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East Challow Landscape Character and Village Scape Assessment

Evidence Base to

The East Challow Neighbourhood Plan

On behalf of East Challow Neighbourhood Steering Group

1563/R/1

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1. Introduction.

- 1.1. Portus and Whitton Landscape Architects (hereafter referred to as Portus+Whitton) have been commissioned by the East Challow Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to prepare a landscape and visual study for the village of East Challow. This technical report will form part of the evidence base for the development of the East Challow Neighbourhood Plan and its policies.
- 1.2. In broad terms, this report considers the character of the landscape around East Challow, its perceived qualities, and relationship with the village. It draws conclusion on the sensitivity of the local landscape with regards to built form, namely residential developments.

2. Scope of the Study, Approach and Limitations.

- 2.1. A recent community survey, carried out in xxx in East Challow concluded that the village setting and surrounding rural landscape is of great importance and a valuable resource (citation needed) to its residents. The current Local Plan 2031 affords a certain degree of protection to the surrounding landscape, however, the village of East Challow has experienced considerable pressure from a number of residential developments in recent years. Two of these recent planning applications have been approved and further erode the rural setting of East Challow. The Steering Group has therefore considered that a landscape based analysis would inform the Neighbourhood Plan and act as an impartial independent assessment of the local landscape and its capacity to residential developments.
- 2.2. In order to focus on the most relevant areas i.e. those that may come forward in future for further development, the study area of the assessment is limited to the land immediately adjacent to the perceived settlement boundary i.e. built form associated with East Challow. This report therefore assesses fewer parcels of land than those covered by the Neighbourhood Plan boundary (refer to Figure L.1).
- 2.3. This baseline information has been gathered during desktop research through the analysis of historic and current Ordnance Survey maps at various scales, information from Natural England and Historic England in relation to nature conservation, landscape, and heritage assets; and policies and evidence base for the current Local Plan 2031 (refer to Figures L.2; L.3; L.4; and L.5). These sources of information were considered the most relevant for the purpose of this assessment.
- 2.4. In addition, the landscape character assessment prepared for this part of Oxfordshire has also been analysed. Various landscape factors, identified in the published assessments have been reviewed and compared with site findings, and field survey sheets. A site survey was carried out in mid-January (17th January 2018) in good weather conditions (slightly overcast) and very good visibility. Photographs have been taken to inform this report and provide evidence and a reference point for future assessments.
- 2.5. As part of the landscape character review, a simplified analysis of the village grain and villagescape has also been carried out. This forms a discrete part of this report and has been provided to help develop design guidance on density, scale, and mass of potential future developments, should they come forward.

3. Description of East Challow and its Surrounding Landscape.

- 3.1. The village of East Challow lies to the west of Wantage, and is listed in the Local Plan 2031 as a 'large village' without a defined settlement boundary. The Council has carried out a 'site selection' process in order to identify strategic housing allocations sites within its administrative boundaries and prior to the adoption of the Local Plan 2031. The 'Vale of White Horse District Local Plan Part 2: Landscape Capacity Study' (March 2017) and its Addendum (October 2017) informed the Council's 'site selection' process and both documents have been reviewed to inform this report.
- 3.2. The Plan does not identify any strategic housing allocations sites (Policy CP4) in or around East Challow but a

number of such residential sites are located in the nearby Wantage and Grove. The closest one is located approximately 2.0km to the east, at Crab Hill on the north-eastern outskirts of Wantage. The second closest strategic housing allocations site, known as Monks Farm, Grove, is located approximately 2.7km to the north-east. It is wedged between the northern outskirts of Grove and the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal. The Grove Airfield is included as a residential site under a separate 'saved policy' H5 of the Local Plan 2011. The village of East Challow lies approximately 1km to the south-west from the nearest dwelling of the recently approved residential scheme at the Grove Airfield (approximately 2,500 dwellings, planning application P12/V0299/O and as amended in 2015).

- 3.3. There are a number of constraints that have influenced and continue to constrain the development of the village. The local topography is a continuation of the strongly undulating landform of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with its escarpment visible across the horizon to the south. Windmill Hill marks localised higher ground and can be described as a feature both separating the settlement of East Challow from Childrey and forming a landscape spur extending from the AONB escarpment towards the village (refer to Figure L.2).

Village Grain

- 3.4. The settlement pattern is clearly defined by the landform with a number of relatively small settlements located at the bottom of the escarpment or on the upper slopes of localised higher ground. The former mostly occurs further west such as Kingston Lisle, Woolstone, and Knighton and others stretching to the eastern outskirts of Swindon. The latter settlement pattern mostly relates to East Challow and Childrey. Wantage, to the east lines the valley of Letcombe Brook and extends onto its upper slopes. Chain Hill, located to the south east of Wantage forms a natural barrier to its expansion and creates a feature on the horizon in similar way to Windmill Hill in East Challow.
- 3.5. To the north of East Challow and other aforementioned settlements lies the low lying and relatively level landscape of the Vale of White Horse. Variations in levels across the vale are not conspicuous, in landscape character terms. The distant horizon is formed by the elevated Corralian Ridge running east – west between Buscot and Wytham. The ridge includes Faringdon Hill and other hills separating the vale from the valley of the River Thames, located further north.
- 3.6. On a local level the village of East Challow lies to the north east of Windmill Hill and the settlement covers its lower slopes descending towards and abutting the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal. Historically the village developed as a small cluster of properties along a turnpike road leading from Wantage to Faringdon and the road followed the lower ground skirting the Windmill Hill. At the time, circa 1800, the majority of roads associated with East Challow were of similar status with the turnpike road perhaps of better quality and more frequented.
- 3.7. The oldest reviewed historic map, the enclosure map from 1801, shows the majority of built form lining the turnpike road and near its junction with the then recently constructed Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal (refer to Figure L.6). A small cluster of properties can be identified at the junction of the turnpike road and Letcombe Way, leading south towards Ickleton Way. The 'Paddock and Pleasure Grounds' of Exuperius Turner Esq are clearly marked and some limited information on the settlement and ownership of the pleasure grounds can be found in the 'Magna Britannia; being a concise topographical account of the several counties of Great Britain' published in 1806.
- 3.8. With the advent of the Canal, the village grew with Nalder and Nalder Ironworks developed in East Challow. The

factory was located in the north eastern part of the village, and immediately north of the canal. The Ironworks can be clearly identified on the historic maps published between 1883 and 1946. One of the buildings, likely to be the old office building and constructed in 1840, is still visible and prominent in the village. The building now comprises several offices. The 'Paddock and Pleasure Grounds' of Exuperius Turner Esq is now identified on maps as Challow Park with the associated buildings, large water feature, and parkland tree planting clearly visible. Between 1801 and 1946 the village retained, broadly speaking, its layout and number of houses. Some limited development can be seen along the old turnpike road with the ironworks and Challow Park forming the dominant feature in the settlement grain. The properties near Letcombe Way, however, had developed and started to form a separate cluster known as Townsend. The village grain remained one plot deep with the layout developed organically.

- 3.9. By 1960s Townsend developed further with a relatively large, in comparison, residential development closing the gap between Townsend and the old Ickleton Way, now the B4507 (refer to Figure L.6). It extended westwards from the existing roads and created a separate and very distinct area of different grain, height, and plot sizes with semi-detached properties. It remains a relatively detached part of the village albeit now absorbed by surrounding built form. The majority of the built form is orientated towards the internal roads and does not address the surrounding countryside.
- 3.10. The late 1960s saw further expansion of East Challow with the allotment gardens disappearing and replaced by a new primary school and residential dwellings. The historic core of East Challow, once separated and having its own landscape setting had been merged with Townsend (refer to Figure L.6). The scale of the built form, plot sizes and their arrangements reflected the modern and planned layout, predominant at the time. Currently this part of the village reads as one relatively coherent area albeit with some small variations due to different density and changes in topography. It is worth mentioning that these developments predate the establishment of the North Wessex Downs AONB, which was designated in 1972.
- 3.11. The separation between East Challow and Wantage seemed to be respected throughout the development of the village. Challow Park and neighbouring isolated properties provided a buffer both visually and functionally, especially important when considering the proximity of both settlements and encroachment of Wantage onto the upper slopes of Letcombe Brook in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- 3.12. Since the 1970s the settlement of East Challow remained, broadly speaking, unchanged. The most recent changes starting around 2012, however, were relatively significant in terms of the village grain. At some stage the former ironworks of Nalder and Nalder had been replaced by an industrial area with large scale metal clad units. These were then demolished and replaced by a residential development, which consisted of 71 dwellings. The development pressure on East Challow has continued and the most recent notable planning decisions include the re-development of the old industrial depot, east of Challow Park (38 dwellings, planning application ref number: P16/V1714/O) and Challow Park itself (88 dwellings, planning application ref number: P16/V0652/O). Both planning applications have been granted in the last two years (September 2016 and October 2016 respectively) (refer to Figure L.6).

Character Areas

- 3.13. The built form in various parts of East Challow differs to a degree and this reflects different time frames in the development of the village, and design principles prevalent at the time. The combination of various landscape factors (such as landform and connectivity with the surrounding landscape) and characteristics of the built form, however, allows to sub-divide the village into a number of relatively distinct character areas (Figure L.7 and

Appendix 1).

CA1

- 3.14. The historic core of East Challow is very much associated with the old turnpike road, now the A417. It is mostly concentrated near the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, but the majority of listed buildings within this part of the village predate the construction of the Canal. Not all of the properties in this character area, however, are listed. Nevertheless, they do form a visually attractive grouping and collectively create a unique and distinct area within the village. The presence of the village green (common land) provides a 'breathing space' with the majority of the buildings lining its western edge and reinforcing the rural character of East Challow.
- 3.15. The grain of the village core is relatively complex and reflects the fact that this part of East Challow developed organically over a long period of time. The built form is mostly of detached dwellings concentrated along the A417 with their front elevations facing the road. There are, however, some side roads with larger properties including farm buildings. These are the remnants of the layout from the beginning of the 19th century and can still be traced to the 1801 Enclosure Map.
- 3.16. In terms of building material brick is predominant. The variation in brick colour is quite strong with brindle bricks frequent. Some properties have a distinctive pattern on their elevations defined by what appears to be blue bricks. Some of the brick elevations have been painted in muted yet light colours and when combined with the generally two storey height it provides a unifying element within this area. Pitched roofs, relatively steep, with clay tiles include gable, mansard, and half-hipped roofs. The roofline is complex and indicate various development periods and organically evolved grain rather than a uniform and planned large scale development. Some properties, such as Church Lodge are particularly attractive due to its complex form and intricate brick pattern.
- 3.17. Boundary treatment is mostly of walls, generally brick but there are examples of coarse stone walls with cock and hen coping stones. Some properties, mostly terraced cottages don't have front gardens. Chimneys, some quite decorative, ornate porches and simple yet attractive brick treatment to windows, provide visual interest and reinforce the character of this area. The 'village green' includes attractive small-scale trees, listed water pump and telephone kiosk. These element, combined with the relatively modest scale of built form define the small scale of this character area.

CA2

- 3.18. The historic core of Townsend is less substantial and includes a relatively low number of dwellings. These are generally located around The Goodlake Arms public house, near the junction of the A417 and Letcombe Hill Road (once known as Letcomb Way). None of the buildings in this area have been listed but they do form an attractive group. They contribute to the visual qualities of the village, particularly due to their prominent position along the bend of the A417, inter-visibility with the village green along the road. This area also offers slightly elevated views over the village green and towards the surrounding countryside and includes a common land that skirts the southern edge of the A417 as it leaves East Challow towards Wantage.
- 3.19. The boundary treatment and built form typology is, broadly speaking, similar to the one observed within the CA1. Typology is perhaps less varied but the number of properties is limited. Variation in levels and changes to the alignment of the A417 make this area slightly detached from the East Challow village core. Nevertheless, there is a strong visual relationship with the village core CA1 and its strategic location at the junction with Letcombe Hill road makes it quite unique.

CA3 & CA4

- 3.20. The relatively large area of residential dwellings stretching from the historic core of East Challow in the north

towards the boundary of the AONB to the south has been subdivided into two areas of slightly different character. In principle, both areas are characterised by residential dwellings developed within a relatively short period of time early 1960s and late 1960s. Despite this close time frame there are some specific elements in their planned layout that make both areas distinct from each other.

- 3.21. Both areas, although developed in slightly different time frame, share similar characteristic. Properties are generally semi-detached and built in brick. Roofs, clad in stone tiles, are gabled or pitched but there are some examples of less typical roofline as well. Dorm windows are generally absent with chimneys punctuating the roofline. Plots are considerably larger when compared with the rest of east Challow with hedges enclosing the front gardens frequent. Wide grass verges with paths follow the road network and due to low height and large plots there is a sense of openness and permeability. Views out are particularly attractive and include the low-lying vale landscape to the north and the AONB landscape to the south.
- 3.22. All properties have their front elevations facing the primary roads with plots radiating from each building quarter towards the road, resulting is a distinctive grain and pattern. The settlement edge to the south west (along Windmill Place) appears quite abrupt but layout and arrangement of built form reflects the properties on the eastern side of the road. This suggests that further development was planned or allowed for in this village grain.

CA5

- 3.23. There are a number of dwellings and areas that do not share similar characteristics, design principles or location. They all, however, are generally located at the interface between the village and open countryside, yet often are directly linked to the centre of the village. These areas are located on the outskirts of East Challow and can be described as fringe development of low density, mainly detached houses set within their own relatively large plots.
- 3.24. These properties occur along the eastern side of Letcombe Hill; on the north eastern outskirts of the village; and along the A417 north of the Canal. Plot sizes are considerable and often enclosed by hedges and belts of trees to a considerable degree. They do not share many characteristics in terms of layout, alignment or architectural style. They are, nevertheless, attractive in their own right.

CA6

- 3.25. Amongst the vernacular examples of architecture and late 20th Century developments there are properties which have characteristics of an infill development. These are generally small areas of few parcels mainly located on the eastern side of the A417. They comprise semi-detached and detached dwellings, but also bungalows and modern terrace houses such as those along Canal Way and The Orchard.
- 3.26. This area is defined by a relatively high-density development, including blocks of flats. Building material is similar to other built form in the village but architectural detailing reflects the design approach current at the time. Roofs are pitched and gabled and buildings are generally two storey heights. Roofline of the properties along Canal Way is simple without chimneys. Elsewhere properties have semi-hipped roofs with chimneys. There is a sense of space and openness around the properties with relatively large lawn areas separating them from roads.

CA7

- 3.27. The school grounds, playing fields and allotments exhibit a varied level of openness but have a number of characteristics that make them a relatively coherent group. The school ground is adjacent to the playing fields (owned by the Parish Council) which separate the built form in the village from the open countryside. Cornhill Lane abuts this area to the west and forms a physical and to some degree visual barrier. The landform generally slopes from the centre of the village to the north west and the playing fields form a strong component of the

views from the nearby residential properties and in views from Cornhill Lane. The area has been terraced in places to create level areas for the sport pitches. The playing fields therefore sit much lower than the nearby built form with field boundaries enclosing some of the fields to a higher degree. Nevertheless, views from the upper slopes, allotments, and the top of the playing fields (near the school) are elevated and relatively distant. The vegetation in private gardens and along Cornhill Lane frames views but the low-lying vale landscape is clearly visible. Due to the distance and its different characteristics it forms a very strong component in views from this area. The field pattern, lines of boundary vegetation, and dispersed built form can be clearly appreciated, perhaps slightly interrupted by the linear form of the railway line. The industrial sheds on the north western outskirts of East Challow can be seen in winter views but are unlikely to be easily perceptible when vegetation is in leaf.

- 3.28. The grounds of Challow & Childrey Cricket Club exhibit a higher level of openness, with its boundaries generally open and exposed. The elevated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB forms a feature on the horizon to the south and this landscape appears open, exposed, and tranquil.

CA8

- 3.29. The premises of 'Haynes of Challow' and adjacent scrap yard form a visually and physically separated area on the north western outskirts of the village. This area is generally well contained by roadside vegetation along the A417 although views of the boundary fencing and concrete wall can be gained.

CA9

- 3.30. The recently constructed and approved residential developments are grouped together as an example of 21st Century architecture and town planning. The two schemes approved in 2016 have not been constructed yet and the final layout, appearance and boundary treatment is unknown. Therefore, further analysis of their layout is not possible.

4. Issues Pertinent to the Character of the Local Landscape.

- 4.1. The Local Plan 2031 has established a clear principle of protecting the open countryside between East Challow and Wantage under the policy NE10 'Important Open Land', as identified on the 'Adopted Policies Map. Western Vale Sub Area' (December 2016). Until the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 has been adopted the 'saved policies' of the Local Plan 2011 remain a material consideration and its policy NE10 'Important Open Land' states: **"In the urban fringes and important open gaps between settlements, as shown on the Proposals Map, development or changes of use which would harm their essentially open or rural character will not be permitted."**
- 4.2. The text accompanying this particular policy clearly refers to the village of East Challow and potential coalescence with Wantage. It also states (in paragraph 7.70 of the Local Plan 2011): **"The gaps between Wantage and Grove, and Wantage and East Challow (...) have been particularly identified and protected in past adopted plans by a special safeguarding policy context. This policy context has been given the strong support of inspectors at local plan inquiries, following careful scrutiny at the respective inquiries."**
- 4.3. The village of East Challow has been transformed in the recent years with the site of the former Nalder and Nalder Ironworks and then business premises transformed into a modern cul-de-sac residential development. The area historically occupied by business and industrial premises has changed its character and grain to a much finer scale yet very much different in character terms. The most recent changes, the two approved residential developments on the land known as Challow Park, the site of 'Paddock and Pleasure Grounds' of Exuperius Turner Esq, will no doubt have further significant effects on the grain and perception of this rural village.

- 4.4. The open countryside protected under the Policy NE10 that separates East Challow from the western outskirts of Wantage has been greatly reduced with both settlements now beginning to coalesce. The extent of the perceived settlement boundaries, once confined by Challow Park now bridge the gap between the village and the western most edge of Wantage, which is marked by the built form of the King Alfred's Academy.
- 4.5. Prior to the publishing and adoption of the Local Plan 2031 the Council has reviewed the housing allocation and different land parcels around East Challow. The findings of these assessments have been published and although no strategic sites have been allocated within East Challow the studies indicate a number of potential and contingency sites around the village.
- 4.6. As indicated in Section 2 of this report, the assessment focuses on those parcels of land that are immediately adjacent to the perceived settlement boundary. These are shown on Figure L.1 and include the following parcels:
 - **Parcel A:** to the north east of the village. This parcel is located between the Woodhill Brook to the north east, the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal to the south; and abuts the perceived settlement edge of East Challow to the south west. The western extent of Parcel A reaches the Woodhill Lane that leads north from the village and links with the western edges of the Grove Airfield.
 - **Parcel B:** located to the east of the village and Challow Park. It coincides with the remaining part of the 'Important Open Land' protected under the policy NE10. It excludes Challow Park and the recently approved residential schemes. To the north the Parcel B extends up to the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal with the settlement edge of Wantage forming its eastern boundary. The A417 abuts Parcel B to the south.
 - **Parcel C:** to the south east of the historic core of the village. It borders the A417 to the north and extends east to the settlement edge of Wantage. The built form of the King Alfred's Academy and its playing fields define its eastern boundary. The southern boundary of Parcel C is defined by the B4507 / Ickleton Road, which coincides with the northern boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
 - **Parcel D:** to the south of the village core. It is wedged between the built form of Townsend to the north east, the Cornhill Lane to the south west and west; and the B4507 / Ickleton Road to the south. The North Wessex Downs AONB forms its southern boundary, similar to Parcel C.
 - **Parcel E:** to the west of the historic core of the village. It is located between the A417 to the north and Cornhill Lane to the west with the perceived settlement edge in East Challow limiting its extent to the east and south. The Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal dissects Parcel E with the northern part abutting the A417.

Parcel A

Refer to Figure L.8.1 and Appendix 2

- 4.7. Parcel A is very much perceived as part of the low-lying vale that stretches to the north of East Challow (refer to Figure L.8.1). In terms of its landscape characteristics it is different from the majority of the landscape around East Challow. Topographically, the land is level and appears simple and smooth. It comprises two large scale arable fields bounded by hedgerows and belt of trees that line the Woodhill Brook. The internal boundary between both fields is marked by a hedgerow and ditch that drains into the Brook. This vegetation includes some hedgerow tree, which restrict views between both fields to some degree. In terms of enclosure Parcel A is bounded by the higher ground of Windmill Hill to the south west and rising topography around Grove and Grove Airfield. The low lying nature of this parcel results in, generally short to medium range views that terminate on the surrounding landscape elements.
- 4.8. Built form along the edge of the airfield is visible, particularly the factory of Crown Packaging Ltd in the eastern part of the Grove Business Park and large scale industrial metal sheds and tower in the northern part of the

park. This built form is relatively prominent and easily identifiable even in winter months. In landscape terms it is of large scale and forms a detracting element. Views towards the more distant elevated landscape around Farringdon are not easily gained. Glimpses of the distant horizon to the north can be gained but do not form a feature and likely to be limited to winter months.

- 4.9. The settlement edge of East Challow is well defined by the recently completed residential development on the former site of Nalder and Nalder. This creates some level of intrusion into the countryside but as a brownfield site this effect had been already established for a number of years. The boundary treatment allows for a relatively high level of inter-visibility between some of these properties but generally views are limited to roof tops or upper storeys. The existing vegetation along this development creates a soft edge to the village where transition between built form and the open countryside seems appropriate and gradual.
- 4.10. The Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal bounds Parcel A to the south and its heritage value and aspiration for restoring this waterway pose a significant constraint. The Canal is lined by mature trees that generally restrict views in and out even in winter months. There is, however, lack of information with regard to the restoration of the Canal and potential conflict between different interest groups may be relatively difficult to overcome.
- 4.11. Notwithstanding the fact that Parcel A is covered by the Policy NE9 Lowland Vale, it is an example of a relatively ordinary landscape currently used for arable production. It is bounded by industrial facilities of the Grove Business Park to the east and north east, and scrap yard to the west, with limited visual connectivity with the wider landscape, landmarks or features that could be described as attractive. In terms of physical effects, it is suited as a developable area, subject to the extent of the Woodhill Brook's flood zone.
- 4.12. This area however feels relatively removed from the village and not perceived as part of the existing settlement or one that could be described as a natural extension to East Challow. The vegetation that lines the field boundaries and roads creates a perception of a rural landscape rather than peri-urban or one that could be argued as transitional. The appreciation of this landscape and visual amenity associated with the two nearby PROWs would also be substantially compromised.
- 4.13. The northern part of Parcel A has also been identified in the Local Plan 2031 as 'Land Safeguarded for Highways Improvements' and any highway or by-pass would require a suitable landscape buffer in order to protect the rural character of East Challow. Any form of development within the remaining part of this parcel would result in substantially extending the settlement either north or east closing the gap between the village and Wantage, and Grove (the approved development on the strategic site at Grove Airfield). The rural setting to East Challow would therefore be substantially compromised, merging the settlements and creating a large scale conurbation.
- 4.14. Small scale ad hoc developments can also result in similar effects by restricting views and visually bridging the gap between East Challow and the built form to the north east and east. When occurring incrementally such developments can result in substantial adverse and unacceptable effects amounting to similar effects comparable to large scale developments.

Parcel A Constraints:

- High sensitivity heritage asset and visual receptors – Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal.
- High sensitivity residential receptors.
- Area safeguarded for future highway improvements – diminished visual quality and reduced capacity of the local landscape to change.
- Visibility of the approved residential development at Grove Airport, located on a higher ground.
- Diminished physical and perceived separation between East Challow and Wantage / Grove.

- Settlement edge extended to the north, lack of connectivity with the core of the village and difficult to relate to the existing village grain.
- Additional suburbanising elements and highway works to Woodhill Lane are likely to further diminish the perception of East Challow as a rural settlement.

Parcel A Opportunities:

- Large scale field pattern with relatively level topography.
- Relatively high to medium level of enclosure.
- Views in and out screened or restricted to a considerable degree (except for inter-visibility with the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal).
- Lack of visibility or strong perception of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Parcel B

Refer to Figure L.8.2 and Appendix 2

- 4.15. Parcel B comprises a number of small to medium scale pastoral fields that separate East Challow from Wantage (refer to Figure L.8.2). The current land use reflects the sloping character of these fields unsuitable for arable production. Most of the field boundaries between the fields are delineated by hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees. The character and perception of this landscape is surprisingly rural, despite being wedged between the settlement edge of Wantage and the village of East Challow. A large scale agricultural barn is located near the centre of and forms a feature visible from the village reinforcing the agricultural character of the landscape and rural character of East Challow. The built form in Wantage, however, is located on a higher ground and is visible from the edge of East Challow foreshortening the physical distance between both settlements. They appear quite prominent due to their elevation and openness of the landscape.
- 4.16. Topographically the site falls from the south to the north and towards the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, which forms its natural boundary. The southern boundary is delineated by the A417 that links Wantage and East Challow and the highway interrupts the flow of the landform with contours continuing to rise further south west and culminating at Windmill Hill.
- 4.17. In terms of visual quality and inter-visibility it varies reflecting the sloping character of Parcel B. The relatively dense and mature vegetation that lines the Canal prevent views in and out of the more low lying parts and views terminate on this vegetation. The rising topography of the southern part of Parcel B reinforces this sense of enclosure and currently the area feels quiet and peaceful. Changes in the topography, field pattern, and pastoral land use provide interest and it is a relatively attractive landscape.
- 4.18. Views towards East Challow include built form in its eastern part but the properties are restricted by the intervening topography and vegetation. The roof lines indicate variation in levels in the village and their alignment and perceived height creates pleasant composition. There are some long distance but restricted views towards the elevated horizon to the north but trees along the Canal screen the majority of this landscape. The large scale industrial scale built form at the Grove Airfield is perceptible through tree canopies but unlikely to be visible when trees are in leaf and this detracting element has little bearing on the appreciation of Parcel B.
- 4.19. The elevated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB appears above the rooflines in views to the west and creates a sense of excitement and relationship with the wider landscape. Due to its elevation and openness it is perceived as a strong feature contributing to the appreciation of the local landscape.
- 4.20. Views from the southern edge of Parcel B overlook this area, low lying parts of the village and allow for long distance views to the north. The vale landscape can be best described as settled and strongly rural with built

form dotted around but not frequent. The railway line is clearly visible due to its linear form and infrastructure that stands out against the greens and browns of the landscape. The rising topography of the Corralian Ridge with its wooded slopes enclose the vale and the scale of this landscape can be easily appreciated. There is a strong sense of openness and exposure, and interest.

- 4.21. This area continues to be covered in the Local Plan 2031 by the policy NE10 'Important Open Land' to prevent coalescence of Wantage and East Challow. The area stretches from the eastern edge of the village and the corridor of the A417 to the edge of Wantage. The recently approved planning application for two residential developments have considerably undermined the purpose of this policy and compromised this landscape gap.
- 4.22. The analysis of the village grain indicates that these two developments, when considered in terms of their cumulative effects, have already bridged the gap between both settlements, both visually and physically. The setting to the village will change considerably over the next few years. Furthermore, the approach from Wantage will now be perceived as a suburban environment rather than a rural gap. Views to the south and towards the AONB will not be affected directly but nevertheless the overall experience will be of continuous built form and upgraded access points, including a relatively large roundabout at the eastern edge of East Challow.
- 4.23. Interestingly the fact that both developments now will extend the settlement further east and substantially intensify its grain, have now increased the value of the remaining parcels of land, both in landscape terms but also as a visual resource.
- 4.24. The capacity of Parcel B to accommodate change without substantially changing its character or appearance is very limited. There are no opportunities to accommodate any large scale developments or one that would be similar in scale to the two recently approved schemes. These two developments affected the capacity of this landscape and there is limited potential to absorb even some small scale and low rise residential developments. Such development may be achievable where it would tie in with the new settlement boundary and notional line defined by the properties on the northern side of the Canal. Such development, however, would substantially affect the visual amenity of the neighbouring properties and visual receptors along the PRoW that skirts Parcel B.

Parcel B Constraints:

- High sensitivity heritage asset and visual receptors – Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal.
- High sensitivity residential receptors.
- Two recently approved residential developments– diminished visual quality and reduced capacity of the local landscape to change.
- Visibility of the settlement edge in Wantage located on a higher ground.
- Diminished physical and perceived separation between East Challow and Wantage.
- Strategic gap between East Challow and Wantage has already been bridged by the approved residential developments. Statutory purpose of Policy NE10 'Important Open Land' has been compromised.
- Relatively steep slopes will require substantial levelling, cut and fill.
- Elevated landform – any development is likely to be highly visible.
- Highway improvements associated with the recently approved residential developments will introduce suburbanising elements on the eastern approach to East Challow and will diminish the perception of East Challow as a rural settlement.

- Inter-visibility with the vale landscape and towards the elevated ridges on the North Wessex Downs AONB. Landscape and visual effects upon the character of these two landscapes.
- Views of the open countryside / pastoral fields potentially screened and affected. Potential loss of the rural context as perceived from the village core.

Parcel B Opportunities:

- Context provided by recently approved residential developments.
- New established line of built form on the eastern edge of East Challow (recently approved residential schemes).

Parcel C

Refer to Figure L.8.4 and Appendix 2

- 4.25. The village of East Challow is bounded to the south east by two medium to large scale arable fields. The medium scale field abuts the rear gardens of the properties along Letcombe Hill road and the Cricket Ground. The eastern part of the Parcel, the large scale field, extends to the boundaries of the King Alfred's Academy and its playing fields. The A417 forms the northern boundary with the B4507 / Ickleton Road delineating its southern extent. The Academy forms the western extent of Wantage at this point with its built form and palisade fencing clearly visible, strongly geometric and abruptly finishing off the settlement edge (refer to Figure L.8.3). The school's boundary vegetation includes some evergreen conifers and although they do screen parts of the facilities they reinforce the detracting character of the school. The scale and extent of built form in Wantage is revealed from the higher ground within the Parcel, and currently visible from its western and south western part. The elevated Chain Hill forms a backdrop to the town and is particularly attractive as a landscape feature with tree stands marking its higher ground and providing transition between Wantage and the landscape of the AONB further south. The alignment of dwellings in Wantage creates relatively strong linear forms and the number of dwellings that are visible extend over much of the panorama. The perceived distance between East Challow and Wantage is therefore reduced and there is a sense that both settlements are very close to each other.
- 4.26. Views from the elevated parts of Parcel C are very attractive, particularly towards the landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The contrast between exposed and open ridges, large scale fields accentuated by hedgerows and belts of trees, and undulating landform stand in stark contrast to the landscape of East Challow and Wantage, and the vale to the north.
- 4.27. The low lying vale appears well wooded and is enclosed by the Corralian Ridge to the north with more distant hills forming a backdrop and creating a layering effect of varied landscapes of different character. The elevated views also include some detracting elements such as the railway line to the north, mentioned before, the large scale industrial sheds at the Grove Business Park in the north east, and Didcote Power Station to the east. The landscape is complex but its underlying character is rural, and strongly rural in places.
- 4.28. The elevated nature of Parcel C and particularly its inter-visibility, and relationship with the North Wessex Downs AONB suggest a high visual sensitivity of this site to any form of development. In terms of its value, it is an attractive area of countryside on the edge of the AONB. Its function as a buffer between East Challow and Wantage, however, indicates that local residents may accredit a higher value to this particular parcel than one may assign to an ordinary agricultural land. This particular area is also covered by the policies NE9 Lowland Vale and NE10 Important Open Land of the Local Plan 2031, both aimed to protect the character of the local landscape and prevent coalescence of the two settlements.

- 4.29. The landscape and perceptual factors that define the character of this Parcel, its contribution to the rural character of East Challow and the amenity ground of the Cricket Club limit its capacity to accommodate any notable change. The presence of the AONB landscape to the south and the high level of inter-visibility increases the sensitivity of this area and reduced its capacity substantially.
- 4.30. It is unlikely that any form of development could be successfully integrated without redefining the character and quality of this Parcel or impact on the amenity of the Cricket Club. Furthermore, any introduced change would affect the character and appreciation of the North Wessex Downs AONB landscape.

Parcel C Constraints:

- High sensitivity residential receptors.
- Setting to the Cricket Club may be potentially affected to a substantial degree.
- Two recently approved residential developments– diminished visual quality and reduced capacity of the local landscape to change.
- Visibility of the settlement edge in Wantage and strong form of the King Alfred’s Academy.
- Strategic gap between East Challow and Wantage has already been bridged by the approved residential developments. Statutory purpose of Policy NE10 ‘Important Open Land’ has been compromised.
- Diminished physical and perceived separation between East Challow and Wantage.
- Elevated landform – any development is likely to be highly visible.
- Highway improvements associated with the recently approved residential developments will introduce suburbanising elements on the eastern approach to East Challow and will diminish the perception of East Challow as a rural settlement.
- Any further highway improvements to the A417 will compromise the character of the local landscape and eliminate the already affected perception of the rural settlement edge.
- High level of inter-visibility with the vale landscape and towards the elevated ridges on the North Wessex Downs AONB. Landscape and visual effects upon the character of these two landscapes.

Parcel C Opportunities:

- Large scale field pattern.

Parcel D

Refer to Figure L.8.4 and Appendix 2

- 4.31. Parcel D is located to the south of the village core and east of Townsend. It is a medium scale field of, broadly speaking, ‘L’ shape and is the smallest of the analysed parcels around East Challow (refer to Figure L.8.4). In terms of its landform it forms part of Windmill Hill and is located on its upper slopes. Cornhill Lane, a byway open to all traffic, abuts this area to the west and south west, and forms a natural barrier. This byway is lined by mature overgrown hedgerow, which screens and restricts views in and out to a considerable degree. Views of the landscape to the west and the elevated topography of Windmill Hill are therefore obstructed from within the Parcel itself.
- 4.32. The northern edge is delineated by an unclassified road with Saint Nicolas Church of England Primary School located on its northern side. Mature trees restrict views to the north and there is very limited inter-visibility with the parish playing fields located further north. The eastern boundary of Parcel D is characterised by built form in Townsend but the properties are located on a slightly lower ground when compared with the western boundary. Vegetation in the gardens and difference in levels soften the appearance of the otherwise sharp edge

to the village. Views over these properties can be easily gained from the western part of the Parcel and Cornhill Lane, where gaps in the vegetation allow. The low lying vale landscape and elevated horizons in the distance form a very interesting view due to its complexity and reinforce the rural character of the village. There are some detracting elements in the landscape, the large industrial scale sheds at the Grove Business Park, facilities at W & G Park along the A417 to the north, and Didcote Power Station. It is worth mentioning at this stage that the Grove Airport has been identified as a strategic site for housing and application has been approved to develop approx. 2500 dwellings (planning application ref no: P12/V0299/O). Once constructed, the extent and massing of this development will alter the panorama currently gained from Parcel D.

- 4.33. The B4507 / Ickleton Road forms the southern boundary of Parcel D and coincides with the northern extent of the North Wessex Downs AONB, similar to Parcel C. Views from the neighbouring residential development and across Parcel D can be easily gained with the AONB landscape forming a strong feature. The difference in the character of this landscape, its landform and high level of inter-visibility creates a very strong relationship between the village and its rural setting. This relationship between two areas of different landscape character indicate a high sensitivity to development. Views in and out and relatively elevated position of Parcel D suggest that this area can be regarded as the setting to the village of East Challow. Any development, including small scale and modest size dwellings, would alter the grain of the village prevailing in this part of Townsend. The current perception of the settlement edge, as one approached East Challow from the east, is of relatively small scale built form partially screened by the intervening landform. Due to the elevation of Parcel D any built form would be highly visible above the established roofline and likely to affect views on the approach from Wantage, to a considerable degree. The layering effect of various elevations, rooflines, and difference in height is likely to be very dominant in this view and could be overwhelming, particularly when seen simultaneously with the open and strongly rural landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 4.34. It is evident that Parcel D forms part of the village setting, providing a buffer between its built form and surrounding countryside whilst preserving the rural character of the village. The character Parcel D and of the immediately surrounding landscape does not have the capacity to successfully accommodate any form of development apart from very small alterations along the existing settlement edge. This would have to be judged against the high visibility of this particular Parcel, substantial adverse visual effects upon the visual amenity of the neighbouring properties and visual receptors along the byway. Effects on the character and perception of the AONB landscape are also likely to be substantial and difficult to mitigate.

Parcel D Constraints:

- High sensitivity residential receptors.
- Visibility of the approved residential development at Grove Airport, more distant when compared with views from other parcels but due to elevations the massing of this development is likely to be easily appreciated and would form a dominant feature in the wider landscape.
- Settlement edge extended to the west, and bridging the gap between the settlement and the nearby Scheduled Monument.
- Potential effects upon the setting of the Scheduled Monument (heritage issue rather than landscape or visual)
- Additional suburbanising elements and highway works are likely to further diminish the perception of East Challow as a rural settlement.

- Elevated topography likely to result in high level of inter-visibility between newly introduced rooflines and elevations and the village core, approach from Wantage, the landscape between Wantage and east Challow, and the wider Vale landscape. Massing and scale would substantially change the skyline of East Challow.
- High level of inter-visibility with the AONB landscape.
- Landscape and visual effects upon the AONB landscape likely to be substantial.

Parcel D Opportunities:

- Context provided by the existing residential developments.

Parcel E

Refer to Figure L.8.5 and Appendix 2

- 4.35. Parcel E comprises a number of medium to small scale pastoral fields and is dissected by the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal. Cornhill Lane, the previously mentioned byway delineates its western edge and separates the village and pastoral fields from large scale arable fields around Cornhill Farm (refer to Figure L.8.5). Mature vegetation along the byway, the canal and also the A417 corridor restrict views in and out. There is a relatively strong level of enclosure with views restricted or screened by the field boundary vegetation, rising landform to the south east, and built form in the village. The area feels very intimate and quiet with the A417 traffic audible to some extent but not detracting from the quality of this landscape. Properties in the village are located on a slightly higher ground and overlook Parcel E. These properties have their back gardens facing Parcel E thus forming a relatively soft edge to the settlement. Their built form is softened by vegetation in their gardens and along field boundaries and due to their orientations, most of the rear elevations are filtered or screened from public vantage points. Judging objectively, the semi-detached dwellings at no. 12 and 13 Reynolds Way are more prominent due to their alignment but cannot be described as being dominant or forming a negative feature in the view.
- 4.36. Properties along the eastern boundary of Parcel E are substantially screened and are generally lower in height, when compared with other properties visible from Cornhill Lane. They are located at a slightly lower elevation with the undulation in the landform across Parcel E further restricting views of their built form.
- 4.37. Views to the south are restricted by the rising landform but there is a certain visual relationship between the pastoral fields that form Parcel E and the adjacent playing fields. Views from the playing fields are long distance and elevated and are possible due to the lack of built form within this area. In these views, the pastoral landscape that immediately surrounds the village create a rural foreground.
- 4.38. The difference in levels provides interest and presence of such land use in close proximity to the perceived settlement edge is unusual within East Challow. The relatively high level of enclosure and scale of the field pattern is also unique and strongly influence the landscape character of Parcel E. As one travels along the Canal views towards the settlement edge are restricted but where gained the low lying landscape and rising landform are particularly attractive and form the setting to the village, and indeed to the Canal. This setting is strongly rural in character and vulnerable to change due to its scale, enclosure and perceptual qualities. The horizon is characterised by dwellings in the village but further west the rising landform of Windmill Hill creates a smooth and elevated horizon with only gappy hedgerow and trees along Cornhill Lane interrupting the skyline.
- 4.39. The northern part of Parcel E, between the Canal and the A417 corridor, appears isolated from the village. It shares some landscape factors that are similar such as level of enclosure, land use, limited inter-visibility and field pattern. There is lack of built form within or around this part of Parcel E that would exert a strong or

noticeable influence. Views towards the caravan park, to the north of the village, can be gained but are not frequent or particularly detracting.

- 4.40. It is also worth noting that the field adjacent south west contains a scheduled monument (List entry Number: 1004854; 'Roman villa E of Cornhill Farm') and some evident traces of ridge and furrow are present within Parcel E. These heritage assets are particularly sensitive to development due to potential physical / direct effects and not just the visual effects.
- 4.41. Development within Parcel E, even of modest scale and size, is likely to affect a high number of visually sensitive receptors. Views from the playing fields, residential properties in East Challow, the Canal, and the public footpath that crosses Parcel E would be affected to a considerable degree. The character of the immediate landscape that defines the setting to the village would alter substantially and be redefined from pastures to the one containing built form. Although the more elevated views from the playing fields and near the school are likely to remain distant and include large tracts of the wider landscape, the foreground and middle ground would include rooflines and elevations visible amongst tree canopies. The visual effects upon the local residents and users of the public footpath would inevitably be greater. Similarly, the visual experience and appreciation of the landscape for those travelling along the Canal would be considerably changed.
- 4.42. Parcel E exhibits a relatively low capacity to change, particularly to residential developments. Due to the variation in levels any built form may appear prominent on the skyline, when observed from the Canal, public footpath and byway, and indeed the playing fields and allotments. The appreciation of the wider landscape that contributes to the visual amenity would be compromised and there is little scope to successfully integrate any built form within Parcel E with the existing developments in East Challow.

Parcel E Constraints:

- High sensitivity heritage asset and visual receptors – Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal.
- High sensitivity residential receptors.
- The currently pastoral fields contribute to the rural setting of the village, particularly important in the context of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal.
- Settlement edge would extend further north. Due to difference in levels it would be difficult to relate to the existing village grain and unlikely to achieve any meaningful connectivity with the village core. Vehicular access is unlikely to be achievable from the village core.
- Additional suburbanising elements and highway works to the A417 are likely to further diminish the perception of East Challow as a rural settlement.
- Potential effects upon the setting of the Scheduled Monument (heritage issue rather than landscape or visual).
- Assuming that vehicular access to the southern part of Parcel E (between the Canal and the playing fields/ residential properties) would have to cross the Canal – considerable physical and visual effects.
- Relatively steep slopes in the southern part of Parcel E will require substantial levelling, cut and fill.
- Elevated landform (in places) – any development is likely to be highly visible.

Parcel E Opportunities:

- Relatively high to medium level of enclosure.
- Views in and out screened or restricted to a considerable degree (except for inter-visibility with the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal).

- Lack of visibility or strong perception of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- Context provided by the existing residential developments.

5. Summary

- 5.1. Two recent planning applications have been approved and these combine to further erode the rural setting of East Challow. The consented developments vary in proximity to the village from approximately 2.0km (at Crab Hill on the north-eastern outskirts of Wantage) to 2.7km to the north-east (at Monks Farm, Grove).
- 5.2. While it is proven therefore that the village has been the subject of considerable pressure from numerous proposed residential developments in recent years, it is also evident that this is likely to continue to be the case in the foreseeable future.
- 5.3. The purpose of this report is to assess in general terms the historic development and current appearance of both the built form of East Challow and of equal importance, its landscape setting. The purpose of this is to inform the judgements and conclusions of the broader and more comprehensive East Challow Neighbourhood Plan
- 5.4. In particular, it will help to maintain the character of the village, minimise the impact of new development on the adjacent countryside and help conserve the setting of the village. It will also inform and help shape any new development to achieve the necessary high quality as well as acknowledging and expressing the positive qualities of local distinctiveness
- 5.5. In conclusion, it is acknowledged that the village setting and the adjacent rural landscape is of significant visual and recreational importance to both residents and visitors. This report will help to understand and protect the character of the surrounding landscape and its qualities and value in creating the setting of East Challow.