.
- 2.8.7 The central eastern boundary of Area B (adjacent to the Hampton Road) rises to a localised high point of circa 127mAOD. The land falls northwards towards the Grand Union Canal, with the northern boundary falling between levels of circa 110-118mAOD and westwards towards Purnell's Brook lying at around 110mAOD at the western boundary. The southern boundary of Area B falls from a level of circa 125mAOD near to Hampton Road and 110mAOD at the western extent of the land parcel.
- 2.8.8 Due to a relative lack of vegetation cover at the southern boundary of the parcel, the southern extents of Area B are overlooked from adjacent residential development at the northern edge of Knowle (i.e. Chantry Heath Crescent). The land within southern areas of Area B appears higher than surrounding land in close proximity to the south and southwest, offering some intervisibility across a slightly wider area of adjacent residential areas.
- 2.8.9 The western boundary of Area B is formed by Purnell's Brook and adjacent tree cover and woodland, which appears to screen and filter views from residences to the immediate west (i.e. Wychwood Avenue); albeit winter visibility should also be assessed in relation to any future development potential.
- 2.8.10 The Grand Union Canal appears at a lower level than the majority of the Site. The southern boundary of the Site is relatively well tree-lined, which filters views and depth of view in to the Site is further limited by topography; however any development on the northern and northwestern facing areas of Area B would be facing towards and on to the Grand Union Canal.
- 2.8.11 The eastern boundary of the Site is formed by a hedgerow of varying quality and maturity, lining Hampton Road, which separates Area B from Grimshaw Hall. The grounds of Grimshaw Hall immediately west of Hampton Road contain a high proportion of tree cover, including mature evergreen and coniferous trees, which filter and limit intervisibility with Area B.
- 2.8.12 Within Area B, the southwestern extents of the parcel comprise an area of rough grassland with occasional scrub. There is also some tree cover leading to a pond in the centre of the field. This area of land transitions to two small agricultural fields in the southeastern extents of the parcel. The fields are separated by a track/footpath on an east west alignment, leading to Hampton Road, which is well lined by hedgerows and tree cover and forms a prominent vegetated corridor within the Site. The field units are relatively small scale.

- 2.8.13 There is a strong mature hedgerow boundary and tree line, on an east west alignment, which separates the southern third of the parcel from the northern two thirds. This also separates the southern part of the parcel from the highest levels in the central area of the parcel.
- 2.8.14 The northern two thirds of Area B appear more open, with a larger scale field pattern. As the topography rises and then slopes away to the northwest, the elevated central and sloping northern parts of the parcel afford some long range intervisibility with rising and rolling countryside to the northwest of the Grand Union Canal. Hedgerow and tree cover has become fragmented, potentially indicating agricultural intensification and loss of historic field boundaries. There are some overhead lines crossing the site in part.
- 2.8.15 North of the Grand Union Canal, levels initially fall in line with Purnell's Brook, but the landform progressively rises further afield, particularly to the northwest reaching a similar highpoint in the landscape to Area B. The northern two thirds of the parcel in particular are similar in character to the rural small to medium scale agricultural landscape, to the north of the canal, formed across a rolling landscape comprising lowland brook courses, isolated highpoints and hedgerows with occasional trees and interconnected areas of small woodland.

2.9 LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENTS

- 2.9.1 The Site lies within the **Arden** National Character Area (NCA97) (Natural England, 2014). Key characteristics for this character area, include:

- *Well-wooded farmland landscape with rolling landform.*
- *Mature oaks, mostly found within hedgerows, together with ancient woodlands, and plantation woodlands that often date from the time of enclosure. Woodlands include historic coppice bounded by woodbanks.*
- *Narrow, meandering clay river valleys with long river meadows; the River Blythe SSSI lying between the cities of Coventry and Birmingham is a good example of this.*
- *Numerous areas of former wood-pasture with large, old, oak trees often associated with isolated remnants of more extensive heathlands.*
- *Diverse field patterns, ranging from well hedged, irregular fields and small woodlands that contrast with larger semi regular fields on former deer park estates, such as, Packington Hall and Stoneleigh Park.*
- *Complex and contrasting settlement pattern with some densely populated where traditional settlements have amalgamated to form the major West Midlands conurbation while some settlements remain distinct and relatively well dispersed.*
- *North-eastern industrial area based around former Warwickshire coalfield, with distinctive colliery settlements. North-western area dominated by urban development and associated urban edge landscapes such as managed greenspace, for example allotments, gardens, parks, golf courses (rough areas) and public open spaces; playing fields, churchyards, cemeteries and institutional grounds (schools, hospitals).*
- *Transport infrastructure, the M42, M40, M6 and M5 are major transport corridors that sit within the landscape of this NCA.*

- 2.9.2 The Solihull Local Plan Review: Draft Landscape Assessment, Character and Open Space (March 2018) identifies the key local landscape character information relevant to the Site along with a brief 'site assessment'; this information is replicated below. It is noted that this site assessment appears limited to Area A and the southern half of Area B (not covering the northern extent of Area B).

Landscape Character

The site is within the *Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines Arden Pastures* and adjacent in part to an enhancement zone.

The overall character of this landscape area is of 'A small scale, enclosed landscape, often pervaded by suburban influences and characterised by small fields, typically bordered by mature hedgerows.'

Characteristic features evident on or close to this site are :

- A well defined pattern of small fields and paddocks.
- Gently rolling topography
- Numerous mature hedgerow oaks

Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines - Arden

Landscape Character Area 3 Knowle & Dorridge Fringe

The land gently slopes down from west to east eventually falling towards the River Blythe in the LCA 4. Purnell Brook, Cuttle Brook and Canal Feeder and their associated springs drain the area. These watercourses are well wooded and provide a distinctive characteristic within the landscape, specifically to the south of the LCA, which is perceived as being more enclosed and intimate.

This area, being in close proximity to Knowle and Dorridge, shows signs of urban influence especially within the northern extent of the LCA on the approaches to the settlement of Knowle.

Although much of the historic environment has been developed over the years, remnants of the past are evident in the names of places. Grimshaw Hall provides a historical connection and is of great heritage value to the landscape character of the area.

Character area guidelines: (P28)

- Resist loss of field boundaries to retain irregular and historic field pattern to south of the area. Discourage the amalgamation of fields...
- Identify appropriate access points to the countryside and ensure that new facilities, signs and paths are low-key and respect landscape character.
- Encourage appropriate management to retain strong hedgerow structure and the planting of individual trees along field boundaries particularly in northern and central extents of the area.

Landscape character sensitivity: Medium.

This is a landscape with a strong sense of local connection to the place, ... There are a few detracting features within the landscape including poor legibility of the canal and some of the suburban influences..' (P29)

Landscape visual sensitivity: Low. *'The general visibility in this LCA is contained, short distance and low level where small scale fields and watercourses add intimacy and close down views across the area. (P29)*

The site visit determined that this site has its own distinctiveness with unusually local high points with long distance views.

Landscape value: Medium. *'The wooded watercourses along with the ancient woodlands are key to the local distinctiveness. Historic sites such as Grimshaw Hall and the Grand Union Canal adds to the cultural and local value of the area.' (P29).*

Landscape capacity: Low- *'likely to be able to accommodate small areas of new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form, in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness. Any new development should not result in the loss of the irreplaceable habitats or destroy the setting of the Grand Union Canal and Knowle Conservation Area.'*

Solihull Landscape Character Assessment (Waterman December 2016)

Site assessment

The site is influenced by Knowle to the south west. The pattern of fields is largely intact as suggested by the field boundaries from the 1889 OS map. Some of the hedgerows are becoming less pronounced and the hedge boundary on Hampton Road is sparse, with few trees.

There is a 17m change in level across the site from the east on Hampton Road towards Purnell's Brook in the west. This change in level allows long views across and beyond the site.

The Purnell's Brook is bordered by Wychwood, both sites are important green infrastructure assets.

There are a number of mature trees subject of TPOs, these are hedgerow trees and are characteristic of the Arden Pastures landscape. A public right of way passes these trees and offers a valuable link from the urban area of Knowle with the adjacent open countryside.

The southern section of this site is used by the Knowle Football Club as playing pitches. It is bordered to the north by an area of woodland and has a hedge boundary with a recent housing development to the south.

Opportunities

Enhance green infrastructure connections with the Purnell's Brook LWS, Wychwood and the wider landscape by restoring, replanting and maintaining hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Enhance the hedge boundary along Hampton Lane, this will also help add to the setting of the listed building of Grimshaw Hall.

Any POS and play should be located around the public right of way, brook and woodland, and be designed sensitively to respect the existing habitat value.

POS Requirement

This site will require Doorstep, Local and Neighbourhood Play Area as nearest facility is beyond recommended walking distance of 1000m – the closest park and play area is at Knowle Park which is approximately 1km from the site (direct 1.09km, 1.24km walking distance away from the centre of the northern section of the site).



3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 VISUAL ASPECTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

3.1.1 Refer to Appendix L1 for illustrative photographic record.

Area A

3.1.2 Overall, Area A appears relatively visually contained, due to being well bounded by adjacent hedgerow and tree cover; however, the relative narrowness of the vegetation along the southern boundary may give rise to more open winter views from the adjacent footpath and new residential development to the immediate south. This would need to be examined in further detail.

3.1.3 Whilst tree cover along the Hampton Road generally provides a screening function, and promotes a transition from a rural to more urban character, winter views for road users and adjacent properties along the Hampton Road to the west of Area A should be considered in detail.

3.1.4 Any intervisibility with Grimshaw Hall to the north would need to be considered. This should be done in conjunction with assessment of the understanding of the relationship of Area A to the setting of the listed property.

3.1.5 It would be a key consideration to retain and enhance the surrounding boundary vegetation to visually integrate any potential development.

Area B

3.1.6 A footpath crosses through the central southern part of Area B. This will be a key visual receptor route, assuming it is retained. The current route affords a relatively 'rural' experience in relatively close proximity to the settled area of Knowle and this is likely being of value. Any residential development, indicated to be either side of the footpath, would replace the current 'rural' aspects to views and the experience along the footpath route. Equally, there is another informal route that appears well used.

3.1.7 A key consideration for any development proposals would be the relationship to views from existing residences to the south and southwest (refer Photo 2 Appendix L1). It will be key to ensure privacy of existing areas is maintained, whilst ensuring that the scale of any development, across the slightly rising land, does not become overbearing to the existing settled area. It is noted that due to the topography, any housing development does have the potential to become prominent in the view from existing residences and any new development could overlook a relatively large number of residences at the northern edge of Knowle. This will need considering in detail.

3.1.8 The potential for winter visibility from Wychwood Avenue directly west of Area B should also be considered.

3.1.9 There are existing transient glimpsed views over the Site from Hampton Road. Any new development would become prominent along this route without substantial new landscape buffer planting to supplement the hedgerow along the road to filter and screen views. This would also be important in terms of preserving the rural urban transition when travelling in to Knowle.

3.1.10 Whilst there are critical visual considerations in close proximity to Knowle, the nature of the topography is such that it affords expansive views particularly towards rising land to the northwest near Henwood Hall at circa 700m distance from Area B. (See Photo 7 and 8 Appendix L1)

- 3.1.11 The isolated highpoint within the Site, and the north and northwest facing slopes, indicates that a poorly designed or an over-extensive development would be potentially prominent in the view from the local footpath leading to Henwood Hall and development in the northern half of the Site would visually influence the wider rural setting of Knowle north of the Grand Union Canal, as well as influencing the wider landscape character. It is particularly noted that due to the intervening topography to Knowle, the limit of the existing settled area and existing tree cover, there is very little existing appreciation of the presence of the village from near Henwood Hall and the wider landscape north of the canal.
- 3.1.12 Any housing development across central higher areas of the parcel, in conjunction with a new sports facility/hub and floodlighting at the northern extents of the parcel, would visually influence the wider landscape setting of Knowle beyond its existing settled limits.
- 3.1.13 Equally, flood lighting within the existing Knowle FC facility is assumed to be relatively well contained at the settlement limits of Knowle and by existing vegetation. Due to the landform of Area B, flood lighting has the potential to become unduly prominent at night time and adversely affect any 'dark skies', particularly from the northwest. This would need to be assessed in detail to understand the feasibility of flood lighting associated with the sports hub/pitches at the northern extent of the Site.
- 3.1.14 Any development in the northern half of the Site may also be visually intrusive from along the Grand Union Canal. Whilst there is decent vegetation cover along the southern boundary, winter visibility should be considered in detail, as well as the impact of any potential flood lighting proposals which would fall upon rising topography.
- 3.1.15 There is potential for some filtered views of development from Grimshaw Hall via intervening tree cover. It should also be considered whether the footpath through the parcel is historically related to the hall which may increase the sensitivity of the visual receptor or importance of the route. The Solihull Local Plan Review: Draft Heritage Assessment (April 2018) identifies the sensitivity of the heritage asset (Grade I) and also identifies to risk of harm. Light spillage from flood lighting is highlighted as a concern, as is that development of the Site may "*introduce a more obtrusive block development*" which may affect views. This would be particularly the case where there were insufficient landscaping buffers and/or increased scale, density and massing of housing relative to the locality. This is a detailed visual consideration.

3.2 LANDSCAPE ASPECTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.2.1 Refer to Appendix L2 for Landscape Constraints Plan and features worthy of retention.

Area A

- 3.2.2 Area A comprises the existing Knowle FC facility and a recently partly cleared area of mixed woodland.
- 3.2.3 Overall, there are considered to be relatively few landscape constraints to development; however, it is considered critical to ensure that peripheral boundary vegetation cover can be retained and enhanced, to preserve screening and help integrate any proposals. This important in maintaining green infrastructure and characteristic landscape elements around the periphery of the parcel, as well as retaining the urban rural transition along Hampton Road in particular.

Area B

- 3.2.4 Overall, there are four landscape characteristics that have the potential to be affected by the Potential Development:
- Landform (permanent effect);
 - Land-use (permanent replacement of agricultural land with residential and sports development);
 - Vegetation cover (potential for loss of important or mature landscape characteristics, such as hedgerows and tree lines); and
 - Tranquillity (permanent effect).
- 3.2.5 The sloping nature of the landform means that level design within the Site would have to be carefully considered to ensure any development retained the overall gently rolling nature of the landform (i.e. such that there were no dramatic changes in rooflines etc.). Of particular concern may be any sports hub/facility in the northern half of the Site, where large pitches, etc. may give rise to significant changes in topography and lead to an increasingly engineered landform out of character with the surrounding area. Any engineered landform may in itself result in increased prominence and visual influence on the wider landscape character to the north/northwest.
- 3.2.6 There would be an obvious loss in the ‘rural’ land-use of the parcel, and change in the character to a residential or mixed use development. It is considered that any development should seek a high proportion of open space, relatively low housing densities and improved landscape buffers to seek to retain a transition between Knowle and the wider rural area.
- 3.2.7 Whilst the allocation proposals seek to retain existing vegetative features and this should be a requirement for the Site, there is much scope for additional planting. This will be key in relation green infrastructure for the Site and connections with the wider landscape. A key concern may be that the proposed residential development extends north of the strong hedge and tree line running through the southern half of the Site. This feature in conjunction with the topography, acts to contain the southern 200m of the Site and this could potentially become lost within a developed area, in conjunction with the outline proposals promoted by Savills. Additionally, the existing pond and adjacent trees in the southwestern segment of Area B should also be retained as an important landscape element.
- 3.2.8 The nature of development will permanently affect the sense of tranquillity at the northern edge of Knowle. This will relate to not just the physical form of development, but also noise and lighting, which may be a particular concern for the Grand Union Canal, which is a local heritage feature, proposed LWS and route of a long distance path. Currently the Grand Union passing north of Knowle in this location has limited or no perceptible influence exerted by built development owing to the rural buffer at the northern edge of Knowle. The potential allocation proposals will create a perceptible ‘developed’ influence on the Grand Union Canal at this location, which would likely have detrimental effects on amenity.

Local Landscape Character Assessment

- 3.2.9 The local landscape character assessment situation is summarised at Section 2.9 above, in relation to the proposed Site allocation. Whilst a detailed appraisal of the reported landscape findings has not been undertaken, it is considered that the relevant local landscape character assessment levels reported are generally applicable at a Site level.
- 3.2.10 It is noted that the initial proposed development allocation area for Area B only comprised the

southern half of Area B; however, the development proposals illustrate the intention that development would extend up to and adjacent to the Grand Union Canal, to justify the proposed amount of development.

- 3.2.11 The local landscape character sensitivity is reported as Medium, and this is considered fair, particularly in relation to Area B. Whilst there are suburban influences, Area B does form an area of open agricultural land, with some important landscape characteristics such as mature hedgerows and adjacent tree cover. The topography of the Site is also considered an important landscape feature, forming the natural containment to the existing settled area and providing a rural transition and containment of views.
- 3.2.12 It is considered that the Site (Area B specifically) has a higher visual sensitivity compared to the wider landscape character area (reported as Low). This is evident in the Solihull Local Plan Review: Draft Landscape Assessment, Character and Open Space (March 2018) which identifies that the Site has its own visual distinctiveness, unusual local high points and long distance views. This is a key consideration for the Site and is a distinctive feature of the Site. This is a material consideration to any development proposals, the containment of Knowle and protection of the wider landscape from the intrusion of development in to views.
- 3.2.13 Whilst within Area B, the landscape value may be considered Medium, it is noted that as a whole the Site may be considered to have a higher landscape value as it forms part of the setting of the Grand Union Canal and Grimshaw Hall. Further to this there are boundary interactions with Purnell's Brook and local wildlife designations.
- 3.2.14 It is considered that the assessed local landscape capacity of Low for the local character area is appropriate and this is particularly the case in relation to Area B. Area B is considered more sensitive than the wider landscape character area due to elevated visual sensitivity (due to local landform high points), as well as the relationship of the Site to wider historic assets and their settings. As such, in landscape terms it is considered that the Site, and in particular the northern parts of Area B, should not be prioritised for development over and above higher capacity landscape locations and where such locations are available, in landscape terms, development should be otherwise be prioritised away from Area B.

3.3 GREEN BELT SUMMARY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.3.1 Consideration of Green Belt is a separate planning consideration from landscape and visual amenity considerations, but there are pertinent landscape and visual considerations that inform impacts on Green Belt. These are summarised below, pending a further note on Green Belt impacts.
- 3.3.2 Area A, whilst comprising sports pitches, is a relatively small Site comprising some existing development. There is reasonable scope to contain any future development through existing boundary vegetation and overall, there would be no greater northerly or easterly settlement limit created in relation to Knowle.
- 3.3.3 Accounting for residential and the sports facility proposals, Area B would constitute a fairly large northerly encroachment in to the Green Belt, beyond the existing northerly settlement limits of Knowle (i.e. formed by residences off Wychwood Avenue). Whilst the Grand Union Canal and Hampton Road may be considered to form permanent or 'defensible boundaries', there would be a northerly encroachment across a rural area of land.
- 3.3.4 Notwithstanding this, development across or close to the localised highpoint in the landscape comprising the central eastern boundary of the Site, in conjunction with any engineered landform,

sports facilities and flood lighting, would increase visual presence and influence across the wider Green Belt to the north. As previously discussed, there is limited appreciation of Knowle from the landscape to the north, owing to the topography and intervening tree cover in relation to the settled area. The northern half of the parcel in particular is beyond what may be considered the topographic limit of Knowle, beyond which there is increased potential for visual influence on the wider countryside.

- 3.3.5 It is noted that the Solihull Strategic Green Belt Assessment July 2016, identified Area B in Green Belt as part of parcel RP36. This was identified as an important parcel in terms of preventing unrestricted sprawl of urban areas and overall, it was considered that RP36 was a higher performer in relation to the purposes of the Green Belt, when taking account of the highest score received (in relation to Purpose 1). This is considered a fair assessment of the situation.
- 3.3.6 Notwithstanding that Green Belt is ‘permanent’ in policy terms, given the potential for development proposals to breach beyond the established natural landscape limit formed at the Site in relation to the existing settled area of Knowle, potentially influencing a wider area of landscape and Green Belt to the north of the Grand Union Canal, it is considered that there is no justification in landscape or Green Belt terms for the release of land for development in the northern half of Area B.

3.4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.4.1 Overall, in relation to Area A, assuming existing landscape buffers can be retained and enhanced, Area A is considered to offer some development potential. Careful design would be required to ensure appropriateness (of style, scale, massing, arrangement and density of housing) to the area, but also ensuring integration at the settlement edge to preserve the rural-urban transition along the Hampton Road.
- 3.4.2 Area B is considered to present a number of landscape and visual constraints that would need more detailed assessment to appreciate impacts and acceptability of any development proposals. In particular, the coupling of the residential proposals as a facilitator for the wider Knowle FC and sports hub development presents a number of concerns as the further north any development progresses, the greater the potential for adverse influence on the wider landscape and rural character and the Grand Union Canal, both in landscape and visual terms, with a number of tranquillity constraints or adverse effects likely to arise.
- 3.4.3 It is unclear the extent of any landform alterations required to accommodate any sports hub, sports pitches or football club; however, floodlighting and potential engineered landform changes would give rise to adverse landscape and visual effects, which may be potentially significant.
- 3.4.4 It is difficult to assess these effects in full at this stage. It is considered that development proposals in Area B have the potential to exert a detrimental landscape and visual effect beyond the immediate site context and on more highly sensitive receptors. This may include consideration of the appropriate scale of any buildings, flood lighting or any landform engineering, and whether these aspects would lead to unacceptable effects in landscape terms.
- 3.4.5 Given the nature and justification of the potential allocation proposals, without more detailed consideration of these aspects, the viability of the wider development may be questioned if certain aspects are not deliverable or result in unacceptable landscape and visual effects that cannot be justified in the context of facilitating wider development proposals..
- 3.4.6 In terms of the proposed development allocation of Area B (northwards to the Grand Union Canal

and accounting for all development aspirations), it is considered at this stage (in the absence of more detailed assessment) that the wholesale release and allocation of land for development is not justified in landscape or green belt terms and that the scale of the development proposals would potentially lead to unacceptable landscape and visual effects, accounting for the following key considerations:

- The ridgeline and highpoint of Area B, in conjunction with existing mature boundary hedgerows and trees form a natural landscape limit to any development. Development further north in Area B remove this landscape containment, relying instead on the Grand Union Canal, which in itself is a heritage feature with a setting;
- The scale of development would likely permanently change the landform at the Site, especially any terracing that may be required to accommodate sports pitches;
- Whilst the Site as a whole is relatively small in comparison to the wider landscape, it clearly forms part of the rural setting of Knowle and there are key views from the northwest of the Site. Due to landform and tree cover, Knowle is well screened and contained in landscape terms ensuring a rural/urban transition when approaching from the north. Any development across the ridgeline would breach beyond the natural landscape containment of Knowle, exerting an influence across the wider landscape character area north of the Grand Union Canal, which Knowle currently does not influence;
- Further to this, any floodlighting associated with the Sports Area, would also have enhanced night time effects, and would not be easily contained. The actual lights could be visible and again this will increase the sense of encroachment in to the countryside and could perceptually change the sense of tranquillity in the area;
- It is considered that the Site is more highly visually sensitive compared to the wider landscape character area and it is noted that generally the Landscape Capacity is recorded as Low by the Local Planning Authority.
- In Green Belt terms, the proposed 'Sports' area and some of the proposed housing area, would be very clearly beyond the pre-existing northern settlement extent of Knowle.

- 3.4.7 The protection of existing neighbouring (visual) amenity from overbearing effects is also a material planning consideration that needs to be adequately addressed.
- 3.4.8 Wholesale development across Area B would represent an extension to Knowle beyond the natural landscape containment formed at the settlements northern extents. Where Knowle currently exerts no or limited influence on the wider landscape to the north due to its containment, this would potentially change upon wholesale development of Area B. This may lead to unacceptable landscape and visual effects and may be detrimental in green belt terms. There are also detailed heritage considerations which need to be separately considered and justified.
- 3.4.9 The Solihull Landscape Character Assessment 2016 recorded that the wider landscape character area (Low capacity) in which the Site falls is *“likely able to accommodate small areas of new development, which would need to be of an appropriate type, scale and form in keeping with the existing character and local distinctiveness. Any new development should not result in the loss of irreplaceable habitats or destroy the setting of the Grand Union Canal and Knowle Conservation Area”*.
- 3.4.10 Overall, it is considered development proposals across the entirety of Area B as promoted would be difficult to justify in accordance with advice for the landscape character area. Development would

breach the landscape containment threshold of Knowle, would be immediately adjacent to the Grand Union Canal and the overall scale of development, accounting for a 'Sports hub' would potentially form an intensification of development beyond the pre-existing suburban limits. In this respect, there should be a reasonable expectation that housing/development density, scale (height), massing etc. would reduce at the urban fringes so to maintain a transition in to the rural landscape.

3.4.11 It is considered that in terms of landscape considerations, other proposed housing allocation sites should be preferentially considered where available, compared to the Site as a whole and the northern extents of Area B in particular.

3.4.12 It is noted that decisions relating to development allocations are not solely based on landscape considerations. There may be other overriding factors. Whilst the KDBH Neighbourhood Forum may wish to object to the proposed allocations wholesale in this location, we would recommend engaging constructively with Solihull MBC to review and consider the following points, which may influence decision making:

- **Potential to reduce the proposed extent of residential development from encroaching three fields northwards, to two fields northwards.** This would maximise the potential of the existing strong hedge and treeline within the Site, in conjunction with the topography and high points within the Site, being able to contain the extent of development and associated landscape and visual considerations along the Grand Union Canal and further north. This would also better respect the settlement limits of Knowle currently, in relation to the northern extent of Wychwood Avenue, utilising on Site landscape features to define the extent of development. This may also be a critical Green Belt consideration. An illustration of this is shown at Appendix L2.
- **Further study in to the relationship of the Site to Grimshaw Hall.** Given the scale of the proposed development it is considered important not just to understand intervisibility, but also the historical nature or contribution of the Site (in particular Area B) to the setting of Grimshaw Hall and any historic link with the footpath route. NPPF requires that **any** harm to a Grade I listed building be wholly exceptional and great weight should be given to the assets conservation.
- **Whether Green Infrastructure corridors and landscape buffers can be more readily defined for the Site and secured via planning policy.** This is important to understanding acceptability in relation to the privacy of surrounding residential locations, particularly those areas south of Area B, as well as seeking to retain the rural urban transition between the wider countryside to the north and Knowle. This is also likely to be important in respect of the protection of the Grand Union Canal in terms of setting and amenity.

3.4.13 We would also recommend that representations are made requesting that Solihull MBC make any allocation for the Hampton Road Site subject to a **Supplementary Planning Document or Design Code** to inform development, to be consulted on with KDBH Neighbourhood Forum. Planning policy should also require that any application be accompanied by detailed Green Infrastructure requirements, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a Lighting Assessment (especially in relation to flood lighting). Any flood lighting in particular, given the Site location and landform, can exert an influence external to the Site on the wider landscape character and tranquillity afforded. The necessity of such development aspects should be considered in advance of any allocation and where necessary designed and assessed upfront. This should also inform the effectiveness and sustainability of any Green Infrastructure both in terms of day and night time effects, which may be

important factors to a number a wildlife species.

- 3.4.14 As such any allocation should be subject to more detailed landscape, visual and heritage assessment and justification in the local plan and this clearly informs policy and design guide for the Site such that potentially unacceptable landscape and visual effects can be avoided and development aspects are more closely defined.
- 3.4.15 The NPPF makes clear that in preparing local plans the Councils evidence base and Sustainability Appraisal “*should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains). **Significant adverse impacts on these objectives should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued.** Where significant adverse impacts are unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures should be proposed (or, where this is not possible, compensatory measures should be considered)*”. [Underline our emphasis]
- 3.4.16 In the case of Hampton Road, there are a number of aspects which are considered to require more detailed consideration, which may need to inform the implementation of detailed protection measures or planning policy requirements. Other important NPPF considerations are summarised below [Underline our emphasis]:
- ***Achieving well-designed places*** - The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities... Plans should, at the most appropriate level, **set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable...** To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, **plans or supplementary planning documents should use visual tools such as design guides and codes.**
 - ***Protection Green Belt Land*** - The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; **the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.**
 - ***Conserving and enhancing the natural environment*** - Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan); b) recognising the 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... Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; **allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value,** where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.
 - ***Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*** - an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to

*substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. **Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.***
Substantial harm to or loss of:** ... b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, **grade I and II* listed buildings**, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, **should be wholly exceptional.

APPENDICES

Appendix L1 – Illustrative Photographs

Appendix L2 – Drawings