

PROPOSED NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL AND ASSOCIATED SPORTS PITCHES

LANDSCAPE PLANNING APPRAISAL

LAND EAST OF KIDNAPPERS LANE, LECKHAMPTON

ON BEHALF OF ROBERTS LIMBRICK LTD

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Landscape Planning Appraisal provides advice with respect to land that has been identified as the possible location of a new Secondary School lying to the south of the A46 Shurdington Road and east of Kidnappers Lane, Leckhampton, Cheltenham.
- 1.2 The extent of land that is subject to the study is approximately 12.61 hectares and is shown edged in red on the Site Location Plan (**Appendix 1**), and hereinafter is referred to as the 'Site'. It comprises three areas of land (**Appendix 2**), with the northern part, area A, extending to about 5.12 hectares; the central area B extending to about 5.97 hectares; and southern area C extending to about 1.52 hectares.
- 1.3 The Site falls wholly within Cheltenham District although it lies in close proximity to and/or abuts the boundary of Tewkesbury District. Areas A and B are separated from Tewkesbury District boundary by housing to the west of Kidnappers Lane at Brizen Lane and Brizen Park. Area C is separated from the district boundary which runs along Farm Lane by a narrow strip of agricultural land and a cluster of houses at Leckhampton Farm Court.
- 1.4 The purpose of the study is to consider the suitability of the Site in terms of landscape and visual capacity to accept potential school buildings and associated uses including hard standings/car parking and sports pitches, and the most favourable locations for such uses, height and extent. The need, broad location and extent of any mitigation and/or enhancements that may be deemed appropriate to integrate such development within its landscape context is also identified.
- 1.5 This appraisal is based on a 'worst case' assumption that the proposed school and associated facilities would be built before any potential residential development on land to the east or south. The construction of residential development is currently ongoing to the west and southwest of the Site as part of the permitted Brizen Park scheme.
- 1.6 For the purposes of this appraisal, it is assumed that the following elements would be required:
- School building(s) of medium scale footprint and 2 to 3 storeys maximum height;

- Hard standings to include car parking, car and bus drop-off areas and pedestrian circulation routes;
- Multiple unlit grass sports pitches (football, rugby, hockey etc.) of varying sizes;
- Sports changing facilities;
- Grounds maintenance accommodation; and
- Landscape structure planting.

1.7 The report has been prepared by means of desk study supplemented by site visits in July 2018. It should be noted that at the time of the site survey access was not permitted to the Site and therefore the preliminary visual assessment, including the approximate extent of the visual influence of proposed development, is based on access to PROWs that traverse area B and area C; PROW occurring within the study area to the east, south and south-west; and from public highways to the north and west, and the public highway that separates areas A and B (Kidnappers Lane).

2. SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

The Site

- 2.1 The Site lies on the urban edge of Cheltenham at its southern limit, in a pocket of urban fringe land between A46 Shurdington Road to the northwest (which forms the northern boundary of the Site), A436 Cirencester Road to the east, and Leckhampton Lane/Church Road to the south (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.2 Kidnappers Lane lies in a north-south alignment to the south of A46 Shurdington Road before turning at a right angle to the east and it then it turns at a right angle to the south/southeast toward Leckhampton; Kidnappers Lane therefore forms both the western boundary of area A whilst separating it from areas B and C. The remainder of the western boundary is formed by Farm Lane, which continues southward from Kidnappers Lane, and private residential property boundaries. A fence line marks the eastern boundary of area A which runs parallel to an agricultural access track off the A46 Shurdington Road, marking the western boundary of a triangular field that separates area A from Hatherley Brook. The eastern boundary of areas B and C is formed by Hatherley Brook, which is well-treed along the Site edge. The southern boundary is marked by a combination of fencing, and ornamental planting associated with residential properties at Leckhampton Farm Court. The Site also encompasses the highway within Leckhampton Farm Court.
- 2.3 Area A occupies the former Leckhampton Nurseries' horticultural nursery with glasshouses and miscellaneous buildings adjacent to Kidnappers Lane; derelict open growing areas with occasional trees, scrub and conifer hedges occur to the north. The northern and western boundaries of the former nursery are marked intermittently by low clipped gappy hedgerows, overgrown hedgerow/scrub, and timber post-and-rail or post-and-wire fencing. Access is via an agricultural gateway from Kidnappers Lane to the west (**Appendix 7, Viewpoint 6**). There is no public access to area A and local views into the Site are controlled by the boundary and brook side vegetation, and thus are limited to much of the A46 frontage, part of the northern section of Kidnappers Lane, and at the gated access to area A.
- 2.4 Area B to the south of Kidnappers Lane comprises three parcels of land that are framed by mature hedgerows with occasional trees which encompass mixed farmland comprising the northern parcel that is in arable use, and the two southern parcels which are used for horse paddocks/pasture subdivided by post

and wire fencing. A broadly east-west hedgerow separates the northern parcel from the two southern parcels. Vehicular access to the northern parcel of area B is from Farm Lane via a field gate at the southwest corner **[Viewpoint 9]**; there is no public access.

- 2.5 Vehicular access to the southern parcels within area B is from a field gate off Farm Lane north of a residential property known as Little Vatch **[Viewpoint 10]**. A public right of way (PROW), Leckhampton Footpath 9, marks the division between the central and southern parcels of area B extending eastward from this vehicular access toward The Nurseries/Field Cottage off Kidnappers Lane to the east, crossing Hatherley Brook via timber stiles **[Viewpoint 12]**. A single-storey wooden L-shaped stable building lies to the southwest of the footpath **[Viewpoint 11]**.
- 2.6 Area C comprises an irregularly shaped field to the south of area B, northeast of Leckhampton Farm Court. Area C mostly comprises rough pasture but includes the highway through Leckhampton Farm Court which is a narrow c.6m wide carriageway with tree-planted central island that leads to a field gate which provides access into area C. The west and southwest boundaries are formed by fencing and ornamental planting associated with residential properties. The remainder of the western boundary is marked by intermittent low hedgerows/scrub and brambles **[Viewpoint 13]**; a large vegetated heap (spoil/manure) lies at the northwest corner parallel to the boundary **[Viewpoint 15]**. This area is enclosed by an overgrown hedgerow with trees to the north and Hatherley Brook and trees to the east. Area C is bisected by Leckhampton Footpath 8 **[Viewpoint 14]**.
- 2.7 Landform across areas B and C is generally level, with a gentle decline east/northeast toward Hatherley Brook, giving way to a steeper incline along the narrow corridor of the Brook; effectively these areas therefore lie on a shallow 'plateau' c. 2 to 3m above the bed of Hatherley Brook. At the time of survey, access was not available to area A or the northern parcel of area B and so it could not be confirmed whether this shallow 'valley/plateau' runs along the full length of the western boundary of the Site/the former nursery.

Historic Context

- 2.8 Historic Ordnance Survey mapping shows the Site was agricultural land in 1903, with areas A and B being in allotment use (1923/24). The nursery appears on

mapping between 1954 and 1974. The eastern half of the area B and land to the south of Leckhampton Footpath 8 are shown as an orchard on the 1954 map and still remain at 1976-78.

- 2.9 A railway lies in a southeast-northwest alignment some 230m from the northeast corner of area A; this is shown as dismantled by 1968.
- 2.10 Housing appears along the western edge of Kidnappers Lane by 1938; land to the north, east and south remains in agricultural use and/or orchards. By 1968 residential development is established to the north of A46 Shurdington Road/south of the dismantled railway, and the small residential estate (Brizen Lane) to the west of the Kidnappers Lane houses is developed between 1978 and 1993; residential development to the south of this is ongoing (Brizen Park), extending through to Church Road. A small residential cluster is developed at Leckhampton Farm Court post-1993. Housing extends south-west at Warden Hill toward Up Hatherley Way to the northwest of the Site, and southwards from Cheltenham to Leckhampton and Pilley. Land to the south of the A46 Shurdington Road, to the west of Brizen Park is in a mix of horticultural and agricultural uses.

Site Context

- 2.11 Land to the west of Farm Lane, to the south of Brizen Lane is subject to ongoing housing development. This development site, known as Brizen Park, extends to the northern edge of Church Road, to the southwest of the Site.
- 2.12 The historic urban development described above has left the Site occupying the western edge of a small pocket of urban fringe agricultural and horticultural land (of average 670m wide east-west, and about 1km north-south) **[Appendix 5]** with housing to the west, north and east/south-east; largely open countryside remains to the south, although this connection is weakened and fragmented by ribbon development including Church Farm Business Centre and large detached houses along Church Road between Leckhampton and Brizen Park.
- 2.13 The Site is not subject to any landscape designation. However, the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) follows Church Road, about 235m at its closest point from the southern boundary of the Site. The AONB wraps around the urban edge of Cheltenham to the east **[Appendix 3]**. Land designated as Special Landscape Area (SLA) occurs at Churchdown Hill to the west of the M5 motorway, about 4.5km to the west of the Site. A number of designated heritage features occur, including Grade II Listed buildings at Leckhampton Farm Court adjacent to

area C boundary, and Field Cottage and Moat Cottage c.150m to 200m to the east; the moat to which they are associated is a Scheduled Monument lying about 230m to the southeast of the Site **[Appendix 5]**.

- 2.14 Land to the south of Church Road and that west of Brizen Lane/Brizen Park is subject to Cheltenham-Gloucester Green Belt designation **[Appendix 3]**.
- 2.15 Land form within the study area is dominated by the Cotswold escarpment to the south and southeast **[Appendix 4 and Viewpoint 1, 2 and 5]**. A trigonometry point marks the nearest highpoint of Leckhampton Hill on the Cotswold plateau at 293m AOD about 1.4km to the southeast of the Site, and the toe of the escarpment lies at about 100m AOD some 460m to the southeast. The land continues to slope gently toward the northwest edge of Cheltenham at about 30m AOD. The Site lies between c.72m AOD (A46/northern edge of area A) and 82m AOD (southwest corner of area C). Open, expansive views are gained from the plateau and escarpment toward Cheltenham and the Site.
- 2.16 A number of PROW traverse land to the east, south and southwest of the Site, including Leckhampton Footpath 5 and Footpath 11 from Kidnappers Lane to Footpath 90/Merlin Way (east), Leckhampton Footpaths 10 and 14 from Farm Lane and Kidnappers Lane (south and southeast), and Shurdington Footpaths 28 and 29 from Farm Lane to Shurdington Road (west/southwest) **[Appendix 5]**.
- 2.17 Shurdington Footpaths 29/31 and Leckhampton Footpaths 8/10 form part of a promoted recreational route known as Cheltenham Circular Footpath which loops to the west and south of the Site, extending south toward the Cotswold escarpment.
- 2.18 The nationally promoted long distance path, the Cotswold Way, follows the edge of the Cotswold escarpment, along Shurdington Footpaths 36 and 45.

3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ANALYSIS

Methodology

- 3.1 Landscape Character Assessment Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity published jointly by (the then) Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002) remains relevant. Topic Paper 6 provides an overview of current thinking about landscape sensitivity and landscape capacity that relates to landscape character assessment. Landscape capacity refers to the degree to which a particular landscape character area is able to accommodate change without undue effects on its character or overall change of landscape character. Topic Paper 6, Figure 1B, identifies the methodology recommended to assess the capacity of a landscape to accommodate a specific type of change, with reference to landscape character sensitivity, visual sensitivity and landscape value.
- 3.2 It should be noted that the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Edition 3 (GLVIA 3), which sets out best practice on how to undertake a landscape and visual impact assessment, does not make any reference to landscape capacity analysis nor does it make any reference to the concept of 'acceptability' of a scheme in terms of degree of harm i.e. as to whether a scheme, whilst generating some harm, would still in the broader context be considered acceptable as opposed to unacceptable development in landscape and visual terms.

Assumptions

- 3.3 The following is a summary of the factors that have been taken into account with respect to considering how the subject landscape has the capacity to accommodate the specific change that would result from school and sports pitch development.
- 3.4 In considering the nature of that change it is assumed that existing trees, external hedgerows and hedgerow trees would be retained with only localised, limited removal of internal hedgerows and/or trees to facilitate access/roads etc., and that the proposed school buildings would be of 2 to 3 storeys (assuming 10m to 15m including an allowance for +/- 2m for localised ground modelling) with associated uses, infrastructure, open space and landscape planting. The sports pitches are assumed to be grassed and/or green-coloured artificial surfacing, and unlit.

Landscape Character Sensitivity

- 3.5 Landscape character is defined as the “**distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse**” (Glossary, page 157, GLVIA, 3rd Edition). Such elements may comprise *inter alia* natural factors such as semi-natural habitats; cultural factors such as land use and enclosure pattern; landscape quality or condition; and aesthetic factors such as scale, enclosure, pattern, form/line and movement. This Landscape Planning Appraisal considers the sensitivity of such elements to change arising from potential development of the Site.
- 3.6 A review of published landscape character assessments is beyond the scope of this landscape planning appraisal and therefore the described landscape character is based on the author’s own assessment of the Site and its immediate context.

Landscape Features Sensitivity

- 3.7 Hatherley Brook and its associated tree line forms a continuous landscape feature common to areas B and C [**Appendix 5**]. Hedgerows along the remaining boundaries of areas A, B and C form further strong landscape features. Exceptions include part of the eastern, western and northern boundaries of area A that are defined by timber post-and-rail fences [**Viewpoints 1, 2, 5**], and the west and southwest boundary of area C that is formed by fencing and ornamental planting associated with residential properties at Leckhampton Farm Court.
- 3.8 Intermittent ornamental tree and shrub planting occurs within area A, associated with its former nursery use. This includes lines of tall conifer hedging [**Viewpoint 6**]. Online aerial mapping (Google Earth Pro, accessed 3rd July 2018) shows vacant/derelict glasshouses covering large areas of the northern parcel, adjacent to Kidnappers Lane, however, their presence could not be determined from the adjacent road, but they are just perceptible from elevated viewpoints on the Cotswold escarpment [**Viewpoint 17**]. Rough grass characterises land to the north of the nursery structures, subdivided by post and wire fencing and occasional derelict pig arks.
- 3.9 No other distinctive landscape features occur within areas B or C which comprise arable land, heavily grazed horse pasture and/or rank grassland [**Viewpoints 9, 10, 11, 14, 15**].

Landscape Character

- 3.10 Landscape character within the vicinity of the Site is predominantly two-storey detached and semi-detached residential properties and associated uses immediately to the north and west; ongoing residential development at Brizen Park lies to the west of Little Vatch and area C, and a small industrial complex to the south west (Church Farm Business Centre) off Church Road. Residential development also occurs further to the east (off Highwood Avenue/Merlin Way). Settlement between these suburban areas is more clustered and/or linear including Leckhampton Farm Court to the south of the Site, Robinswood/Robinswood Cottage to the east of the Site, and Peacecroft (Nursery Rhymes Nursery), Cornerways, Long Acre, and The Nurseries, and Sheepshead Row, Field Cottage and Moat Cottage along or off Kidnappers Lane to the east. Linear development also occurs along Church Road west of Leckhampton.
- 3.11 A patchwork of small and medium-sized geometric fields characterises land beyond the urban boundary, predominantly defined by hedgerows of variable heights and management regimes. Trees are frequent, and these combine with the hedgerows and shallow, gently sloping landform to limit mid and long-distance views to the north, east and west; longer views are drawn southward to the higher ground of the Cotswold escarpment and plateau.
- 3.12 Each of the three areas of land that comprise the Site display different landscape characteristics. Area A includes enclosed, intimate space within its southern part within and around the former nursery, contrasting with visually and spatially open areas in the north adjacent to A46 Shurdington Road **[Viewpoints 2 and 5]**; this patchwork of land uses does not follow or reinforce the prevailing field boundary pattern.
- 3.13 The northern parcel of area B is well enclosed, with tall established hedgerows forming the north, south and west boundaries and mature trees along the Hatherley Brook, creating an intimate space with no or limited views into or out of it from its immediate environs **[Viewpoint 9]**. The intensive arable use contrasts with adjacent urban use, and prevailing horse paddocks and livestock grazing uses in the wider area.
- 3.14 The two remaining parcels within area B, are of larger scale than the northern parcel and this creates a medium sense of enclosure in relation to the hedgerows and trees along its boundaries. Horse grazing and an associated timber stable

block is the dominant land use [**Viewpoints 10, 11, 14, 15**], with glimpsed views out or through the hedgerows to housing to the east and west, overall presenting an urban fringe 'horsiculture' character. Glimpsed views are gained toward houses along or at Kidnappers Lane/Brizen Lane, and toward Little Vatch seen through and above its garden foliage.

- 3.15 The character of area C is of a small to medium scale agricultural land parcel, although its land cover of rough grassland and vegetated spoil heap gives it an air of under use. Trees and hedgerows to the north, east and south create a medium sense of enclosure, which weakens to the southwest with open views toward houses at Leckhampton Farm Court. Narrow framed views of the Cotswold escarpment are gained to the south.
- 3.16 Approaching the Site from the west at its junction with the A417, the A46 Shurdington Road presents the character of a typical primary transport route comprising a wide, well-trafficked, single carriageway punctuated by roundabouts, traffic islands and signalised pedestrian crossings. It is flanked along its northern edge by established and recent urban developments, with the Kidnappers Lane/Brizen Lane estate lying to the south adjacent to the south, first seen from the vicinity of Up Hatherley Way roundabout. Street lighting occurs along the western approach from A46/to Up Hatherley Way roundabout past the Site, through to the town centre; occasional traffic signage occurs. Highway boundary treatments vary with prevailing low-trimmed hedgerows to the south and taller hedgerows to the north which visually screen residential properties from the road, interspersed with low-clipped hedgerows, brick walls, close-board fencing, post-and-rail fencing. A footway runs along the northern edge of the carriageway for the full length of this section of road, with localised footway occurring along the southern edge adjacent to the Kidnappers Lane/Brizen Lane estate, terminating at Kidnappers Lane; a signalised pedestrian crossing links the north and south footways west of Kidnappers Lane.
- 3.17 Approaching the Site from the east, A46 Shurdington Road typically displays an urban character flanked by two storey houses, in places converted to shops, with domestic gardens (and occasional mature trees) and footways on both edges of the highway. The route is lit and punctuated by street furniture such as signage, traffic lights and bus shelters.
- 3.18 Kidnappers Lane is of varied character along its route. The northern section has been diverted relatively recently, probably contemporary with the Brizen Lane

housing development, to create a wide bell-mouth junction with the A46. The road, and its extension along Farm Lane, is of a wide housing estate route character, providing access to the Brizen Lane, Leckhampton Farm Court and ongoing Brizen Park residential developments. Established housing along the western side of the route north of Brizen Lane has direct access to/from the highway, separated from it by a narrow intermittent grass verge and well-maintained ornamental hedgerows and/or fences and walls. Street lighting and a footway run along its eastern edge which is marked by a tall hedgerow for much of its length.

- 3.19 Where it separates areas A and B, Kidnappers Lane is narrower, little more than a single-track road, running between tall hedgerows to the north and south **[Viewpoints 7 and 8]**. This section is unlit and has no footway, presenting a more rural character. However, urbanising influences affect the character of the lane to the east of the Site adjacent to housing/nurseries which are separated from the road by a well-kempt grassed verge of medium width; the tall hedgerow remains to the north **[Viewpoint 8]**.
- 3.20 In terms of the landscape character sensitivity of the Site, the extent and pattern of vegetation features should be considered. In this case the strong north-south tree and hedge lines along Hatherley Brook **[Viewpoint 16]**, and east-west hedgerows and tree cover that subdivides areas within the Site (principally area A and northern parcel of area B; northern and central parcels of area B; and areas B and C should be retained and significantly enhanced with further hedgerow and tree planting. The retained hedgerow and tree planting, including appropriate management and gapping-up of existing hedgerows will 'anchor' any proposed development upon the Site, and enhance enclosure, screening of sensitive views, nature conservation and recreational opportunities.
- 3.21 In terms of cultural factors, the majority of the Site is or has recently been used for horticultural nurseries and/or horse and livestock grazing, which is a ubiquitous resource locally to the south and west. With respect to enclosure pattern, the Site is defined by hedgerows and/or tree belts to the east and west, with the urban edge of Cheltenham and associated clustered residential development forming the northern, southwestern and western boundaries. The characteristic sub-division of the landscape should be retained and further reinforced by any proposed development.

- 3.22 Scale needs to be considered in terms of aesthetic factors, and the development can be described as a small element associated with the overall settlement of, and development within, the context of Cheltenham. It would, however, be of medium scale set within, but associated with, small scale residential development.

Visual Analysis

- 3.23 A desktop study has been conducted of online aerial photography and has been verified by the preliminary site assessment from or near to the perimeters of, and within, the Site **[Appendices 6 and 7]**. This has confirmed that the visual influence of the Site is defined by the high proportion of tree cover and mature hedgerows within the site and its immediate context, thus making the Site visually well contained with localised inter-visibility with existing development in Cheltenham to the north, east, and west and no inter-visibility with Leckhampton to the southeast. Potentially, views toward or into the Site may be gained by receptors using public roads immediately adjacent to the Site (A46 Shurdington Road, Kidnappers Lane/Farm Lane and Brizen Lane); public rights of way (Leckhampton Footpaths 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and Shurdington Footpath 29); and private properties off A46 Shurdington Road/Kidnappers Lane/Farm Lane. Medium-distance views from the A46 in the vicinity of Up Hatherley Way roundabout toward the Site are screened by, or would be seen in the context of, foreground housing of the Brizen Lane estate **[Viewpoint 4]**.
- 3.24 Elevated distant views are gained from sections of the Cotswolds Way on Leckhampton Hill/the Cotswold plateau to the southeast **[Viewpoint 17]**. The shallow angle of view from the Cotswold escarpment and plateau at Leckhampton Hill is of a not unpleasant agricultural landscape set within and dominated by the urban development and urban fringe of Cheltenham. The Site is seen juxtaposed with the medium scale buildings of Church Farm Business Centre in the foreground (i.e. south of the Site), and the large-scale structures of Cheltenham Bournside School (and associated sports pitches) and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) set within the urban backdrop (i.e. north of the Site). Overall, the Site and the pocket of urban fringe land within which it lies is enveloped by urban development to the north, east, southeast and west.
- 3.25 Ground level views from housing north of A46 Shurdington Road and west of Kidnappers Lane are limited by building orientation, boundary treatments along the highway edge, including tall hedging, fences and/or walls. Intermittent

properties have views from first floor windows, but again these are prevented largely by roadside and/or garden tree and shrub canopies. The well-established hedgerow along part of the western edge of areas A and B further controls views from the upper floor of Kidnappers Lane/Farm Lane properties into the Site.

- 3.26 The property known as Little Vatch lies to the east of Farm Lane set within mature gardens which screen ground level views toward the Site with which it shares its north and east boundaries. Little Vatch is oriented north-south, with the principal first floor windows having an outlook in these directions. Some views would therefore be gained from the first floor of this property to the north/northeast and southeast toward areas B and C, respectively. Views of area A are unlikely to be gained from this property during summer months due to the screening effects of intervening hedgerows and tree canopies particularly those flanking the east-west section of Kidnappers Lane; this screening effect would be perpetuated to some degree during winter months as any new structures within area A would be filtered by the tracery of tree canopies.
- 3.27 A small cluster of houses (which includes two Listed buildings) of varying outlook lie to the west/southwest of area C at Leckhampton Farm Court. As with Little Vatch, ground level views to the north/northeast are screened by close-boarded boundary fences, and garden planting including trees and shrubs. The eastern boundary is more open with post and rail fencing and young, intermittent trees and shrubs that permit oblique ground level views across area C. Views toward area B, including those from first floor level, are filtered by a mature hedgerow with trees that separates areas B and C, although some 'slot' views may be gained from properties at the northwest corner of Leckhampton Farm Court. No views are gained of area A due to distance and the screening effect of successive hedgerows and mature trees.
- 3.28 Views to areas B and C from residential and commercial properties off Kidnappers Lane to the east of the Site (Robinswood/Robinswood Cottage, Peacecroft (Nursery Rhymes Nursery), Cornerways, Long Acre, The Nurseries, Sheepshead Row, Field Cottage and Moat Cottage) during summer months are effectively screened at ground and first floor level by tree and shrub canopies along Hatherley Brook. This screening effect would be weaker during winter months but would continue to be filtered by the tracery of the tree canopies **[Viewpoints 8, 12, 16]**. It is assumed that mature trees and the hedgerow along the northern edge of Kidnappers Lane (i.e. the southern boundary of the former Leckhampton

Nursery) would be retained as part of any future land uses to the east of area A (although ad hoc planting within the former nursery is expected to be removed). Therefore, no significant views would be gained from these properties toward any proposed development within area A.

- 3.29 No views would be gained by properties off Church Road due to screening effect of successive and combined layers of hedgerows and tree canopies, or built development flanking this route.
- 3.30 Views from A46 Shurdington Road on the western approach to the Site are restricted due to the combined effect of low-lying or gently sloping landform, frequent mature hedgerows/tree canopies and the built form of Kidnappers Lane/Brizen Lane housing which provides foreground to the Site. The Site therefore only comes into view in the immediate proximity of Kidnappers Lane junction. At this point, and along the northern boundary of the Site, open views are gained across area A, above the low foreground hedgerow/fencing seen against an intermediate backdrop of tree canopies along Hatherley Brook and within the former nursery/Kidnappers Lane. Areas B and C are not visible. Wooded flanks of the Cotswold escarpment form the distant backdrop, seen above the intermediate tree canopies **[photo]**.
- 3.31 Views from the eastern approach to the Site from the A46 Shurdington Road, east of Woodlands Road, are screened by roadside vegetation comprising hedgerows and trees. Oblique views are gained from the vicinity of Woodlands Road toward the northernmost Kidnappers Lane houses across the Site, which forms the middle ground; housing to the south is largely screened by vegetation the tree belt along Hatherley Brook, Site boundary hedgerows and overgrown scrub and conifers within the former nursery **[photo]**. Open views are gained of area A, again seen against an intermediate backdrop of tree canopies within the former nursery and/or along Kidnappers Lane. Areas B and C are not visible. Wooded flanks of the Cotswold escarpment form the distant backdrop, seen above the intermediate tree canopies.
- 3.32 Properties along and to the west of the northern section of Kidnappers Lane comprise modern 2-storey houses and older single storey bungalows (some with loft conversions). Ground floor views are prevented by hedges, walls or close-board fences to the property boundaries; some open or oblique views across area A may be gained from first floor windows where permitted by tall intermittent hedgerows along the western Site boundary **[photo]**.

- 3.33 There are no views from Kidnappers Lane between area A and area B into these respective parts of the Site as they are prevented by mature trees and hedgerows adjacent to the road **[photo]**. Views from Kidnappers Lane to the east of the Site are prevented by tree cover along Hatherley Brook **[photo]**.
- 3.34 The Site is not discernible from the northern edge of the Cotswolds AONB as it follows Church Road at the foot of the Cotswolds escarpment. Successive layers of treed hedgerows combine with mature vegetation along the Hatherley Brook and falling landform to create an effective screen; the existing urban edge of Cheltenham to the north/northwest, including established housing along Kidnappers Lane, is not visible. This effect is predicted to remain even during winter months when the vegetation is devoid of leaf cover.
- 3.35 Views from the Cotswold escarpment within the Cotswold AONB are gained, including those from the promoted Cotswold Way long-distance path. From this elevated position, the Site is visible, but is seen within the context of an expansive and complex panorama, that encompasses much of the urban extent of Cheltenham set against a distant backdrop of the Black Mountains in Wales to the northwest and the Cotswold escarpment to the northeast as it stretches toward Cleeve Hill **[Viewpoint 17]**. The landscape pattern is one of dense development interspersed with generally manicured open spaces (i.e. Caernarvon Park; Warden Hill; Cheltenham Bournside School sports pitches; Hatherley Park; Burrows Playing Field; Leckhampton C of E Primary School playing field; Hall Road Allotments; and Naunton Park)
- 3.36 From the escarpment, the disused glasshouses of the former nursery are just discernible, to the north of and partly screened by Kidnappers Lane hedgerow, nestled within the ad hoc trees and shrubs of the former nursery beds. The northern part of the area A appears open, with moving traffic on the A46 Shurdington Road just perceptible. It is envisaged that the overgrown nursery beds, including conifer hedging, would be cleared to enable development to proceed; this would represent a very small and almost imperceptible change in views from the escarpment experienced in the context of a sweeping panorama.
- 3.37 Area B and its internal hedgerows are also visible from the escarpment, juxtaposed with existing residential development flanking the western edge of Farm Lane and emerging development at Brizen Park which extends the built form south to Church Road; Cheltenham Bournside School is seen to the north of and in alignment with area B. From this elevated vantage point, the internal

hedgerows of area B make little contribution to the screening of the land, compared with the strong screen afforded by trees along Hatherley Brook or the east-west section of Kidnappers Lane.

Summary

- 3.38 In summary, the Site sits within a pocket of open land on the southern edge of Cheltenham and is bound immediately to the north and west by existing and ongoing residential developments, with residential and mixed uses occurring further to the east and south/southeast at Leckhampton, separated by fields/horse paddocks, horticultural nurseries, and isolated residential properties.
- 3.39 The Site extends to 12.61 hectares and has been subdivided into area A (5.12ha), area B (5.97ha) and area C (1.52ha) for the purposes of this appraisal.
- 3.40 Hatherley Brook is lined by mature trees and forms most of the eastern boundary of the Site, with the remainder of that boundary comprising visually open fencing towards the north. The northern boundary is marked by fencing along the busy A46 Shurdington Road which is visually open. The western boundary is defined by Kidnappers Lane and is marked by mature hedgerows for much of its length which screen ground level views into the Site; the northern section of that boundary is fenced and visually open. The southern boundary abuts residential development at Leckhampton Farm Court and pasture to the south; this edge comprises a mix of fencing, immature trees and ornamental garden shrubs and generally has open or glimpsed visibility at ground level.
- 3.41 The Site displays an urban fringe character comprising derelict horticultural nursery and 'horsiculture' features, with a small parcel of arable land; such uses are ubiquitous within the locale.
- 3.42 Overall, ground level views (ground floor and private curtilage) into the Site are limited from neighbouring properties including Little Vatch and housing off Kidnappers Lane. However, views may be gained into the Site from first floor windows of some properties immediately fronting onto the Site.
- 3.43 The Site is not subject to landscape designation, but it is close to the Cotswold AONB boundary that follows Church Road to the south. The AONB extends to the southeast and includes the Cotswold escarpment and plateau. The Cotswold Way forms a nationally promoted long distance path that follows the edge of the Cotswold escarpment at Leckhampton Hill, affording elevated panoramic views of

Cheltenham and surrounding land within which the Site forms a central but small element. In such elevated views, the Site is seen juxtaposed with medium scale employment uses at Church Farm Business Centre in the foreground, with Cheltenham Bournside School and the large-scale GCHQ building in the background, set within small-scale residential development and a patchwork of manicured open spaces. The Site is not visible from the lower-lying parts of the AONB due to the screening effect of intervening trees and hedgerows.

- 3.44 Development of the nature proposed, comprising medium-scale built form and associated uses set within manicured open space (i.e. the sports pitches and structural landscape planting) would be in keeping with the prevailing landscape pattern and character. Both area A and area B would be suitable locations in landscape and visual terms for the proposed new 2 to 3 storey school.
- 3.45 Area A occupies the former Leckhampton Nurseries site which includes disused glasshouses, miscellaneous hard standings, overgrown ornamental planting and rough grassland. Area A provides development opportunities due to its former uses, current condition and proximity to the A46 and established urban edge of Cheltenham; there are also good opportunities to enhance visual screening and physical boundaries. It could therefore be a suitable location for the proposed school buildings and hard standings, particularly if sited toward the north and west of part of area A. Built development of up to 3-storeys within area A when seen from elevated viewpoints on the Cotswold plateau and from Cotswold Way would be 'read' as part of the Cheltenham urban area, and would be partially screened by existing hedgerow and tree planting. Buildings close to the western boundary should be limited to 2-storeys opposite existing housing, and a sympathetic set-back of structures and appropriate boundary enhancement would be required along this edge of Kidnappers Lane.
- 3.46 With regard to area B, the strong tree cover along Hatherley Brook and Kidnappers Lane (i.e. the northern boundary of the parcel) provides opportunities to anchor and screen a 2 or 3 storey school building and so it could therefore be a suitable location for the proposed school buildings and hard standings. Any proposed structures along the eastern edge of Farm Lane should be limited to a maximum of 2 storeys opposite existing housing, and a sympathetic set-back of structures and appropriate boundary enhancement would be required along this edge of Farm Lane. Grouping of the development and associated sports pitches within area B would be in keeping with the prevailing landscape pattern.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 4.1 The Site lies on the southern edge of Cheltenham, within a pocket of urban fringe land which is enveloped by urban development to the north, east, southeast and west.
- 4.2 From the landscape features, landscape character and visual analysis it is concluded that both area A and area B would be suitable locations for the proposed school building(s). Area A provides an opportunity to group the proposed structures with established built form to the north and west and to enable direct access to the A46. Any structures would be best located in close proximity to existing built form i.e. toward the northwest corner of area A. These buildings could extend up to 3 storeys without significant landscape or visual effects occurring, although it would be preferable to limit heights to no greater than two storeys opposite existing residential dwellings to avoid unneighbourly impacts of overlooking/overshadowing.
- 4.3 The northern part of area B offers strong landscape features in the form of tree cover along Hatherley Brook and Kidnappers Lane that could anchor and screen a new school building. Built development is also being extended further to the west and southwest by ongoing work at Brizen Park, which will expand the developed context for potential school structures in the northern parcel of area B. It is recommended that development of school buildings is restricted to areas A and/or B.
- 4.4 With regard to sports pitch location, then the whole of area B would be suitable, and the majority of area C, subject to structural landscape planting and/or buffer to Leckhampton Farm Court and Little Vatch.
- 4.5 It is therefore envisaged that the proposed school buildings would be confined to area A or area B and would therefore be associated with established built form to the north, southwest and west (A46 Shurdington Road/Kidnappers Lane (north)) and the overall prevailing landscape pattern of built development and manicured open space. The size, shape and varied size of sports pitches required to serve the school could be located within area B on broadly east-west orientation, and potentially a small-sized pitch within area C in a broadly north-south orientation. Some localised ground modelling would be required within areas B and C to accommodate the proposed uses. Whilst the proposed sports pitch use would

change the appearance and character of arable and rough pasture to a manicured amenity character, it would maintain the prevailing landscape scale and pattern.

- 4.6 The present boundaries, other than the north, east and northwest boundaries of area A, the internal boundaries of area B, and southern and western boundaries of area C, create a relatively strong sense of spatial enclosure to the Site, due to tall, mature trees and lower growing shrub layer beneath. To the north of the Cotswold escarpment, this prevailing pattern of trees and hedgerows with trees combine with gently sloping landform to permit only local, close range glimpsed views to be gained into the Site. On the steeply rising ground of the Cotswold escarpment and the plateau, views are gained down toward the Site from elevated vantage points.
- 4.7 The proposed development would be seen in the context of Bournside School buildings and sports pitches to the north of the A46 and would be similar in appearance and scale.
- 4.8 Wherever possible, ready-established vegetation should be retained, protected, and appropriately managed with minimum removal of plants to enable infrastructure/vehicular and pedestrian/cycle access.
- 4.9 The objective of new planting would be to strengthen containment of, and enhance screening of views toward, the development to generally enhance the visual and landscape amenity of neighbouring residents and users of the Site. In turn, appropriate design of such planting would provide opportunities for ecological and possible recreational enhancement, particularly along Hatherley Brook.
- 4.10 Any proposed development and or re-grading of landform for building or sports pitch platforms should be set back from Hatherley Brook to protect the watercourse and mature trees and shrubs along its banks. Similarly, any re-grading should be offset from mature hedgerows and trees that bound the parcels of land that comprise the Site to protect root zones.
- 4.11 Screen planting should be enhanced adjacent to existing properties to the east of Farm Lane including The Vatch and Leckhampton Farm Court. The southern and eastern boundaries of area C are poorly defined, and it is therefore also recommended that hedgerows with occasional trees be established along these edges.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

- 5.1 This landscape appraisal considers a proposed new secondary school on land south of A46 Shurdington Road, east of Kidnappers Lane. It assumes that the proposed school would be built in advance of any potential housing that may come forward at a future date within the parcel of urban fringe land within which it lies.
- 5.2 The Site lies on the southern edge of Cheltenham and is bordered by housing estates to the north and west, with an isolated property, Little Vatch and a cluster of properties (Leckhampton Farm Court) lying to the east of Farm Lane. It forms part of a small pocket of agricultural land framed by housing to the north, east southeast and west, including ribbon development to the west of Leckhampton along Church Road.
- 5.3 For the purposes of the appraisal, the Site has been subdivided into three parts, namely area A (to the north), area B (the central area comprising three parcels of land) and area C (to the south).
- 5.4 The Site occupies a former horticultural nursery (area A) and agricultural land (arable and horse pasture uses areas B and C). Hatherley Brook forms much of the eastern site boundary edged by a strong belt of native trees and shrubs. Established hedgerows with occasional trees bound much of the Site providing a strong landscape frameworks that is typical of the prevailing landscape character.
- 5.5 Landform within the Site gently slopes from southeast to northwest, although Hatherley Brook is incised, thus the Site lies on a shallow plateau c.1.5m to 2m above the stream bed.
- 5.6 The Cotswold escarpment and plateau lies to the south and southeast, with Leckhampton Hill forming a local high point. Elevated views are gained from public rights of way (PROW) including the Cotswold Way national trail that follows the plateau edge and escarpment. Views from PROW on the lower lying land are generally screened by intervening vegetation comprising successive hedgerows and tree canopies.
- 5.7 Two PROW traverse the Site within areas B and C; there is no public access to area A. Views are gained across these areas by users of the footpaths.

Conclusions

- 5.8 The landscape and visual appraisal concludes that area A and area B within the Site would be suitable for the proposed uses of school buildings and associated uses including car parking/hard standings and sports pitches.
- 5.9 Area A would permit direct access to the A46, with proposed buildings positioned in proximity to existing built development along the north and/or western edges of the Site, subject to suitable building line set-back to maintain amenity of neighbouring residents. Building heights of up to 3 storeys would be acceptable, with two-storeys closest to neighbouring houses and taller elements set back.
- 5.10 Similarly, area B would be suitable for built development subject to suitable building line set-back to maintain amenity of neighbouring residents; access could be gained from Farm Lane. Building heights of up to 3 storeys would be acceptable, with two-storeys closest to neighbouring houses and taller elements set back. Area B is also suitable for the sports pitch development.
- 5.11 Area C would be suitable for development of a small grassed sports pitch subject to retention of existing perimeter hedgerow trees/hedgerows, safeguarding of root zones, and protection of Hatherley Brook corridor and vegetation. It is assumed that the sports pitches would be unlit.

APPENDIX 1

Site Location Plan

APPENDIX 2

Gloucestershire County Council Site Plan (areas A – C)

APPENDIX 3

Landscape Designations Plan

APPENDIX 4

Topography Plan

APPENDIX 5

Landscape Features Plan

APPENDIX 6

Viewpoint Location Plan

APPENDIX 7

Photoviews