

LANDSCAPE & VISUAL APPRAISAL

Evidence Base for the Semington Neighbourhood Plan

For:

Semington Steering group and Parish Council

December 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reason for the Report

1.1.1 Fiona Sharman was commissioned by Semington Parish Council and Steering Group to undertake a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) of the parish of Semington as part of the Semington Neighbourhood Plan evidence base. Figure 1 shows the Study Area.

1.1.2 The aim of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) is to assess Semington Parish's landscape and visual sensitivity to new residential development.

1.1.3 The LVA will deliver the evidence base required for the emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and its policies, and will help the community to decide objectively a) whether new residential development may be acceptable/appropriate in certain locations, given the likely implications, and b) which areas are worthy of protection.

1.1.4 The LVA's findings can also be used to help develop detailed landscape strategies and future environmental and recreational projects/initiatives/enhancements/design guides for the local area, the village, and individual parcels of land. These could be the subject of specific NDP policies.

1.2 Scope of the Work

1.2.1 The scope agreed was to undertake a desk study exercise to review existing Landscape Character Assessment and designations associated with the area to understand the Landscape and Visual character of the Study Area and its surrounding context.

1.2.2 The work also required fieldwork to check/assess the Landscape and Visual character of the Study Area that included confirmation of key views from publicly accessible areas of the surrounding landscape which affect the setting of the parish and settlement of Semington village.

1.2.3 Following completion of the desk study and field work, preparation of a Landscape and Visual Appraisal report to include the following:

- The landscape character context of the parish of Semington looking at physical influences; influences of human activity; and aesthetic and perceptual factors.
- Setting out the landscape planning context including any relevant landscape-based planning policies/designations/guidelines etc.
- Setting out the visual characteristics of the village of Semington and surrounding landscape focusing on the setting of the village and the degree of separation/coalescence between the village, parish and neighbouring parishes of Melksham and Trowbridge.
- Undertaking a narrative analysis of the issues and assess the sensitivity of the landscape to development and make recommendations on the need for a Landscape Gap in landscape setting terms.

The Landscape and Visual Appraisal was carried out from a range of publicly accessible land within the Study Area. The appraisal was carried out on foot and included a relevant selection of publicly accessible open space, roads and footpaths. The Study Area was

visited during November 2022 and the weather was dry with good visibility. Representative photographs were taken using a standard 50mm lens at eye level.

1.3 Relevant Experience

- 1.3.1 Fiona is a Consultant Chartered Landscape Architect and has been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute since 2005.
- 1.3.2 Fiona’s professional experience includes work within the private and public sectors, with extensive experience of consultation, public participation and engagement, often working with planning authorities, neighbourhood partnerships and community groups. Fiona has been involved with a wide range of development proposals, including acting as Expert Witness at Planning Inquiries.
- 1.3.3 Fiona’s experience includes strategic and green infrastructure analysis and planning, residential master-planning, the regeneration of city-wide parks and neighbourhoods, creation of new play areas, Local Plan housing allocation sites and neighbourhood plans. Her project portfolio also includes residential, renewables, industrial, commercial, waste energy and minerals projects.

1.4 Report Structure

The structure of the report is summarised below:

- 1.4.1 **Section 1** provides an introduction and background.
- 1.4.2 **Section 2** explains the landscape and visual assessment methods used, the approach to the commission, and the processes followed.
- 1.4.3 **Section 3** explains the Landscape Planning Context. This section includes a review of relevant landscape-based planning policy from national policy context through to the local planning framework; identifying the key landscape planning issues and constraints in respect of the Study Area, including the planning context for the provision of Landscape Gaps.
- 1.4.4 **Section 4** describes the landscape resource/character of the area (with reference to published character area appraisals), identifying its key constituent elements

including physical influences (e.g. vegetation, watercourses and biodiversity) influences of human activity (e.g. heritage assets and settlement patterns) and aesthetic and perceptual factors (e.g. sense of place, local features and cultural associations).

1.4.5 **Section 5** identifies the visual characteristics of the Study Area with representative key views which analyses the setting of the parish of Semington and the village of Semington.

1.4.6 **Section 6** sets out and describes the processes followed in making judgements about landscape and visual sensitivity. It explains the key terms and phrases used, and summarises the information that was factored into judgements about levels of sensitivity. Potential effects arising from future development are considered.

1.4.7 **Section 7** sets out the assessment's recommendations. This section of the report makes recommendations regarding the sensitivity of the landscape to residential development and potential for the creation of a Landscape Gap and Green Spaces. This section identifies landscape features that require protection or could benefit from enhancement.

1.4.8 **Section 8** sets out the conclusion.

2. METHODOLOGY, ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section provides a brief summary of the methodology used in the preparation of this document. A detailed methodology is set out in Appendix 1 accompanying this report. The methodology sets out the guidance referenced, the terminology used, the concept behind the process of Landscape and Visual Appraisal, and the methodology which has been applied.

2.1.2 The methodology also sets out both assumptions made and limitations acknowledged, and is supported by a glossary which defines terms used throughout.

2.1.3 The main aims of this LVA are: a) to assess the landscape and visual sensitivity of Semington Parish, and its sensitivity to new residential development, and b) to inform and guide decisions about where Landscape Gaps and Green Spaces should be located.

2.1.4 Any new development will result in certain changes to the existing 'baseline' landscape and visual situation. These changes are likely to subsequently affect landscape character and views in varying degrees.

2.1.5 It is necessary to establish what and who could be affected by these changes created by any new development and what the implications of the changes would be, in order to make decisions about whether the changes are 'acceptable' or not, taking into account a wide range of factors.

2.2 Guidance and Terminology

2.2.1 The methodology, guidelines and terminology used in the preparation of this Landscape and Visual Appraisal have been developed from the following:

- The ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition’ (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (published 17th April 2013)
- ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’, Natural England, 2014

2.2.2 For the avoidance of doubt:

- ‘Km’ means kilometre(s); ‘m’ means metre(s).
- All distances are approximate.
- All references to points of the compass are generalised and are used for descriptive purposes only.

2.3 Process of Assessment

2.3.1 Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Assessment is a process where the features and qualities of views and surrounding Landscape are examined, and assessments are undertaken in accordance with the approach set out in GLVIA3¹.

2.3.2 The process considers: a) the susceptibility to change of the ‘receptor’ (i.e. the landscape itself or any viewer thereof) and b) the value attached to the view/landscape element to determine sensitivity (for a full definitions of these terms and process to determine sensitivity see Appendix 1: Methodology).

2.3.3 It is important to note that this Appraisal is not a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). LVIA is used mainly for assessing the effects of site-specific developments, where the type, scale and form of proposed new built form is already known. Landscape Appraisal (the focus of this report) tends to be carried out at an early stage in the planning process, as the findings are used to inform judgements

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition’ (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (published 17th April 2013)

about the suitability or otherwise of land for certain generalized forms of development (such as housing, forestry etc.).

- 2.3.4 Landscape-related planning policy is relevant to the assessment, as the planning context within which new developments would have to be considered in the context of planning policy requirements.
- 2.3.5 The value and sensitivity of heritage assets are considered in relation to the assets' landscape context and setting, in line with Historic England (HE)'s 'The Setting of Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning' Note 3 (Second Edition).
- 2.3.6 It is important to state here that this appraisal does not state whether an area of land can or should be developed; it simply sets out the sensitivity of an area to residential development.

3. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 National Planning Context

3.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (revised in July 2018) sets out the policies with which new development should comply. Broadly speaking, there are three factors that must be taken into account when planning new development, and an appropriate – ideally equal – balance should be struck between all of them: the factors are ‘social’, ‘economic’ and ‘environmental’.

3.1.2 The NPPF requires that development should be on land of the right type and in the right place, and that planning policies and decisions should inter alia ensure that new development is appropriate for its location. It also requires that development should contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

3.1.3 Section 7, Paragraph 58 states that local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust policies that set out the quality that will be expected of any new development, based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions, among others, should aim to ensure development:

- Will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development.
- Responds to local character and history, and reflects the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation.
- Is visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

3.1.4 Section 11, Paragraph 109 of the document states that the planning system should contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and local environment through, among others protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

3.2 Local Planning Context

3.2.1 WILTSHIRE COUNCIL CORE STRATEGY

The Wiltshire Core Strategy was adopted by Wiltshire Council in January 2015 and sets out the planning policy within the district up to 2026. A number of policies from the West Wiltshire District Plan 2004 and West Wiltshire Leisure and Recreation DPD 2009 have also been saved within the Core Strategy and remain relevant in so far as they accord with the NPPF. The main landscape policies from these documents relevant to the Study Area are as follows:

- Core Policy 15 sets out the Spatial Strategy for the Melksham Community Area. Semington is located within the Melksham Community Area and is classified as a large village. The Melksham policies are therefore relevant to Semington. The policy states that *'over the planned period approximately 2,370 homes will be provided, of which about 2,240 should occur at Melksham. Approximately 130 homes will be provided in the rest of the Community Area.'* Development must be in accordance with Core Policies 1 and 2 and would need to respond to the proposed Melksham Canal Link Project (Core Policy 16 below).
- Core Policy 16 promotes the Melksham Canal Link Project that would link the Kennet and Avon Canal to the proposed restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal. The policy promotes green infrastructure links and sustainable transport connections between Semington, Berryfield and Melksham. The policy also requires that development along this route have regard to Policy 53 and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.
- Core Policy 29 sets out the Spatial Strategy for the Trowbridge Community Area (see below).
- Core Policy 51 requires any new development to preserve, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character, mitigating any negative effects through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals should be informed by the relevant landscape character assessments.

- Core Policy 52 requires development to retain and enhance Wiltshire’s green infrastructure network, linking to the network, providing accessible open space in accordance with Wiltshire Open Space Standards and ensuring appropriate long-term management.
- Core Policy 53 sets out that the historic alignment of Wilts and Berks canal will be safeguarded with a view to long-term re-establishment as a navigable waterway. Proposals will be permitted that are designed to develop the canal’s recreational and nature conservation potential, in particular, the use of the old line of the canal for walking, cycling and interpretation. Proposals will need to demonstrate that the cultural, historic and natural environment will be protected and enhanced, with no overall adverse effect, and that potential impacts on ecology, landscape, flood risk, water resources (abstraction) and water quality have been fully assessed and taken into account.
- Core Policy 57 requires development to be of a high standard of design, in particular, retaining and enhancing existing important landscaping; responding to and; retaining important views into and out of an area and ensuring public realm proposals create places of character.
- Core Policy 67 states that *‘Development proposed in Flood Zones 2 and 3 as identified within the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment will need to refer to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment when providing evidence to the local planning authority’*
- Saved Policy C40 requires trees of visual amenity value to be retained, especially those in Conservation Areas and those covered by Tree Preservation Orders.
- Saved Policy CR1 seeks to protect the public rights of way network from development and seeks extensions and improvements where appropriate, as part of development proposals.
- Saved Policy CR3 seeks to develop a green space network around the urban areas within the district, encouraging development proposals to provide recreational areas and extend and enhance fragmented habitats.

3.2.2 OTHER RELEVANT LOCAL POLICY DOCUMENTS

- Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy.²
- Published Landscape Character Assessments (see Section 4 below)

3.3 Neighbourhood Planning – Policy Context

3.3.1 In 2010 the concept of ‘Neighbourhood Planning’ was introduced by the Government, and was subsequently included in the first version of the NPPF via the 2011 Localism Act. One of the NPPF’s original fundamental objectives was to put unprecedented power in the hands of communities to shape the places in which they live.

3.3.2 According to the Government’s website³, *‘Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. ‘They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. ‘Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.’*

3.3.3 So long as the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) policies do not conflict with national or local policies, the NDP will form part of and sit alongside the plans prepared by the Local Planning Authority (LPA). Decisions on planning applications are made using both the Local Plan and the NDP.

3.3.4 Neighbourhood planning is also an opportunity for the community to identify formally protect areas/features which it considers to be of high local value.

² A Green And Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Wiltshire, Wiltshire’s Natural Environment Plan 2022-2030 – Wiltshire Council Feb 2022

³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

3.4 Local Green Spaces

- 3.4.1 NDPs can designate certain areas as ‘Local Green Spaces’ (LGSs). The designation is ‘*a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities*’.⁴
- 3.4.2 NPPF Paragraph 100 states that ‘*The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is: (a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves (b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife (c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*’
- 3.4.3 Paragraph 100 of the NPPF also states that ‘*Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.*’ However, neither Green Belt nor LGS designations can entirely preclude development, but may provide another layer of protection.

3.5 Landscape Gaps – Policy Context

- 3.5.1 Landscape Gaps are spatial planning tools designed to shape the pattern of settlements. They are not countryside protection or landscape designations. They generally command wide public support and have been used with success in previous strategic plans to influence the settlement pattern. Nationally, the most significant application of policy to maintain settlement separation and avoid coalescence is Green Belt Policy.
- 3.5.2 Previous National Guidance (in PPS’s and PPG’s) on gaps and green wedges has subsequently been revoked but the importance of maintaining physical separation between settlements and avoiding coalescence is still an important consideration for many communities.
- 3.5.3 The importance of a Landscape Gap is therefore more concerned with its ‘setting’ function (visual and physical separation) rather than a consideration of intrinsic

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space>

‘landscape value’; thus, helping to preserve landscape areas which contribute to the setting, identity or backdrop of settlements.

3.6 Summary of potential future development in and around the parish

- 3.6.1 At the time of writing this report there are currently 53 dwellings in the development pipeline: 24 being built along St George’s Road, outline planning permission for 26 on the land west of the tennis court and 3 others.
- 3.6.2 A number of other sites are being promoted for development. A local call for sites has been held as part of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process and all the SHEELA sites will be assessed with a view to informing the approach to allocation by the NP.
- 3.6.3 Wiltshire Council’s Local Plan Review Consultation (January 2021) identified large areas of potential to extend Trowbridge to the south-west of Semington⁵.
- 3.6.4 To the north of the parish, in Melksham Without Parish, there are various development proposals, significantly the Melksham Canal link project which could see the Wilts and Berks Canal linked up again to the Kennet and Avon Canal and up to 900 homes delivered alongside.⁶

3.7 Summary of progress to date on the Neighbourhood Plan

- 3.7.1 The Neighbourhood Plan is in the early stages of preparation. Evidence collection is underway to inform policies that are linked back to a draft vision and objectives that have been drafted and tested through consultation with the community. The aim is for the Neighbourhood Plan to inform and shape future development, as well as to protect and key assets and features of the village and wider parish. Allocation of housing is being actively explored with a Local Call for Sites and Site Assessments being undertaken.

⁵ See the Wiltshire Council Regulation 18 consultation document for further information:

[https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5652/Planning-for-Trowbridge/pdf/](https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5652/Planning-for-Trowbridge/pdf/WLP_Principal_Settlement_Planning_for_Trowbridge__26-01-2021_.pdf?m=637472733734070000)

[WLP_Principal_Settlement_Planning_for_Trowbridge__26-01-2021_.pdf?m=637472733734070000](https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5652/Planning-for-Trowbridge/pdf/WLP_Principal_Settlement_Planning_for_Trowbridge__26-01-2021_.pdf?m=637472733734070000)

⁶ <http://melkshamnews.com/2021/12/15/canal-projects-plan-for-up-to-900-houses-throws-up-concerns>

4. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER BASELINE

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This section describes the landscape resource/character of the area identifying its key constituent elements including physical influences (e.g. vegetation, watercourses and biodiversity) influences of human activity (e.g. heritage assets and settlement patterns) and aesthetic and perceptual factors (e.g. sense of place, local features and cultural associations).

4.1.2 Landscape Character Assessment seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive. The landscape character of the area has been analysed at a number of scales in published character studies. Brief outlines are included here to bring out elements and features relevant to the parish. Where relevant these publications are also referred to in later sections of this report relating to the landscape and visual sensitivity of the parish.

4.1.3 At the time of writing this report, members of the parish have assembled the following detailed, valuable local landscape character information about their parish:

- Semington Character Statement
- Key views
- List of non-designated heritage assets

Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, these documents should be referred to alongside this report and will be referenced where appropriate.

4.1.4 In addition to the published character assessments this section also contains more detailed notes relating to the author's observations and findings following their visits to the parish and additional baseline studies.

4.2 National Landscape Character Assessment

4.2.1 Natural England published an updated profile for the area in 2014. The Parish is located in National Character Area Profile 117: Avon Vales. Whilst the National Character Area profiles provide some insight into the landscape around the Study Area, they cover large areas and only provide a broad overview. In summary, the NCA is described as follows: *'The Avon Vales form a low-lying, clay-dominated open landscape, with the higher ground of the Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs National Character Area (NCA) to the south, Berkshire & Marlborough Downs NCA to the east, and the Cotswolds NCA to the west. In the south and north there is a gradual merging with the clay of the Blackmore Vale and Vale of Wardour NCA and the Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA respectively'*. The key characteristics identified in the NCA and considered relevant to the parish are summarised below:

- An undulating clay vale with a mix of arable and pasture.
- Small and medium-sized fields with mostly hedgerow boundaries with few hedgerow trees, varying in shape from irregular piecemeal enclosure to rectilinear planned enclosure.
- Numerous low ridges with local views over towns and villages.
- Transport corridors along roads and watercourses, heavily influential on all development in the NCA.

4.3 Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (County Level)

4.3.1 Of more direct relevance to the Study Area is the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, December 2005). The purpose of this assessment is to document the current status of the Wiltshire landscape, furthering the understanding of the landscape resource available in the area and giving an indication of areas in need of enhancement and of conservation. This enables better-informed decisions to be made on the future management of the landscape and provides an objective basis for developing policies as well as enhancement and restoration projects or strategies.

4.3.2 The Study Area falls within Landscape Character Type 12: Open Clay Vale. Landscape Types have a distinct and relatively homogenous character with similar physical and cultural attributes, including geology, landform, land cover, and historical evolution. The Landscape Type has been further sub-divided into component Landscape Character Areas (LCAs).

4.3.3 LCAs are described as discrete geographic areas that possess the common characteristics described for the Landscape Type. Each LCA has a distinct and recognizable local identity.

4.3.4 KEY CHARACTERISTICS

The Parish falls within LCA 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale. The majority of its identified key characteristics are exhibited within the parish of Semington. These key characteristics are listed below:

- ‘Level landform with wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.
- Pastoral land use with some arable.
- Large scale geometric fields with hedgerows or open drainage channels defining boundaries.
- Presence of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies.
- Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).
- Floristically rich hay meadows.
- Settlement pattern varies from large towns and small scattered villages to sparse farmsteads.
- Buildings in varied materials of brick, render and stone.
- Crossed by major transport corridors, and a network of minor roads linking settlements.
- Historic use for transport evident in canals’.

4.3.5 The assessment describes the Landscape Character Area as follows: ‘Area 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale is an extended area following the course of the River Avon from Great Somerford in the north to Bradford on Avon in the south. As well as the Avon the area is characterised by the presence of other rivers, tributary streams, lakes, and, to the south, the Kennet and Avon Canal. The Avon Open Clay Vale is a level, open area with views to the higher ground of the Limestone Ridge to the east. Land is predominantly intensively managed permanent pasture with some arable and small isolated pockets of meadow (such as Sutton Lane Meadow SSSI). Hedgerows, gappy or low flailed in places, enclose fields of varying size. There are sparse hedgerow trees plus willows lines (some pollarded) marking the waterways and poplar shelter belts. Sections of the area remain rural and tranquil despite major routes travelling through (the M4, A350, A342) plus railway lines in cuttings and embankments and the visual influence of modern large-scale development on the edges of Chippenham, Trowbridge and Melksham. This urbanising influence is particularly prevalent to the south of the area while the northern section is more akin to area 12A with scattered settlement of small brick and stone-built villages and farmsteads.’

4.3.6 EVALUATION

Positive landscape features of significance:

- ‘Wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.
- Rich variety of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies, including scarce marl water habitats.
- Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).
- Hay meadows with unimproved grassland of ecological interest.
- Villages and farmsteads with vernacular mix of local stone and brick.
- Visible archaeology in Roman roads, pattern of medieval villages, long established grazing meadows, and the Kennet and Avon Canal corridor.’

4.3.7 The document identifies the forces for change as:

- ‘Agricultural intensification threatens the remaining small-scale field patterns and traditional pastoral landscape.
- Loss of hedgerows boundaries and particularly mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows.
- Elm loss of the 1970s.
- Intensification in farming leading to drainage and improvement of permanent pasture and water meadows on the floodplain and loss of riparian vegetation.
- Pressure for further expansion of settlement and new development threatening the character of the small villages and scattered farmsteads.
- The presence of major transport corridors particularly the trunk roads has brought pressures for development and associated amenity planting and signage.
- Increasing road use which will further diminish the rural tranquility of the vale landscape.
- Pressure to upgrade roads through additional kerbing and signage to accommodate an increase in traffic volume.’

4.3.8 LANDSCAPE CONDITION

This is generally judged as moderate and the document states that *‘The Open Clay Vales are an intensively managed type with large areas under arable cultivation. Although there are limited areas still managed as unimproved grassland, most of the meadows, a substantial part of the hedgerow network and riparian vegetation has been lost’*.

4.3.9 In terms of strength of character the document states that: *‘There are still some highly rural, tranquil areas within the Open Clay Vales which are dominated by the varied waterways with their lush vegetation, with small scattered villages and farmsteads of vernacular materials. However elsewhere in the type the influence of*

the busy transport corridors and the large urban areas is pervasive making the type as a whole moderate in strength of character’.

4.3.10 The inherent landscape sensitivities are identified as:

- ‘Rural tranquility.
- Hedgerow pattern.
- Water bodies and water ways of varied character and ecological value.
- Streamside willows and other riparian vegetation.
- Remnant hay meadows.
- Wide open views.
- Settlement pattern of nucleated villages with variety of vernacular building materials. Pressure to upgrade roads through additional kerbing and signage to accommodate an increase in traffic volume.’

4.3.11 The broad management objectives that are considered relevant to the Study Area are :

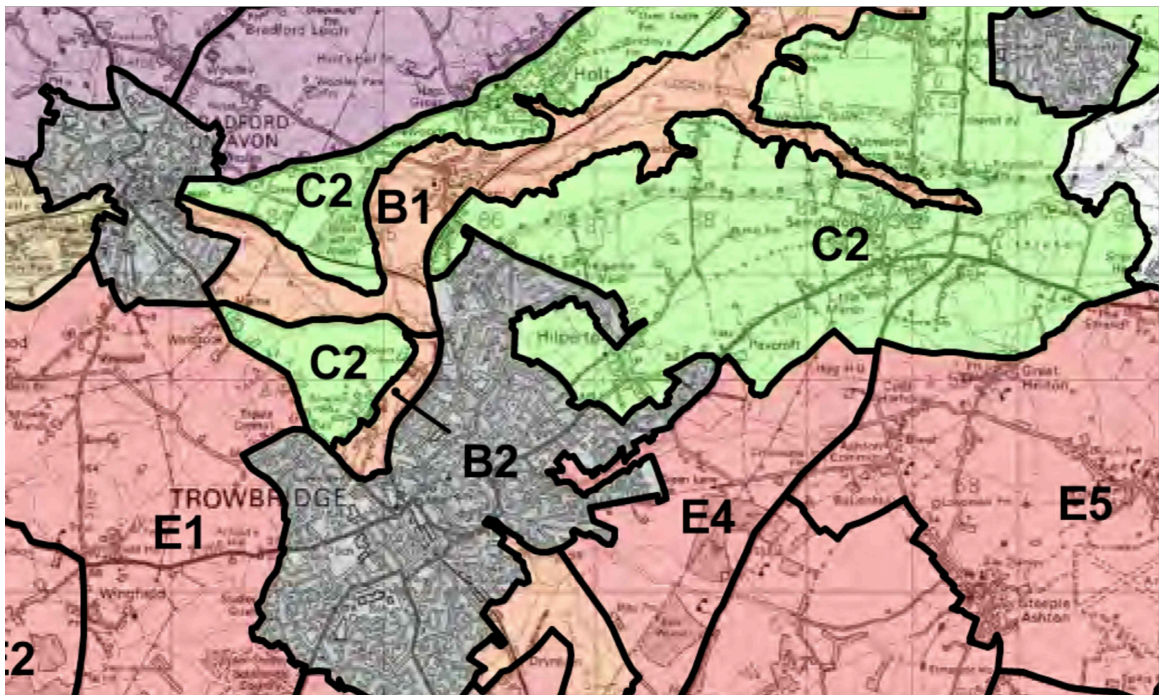
- ‘Retain and manage the hedgerow network and nurture new hedgerow trees.
- Promote appropriate management of arable land including retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields to encourage wildlife, particularly farmland birds.
- Retain and manage hay meadows.
- Introduce new tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as alder and willow.

- ‘Take opportunities to extend and enhance the varied wetland habitats (reed beds, wet grassland and wet woodland) of the Cotswold Water Park through appropriate restoration of mineral workings.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.’

4.4 West Wiltshire District Landscape Character Assessment (Regional Level)

- 4.4.1 The West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007 (Chris Blandford Associates) was produced on behalf of the old West Wiltshire District Council and provides a further level of detailed assessment at 1:25,000 scale.
- 4.4.2 The majority of the parish of Semington is situated mainly within the C2: Semington Open Clay Vale Landscape Character Area (LCA). However a narrow spur of the B1: Avon Flood Plain LCA extends into LCA C2 from the north-west of the parish to follow the corridor of the Semington Brook that feeds westwards into the main Avon river corridor
- 4.4.3 The location of the Semington Open Clay Vale Landscape Character Area C2 and B1: Avon Flood Plain is shown in Figure 2 below.

FIG.2 Location of C2: Semington Open Clay Vale Landscape Character Area (LCA) and B1: Avon Flood Plain LCA.



4.4.4 C2: SEMINGTON OPEN CLAY VALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA (C2 LCA)

The area stretches from the north-eastern edge of Trowbridge, eastwards (incorporating Semington) and northwards to the southern edges of Melksham and western edges of Bowerhill. The area is sub-divided by the River Avon floodplain.

4.4.5 All of the Key Characteristics of the C2 LCA are exhibited within the parish and these are as follows:

- ‘Predominantly flat, sloping gradually upwards to the south of Bowerhill and at Hill Farm east of Hilperton
- Gently meandering course of Semington Brook, lined in places by mature vegetation
- Kennet and Avon Canal and disused railway corridor are distinctive corridor features
- A mixture of arable fields and pasture
- Urban fringe character apparent, adjacent to Trowbridge and Melksham/Bowerhill

- Several interconnecting main road corridors cross the area
- Settlement pattern comprising Semington village and a number of isolated farmsteads.
- Strong sense of openness
- Sense of tranquility disturbed by proximity to major road corridors.'

4.4.6 The evaluation section of this document highlights that the hedgerow network is gappy in places and the landscape pattern relatively fragmented by major road corridors and the canal/dismantled railway corridors. The document also highlights that the area is intensively managed and in several places character is strongly influenced by human activity.

4.4.7 Key management objectives within the character area are to enhance the landscape setting of Trowbridge, Melksham and Bowerhill and restore fragmented hedgerows and deteriorating landscape pattern. Specific management objectives are to:

- 'Remediate and soften visually intrusive harsh urban edges of Trowbridge, Melksham and Bowerhill.
- Conserve open views across the clay vale to distant downland ridges.
- Restore gappy hedgerows with species appropriate to local landscape character.
- Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the A361 and A365 road corridors.
- Introduce arable field margins as an important nature conservation feature.
- Screen visually intrusive large developments.
- Encourage any new development within settlements to fit with the local vernacular character.'

B1: AVON FLOOD PLAIN LCA

4.4.8 A narrow spur of the B1: Avon Flood Plain (LCA B1) extends into LCA C2 from the north-west of the parish following the corridor of Semington Brook which is an important tributary water course that feeds into the main river Avon corridor and its catchment area.

4.4.9 Key characteristics of the B1 LCA are as follows and apart from the first, they are clearly in evidence within the parish.

- ‘Meandering River Avon and its adjacent low-lying, flat floodplain.
- Intimate river corridor, lined with riverside trees (including alder and willow).
- Patchwork of rough grassland and arable fields within the floodplain, along both sides of the river channel.
- General lack of settlement pattern.
- Away from the settlements, a strong sense of tranquility throughout the area.
- River corridor is generally inaccessible via road, although a comprehensive network of footpaths leads to, and along the river corridor.

4.5 Local Landscape Character Analysis

4.5.1 The following observations are made by the author and are based on their additional desktop studies and observations in the field.

LOCATION

4.5.2 Semington is a civil parish and village (large village in planning terms in Wiltshire). The village is located approximately 2 miles to the south of Melksham and 3 miles north-east of Trowbridge. The parish includes the hamlets of Little Marsh and Littleton.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

4.5.3 Geology and Soils

Underlying geology '*comprises a mixture of Oxford/Kellaway clays and tracts of sand within vales*'.⁷ Soils vary from loam over gravel to seasonally wet deep clay.⁸

4.5.4 Landform and Topography

Landscape within the parish is relatively flat, particularly to the east and north of Semington village at around 30 to 40 Above Ordnance Data (AOD), generally comprising the flood plain to Semington Brook. The land rises gently to form a low ridge to the west of the village at around 50 to 59 AOD at the parish boundary. To the north of Semington village the land slopes upward slightly to meet the course of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

4.5.5 Hydrology

The '*gently meandering course of Semington Brook*'⁹ (a tributary of the River Avon¹⁰) enters and forms the north-east parish boundary, runs eastwards, then southwards to follow the parish boundary before heading eastward again at the foot of Seend Head. There are also a few drainage ditches and small tributaries that feed into the Brook plus a few isolated ponds.

4.5.6 Vegetation and Biodiversity

The parish and settlement of Semington is generally well vegetated with a strong and varied network of mature native hedgerow field boundaries and mature hedgerow trees. However, the condition of these is variable, ranging from gappy and poorly maintained in places, to well maintained and flailed in others.

⁷ LCA2 page 48, West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007. Chris Blandford Associates

⁸ LCT12 p125 Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants, December 2005

⁹ LCA2 page p48 West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007. Chris Blandford Associates

¹⁰ This is a strategic GBI corridor in the Wiltshire GBI Strategy, Feb 2022

- 4.5.7 Notable mature trees with some exotic species are also seen in and around the settlements or around isolated countryside dwellings. These are often associated with larger properties (often historic) such as land associated with Brook House to the north of the settlement of Semington and private land opposite St George’s Court.
- 4.5.8 A mature oak is a noticeable feature at the junction of St George’s Road and High Street. Other prominent mature trees of note are those located near the A361 roundabout and the High Street approach to Semington and Little Marsh.
- 4.5.9 In general, grassland in the area is *‘predominantly intensively managed permanent pasture with some arable and small, isolated pockets of meadow’* with some areas of marshy fields and rough grassland.¹¹
- 4.5.10 Riparian vegetation (as identified in LCA 12B and C2) such as willow and poplar are seen along the corridor of Semington Brook and its tributary streams, for example as seen around Semington Brook and The Mill at Littleton. These provide valuable wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors. In other areas, the banks of Semington Brook are less rich in habitats and variety due to more intensive land management.
- 4.5.11 A line of poplars (shelterbelts are identified in LCA 12B) located near the A361 and crematorium is a noticeable feature in views throughout the parish.
- 4.5.12 The embankments to the major roads (A361 and A350) are generally well vegetated with established belts of trees and this assimilates these routes within the parish landscape and limits visibility of moving traffic.

INFLUENCES OF HUMAN ACTIVITY

Cultural Heritage

- 4.5.13 It is important to note that it is beyond the scope of this appraisal to assess individual heritage assets or features. However, the effects on the visual experience of these assets, i.e. their setting are within the remit of this appraisal.¹²

¹¹ LCA 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale, Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, Land Use Consultants 2005

4.5.14 The parish of Semington is rich in cultural heritage and there are numerous historic associations between elements, such as the Kennet and Avon Canal (historic transport use) and The Mill at Littleton.

4.5.15 Members of the Semington Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have prepared a document that identifies the cultural heritage assets within the parish including those that are non-statutory designated, such as the WW2 pill boxes, but are nevertheless important and of value to members of the parish.

4.5.16 In summary, the key heritage features/elements identified are:

- St George’s Hospital: grade 1 listed former Victorian Poor Law Workhouse, since converted to residential use¹³
- 33 listed buildings
- 14th century St George’s Church
- Brunel aqueduct on the Kennet and Avon Canal
- Nucleated pattern of mediaeval villages
- Ancient meadows and grazing patterns
- Somerset Arms: 18th Century public house

4.5.17 Land Use/Management

Land use within the parish is a mix of intensively managed permanent grass pasture with some arable. There are also some small pockets of less intensively grazed meadow. The boundaries are a mix of post and wire fencing and mature hedgerows that are in very poor condition (see section 4.5.5 above).

¹² The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Historic England 2017

¹³ LCA C2 Semington Open Clay Vale, West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007 p49

4.5.18 Landscape and Settlement Patterns

A large proportion of Semington Parish consists of countryside and has a rural quality. Fields are a variety of medium and small sizes of irregular shape (see Figure 2: Aerial View). Arable use tends to be associated with some of the medium-sized fields.

- 4.5.19 The largest settlement within the parish of Semington is the village of Semington that is located to the west of the parish. Elsewhere, development is sparse and limited to hamlets and isolated farmsteads/dwellings, and the converted Littleton Mill and a few commercial premises and two gypsy traveller sites.
- 4.5.20 The settlement of Semington historically extended in a broadly linear pattern along High Street to connect with the historic transport use of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Later 20th century development extended the settlement to the west along St George's Road and Pound Lane. There is also some extension to the south to meet the A361. These developments are more noticeable in the landscape as they are less vegetated in appearance. The historic pattern of the settlement also extended along Church Street to the church, ending at Manor Farm.
- 4.5.21 To the south of the village of Semington and the A361 lies the hamlet of Little Marsh. To the east of Semington, beyond the A350, is the hamlet of Littleton that consists of a farmstead and a few dispersed properties. The disused route of the old A361 is evident.
- 4.5.22 To the south of the A361 and to the west of the parish there are a number of other uses evident, such as the crematorium, playing fields and adjacent gypsy traveller site and the caravan park at Fairfield.
- 4.5.23 The hamlet of Little Marsh is located to the south of the A361 roundabout along Little Marsh Road, which was the old course of the A350 before the bypass was opened in 2004. The routes of the bypass and A361 tend to dominate the landscape and isolate and disconnect this area from the rest of the parish and in this area were generally inaccessible/neglected at the time the field study was conducted.
- 4.5.24 20th century development alongside the A361 at Turnpike Place is prominent to the south of the village and extends beyond the village up to the roundabout.

4.5.25 The area around Brickfield has a good network of PRow, with a rural countryside feel, has very little built form, and is predominantly agricultural land. Apart from Gypsy traveller sites adjacent to A350 and A361 roundabout, built form is relatively sparse and comprises a few farmsteads and isolated properties. The area contains a tributary to the Semington Brook comprising part of its floodplain. There are also a number of non- designated/scheduled monuments.

4.5.26 For further information/detail regarding the pattern of growth and character of Semington village, the reader is referred to the Semington Character Study.¹⁴ In brief, the document states: *'Semington has seen incremental housing growth from the 1960s onwards, the majority of which has been and continues to be small estate developments to the west of the old village.'*

4.5.27 The Immediate setting to Semington Village

Apart from the southern edge of Semington village adjacent to the A361, the village is surrounded by farmland and paddocks. The north, north-east and eastern edge of Semington appears well vegetated and verdant, with the occasional property that is more visually prominent, i.e. less enclosed by vegetation. The far eastern edge of the settlement extends to the Grade 11 Listed property Manor Farm and its associated large agricultural barns and outbuildings, with land that appears unkempt and overgrown with scrub, and various agricultural machinery and materials that appear disused/neglected.

4.5.28 To the north of the settlement there are isolated clusters of properties, including Semington dry dock, around the canal and humpback bridge that acts as a gateway to the parish of Semington. The High Street descends from this bridge and runs past a few modest properties and fields before entering the village via a bridge over Semington Brook.

4.5.29 Land to the north- west edge of the settlement contains small fields of pasture/ paddocks that adjoin the Kennet and Avon canal. These fields widen out in a westerly direction creating a visual and physical continuity and connection with the countryside beyond.

¹⁴Semington Character Study produced by the Semington Steering Group

4.5.30 The western edge of the settlement is generally well vegetated and integrated with surrounding fields/countryside. Pylons are a dominant element in the fields immediately to the west of residential areas and these run in a north-south direction.

4.5.31 Character of Buildings and the Built Form

The Semington Character Study ¹⁵ provides a detailed analysis of the character of buildings and built form within the settlement and is therefore not repeated in detail here. The document identifies the gateways to the village, its character, notable buildings, positive features and detractors.

4.5.32 Public Access/General Access and Movement

This is an accessible landscape for walkers and cyclists with numerous Public Rights-of-Way (PRoW) and these are shown on Figure 3. Some of these PRoW are promoted routes and are recognised at a national as well as local level. Nationally recognised and promoted tourist routes within the parish are:

- The Kennet and Avon Canal and towpath – attracts boat users (tourist and residential) and users of the towpath.¹⁶
- The Mid Wiltshire Way Long Distance Path – crosses the parish at its eastern end.
- National Cycle Routes 4 and 403 – connect Hilperton with West Semington and Melksham.

4.5.33 Popular local routes often extend beyond the parish and connect to the wider landscape beyond and neighbouring settlements, and there are many opportunities for circular walks of varying lengths. For example:

- SEM 128 follows the Semington Brook towards the eastern boundary of the parish and this route incorporates the historic mill at Littleton, and connects

¹⁵ Semington Character Study produced by the Semington Steering Group

¹⁶ <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canal-and-river-network/kennet-and-avon-canal>

with the Mid Wilts Way Long-Distance Route, with an option to return to Semington via the Kennet and Avon Canal.

4.5.34 The parish is also served by a few byways and bridleways, particularly to the west of Semington village. Due to the presence of the A350 bypass and A361 the lanes and minor roads are peaceful in nature with a low volume of traffic. The layout of the parish is physically influenced by the presence of these major roads that intercept near Littleton. These roads have severed the continuity and accessibility of and detracted from the legibility (i.e. the ability for walkers to orientate themselves in the landscape) of some areas and PRow within the parish. It is not always easy to cross these roads, for example, as is the case to the south of the football club near Little Marsh. As a result, some areas appear somewhat fragmented and isolated from the rest of the parish. For example:

- Littleton from Semington (the old A361 road to Seend and Devizes is still evident. This was closed when the stretch of road that runs past the crematorium was built).
- Little Marsh from Semington (particularly on foot)
- The crematorium and St George's Church (particularly on foot)
- The portion of the parish to the south of the A361 and east of the A350 around Brickfield Farm.

4.5.35 The High Street that passes through Semington provides a popular means of access to the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington dry dock.

Gateways

4.5.36 Gateways are important elements in the landscape that provide an introduction/entrance to an area or place. They often inform the first impression of a place, help support or create a sense of place/genus loci and they aid legibility i.e. the navigation through that landscape.

4.5.37 There are a few locations/routes that act as key gateways into the parish for vehicle users, cyclists and pedestrians these are related to the village of Semington and are strongly defined to the north of the village by the humpback bridge over the Kennet and Avon Canal and the A361 roundabout (with old crossroad toll house) to the south.

4.5.38 In addition, in relation to walkers, cyclists and boat users, other important/key gateways into the parish are the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal, National Cycle Routes 4 and 403, the route of the Mid Wilts Way Long Distance path and footpaths crossing the northeast portion of the parish.

4.5.39 The Semington Character Study has identified inner and outer key gateways into the village of Semington. These are described in more detail in the Character Study.

4.5.40 Community Spaces

The following community spaces, which are highly valued by the community, are located within the parish of Semington:

- Semington Village Hall and social club
- St George's Church and grounds
- Football club and playing fields
- Tennis courts
- Crematorium
- Areas of wide grassed verge with benches within the settlement of Semington

AESTHETIC AND PERCEPTUAL FACTORS

4.5.41 Scale

Whilst there is an intrinsic openness (identified in the character appraisals) and expansive views across the parish, the regular enclosure of fields of small to medium

size with hedgerows and trees creates a variation of scale. Where present, vegetation and mature trees around and within the settlement of Semington provide a containment to the spread and appearance of built form. The scale of built form is generally residential and mainly in proportion to the surrounding landscape.

4.5.42 From within the parish occasional views are afforded of the larger scale, commercial development associated with Hampton Business Park and Police Headquarters at Bowerhill, Melksham. The large scale of these buildings contrasts with the surrounding small to medium scale of the parish of Semington.

4.5.43 Complexity

The parish of Semington varies in complexity from low to moderate. The least complex areas and most defined are the more rural areas associated with the course of the Semington Brook and its floodplain located to the east of the A350, and the north-west portion of the floodplain to the north of the Kennet and Avon Canal (that in itself adds a layer of complexity).

4.5.44 Elsewhere within the parish landscape complexity increases due to an increase in urbanising elements, such as the intersecting major transport corridors (A350 and A361) and presence of settlements and associated amenities. At the western edge of the settlement of Semington and Little Marsh a line of pylons is a prominent element in the landscape.

4.5.45 Degree of Enclosure/Openness

The degree of enclosure and feel of openness varies across the parish of Semington, but in general there is a '*strong sense of openness*'¹⁷ with '*wide open skies and views to ridges and downs*'.¹⁸

4.5.46 The historic core of the village of Semington has a high sense of enclosure as this area has an inward focus that is characteristic of a nucleated village¹⁹. The later 20th century development extends the settlement outwards and the sense of enclosure decreases.

¹⁷ LCA C2 Semington Open Clay Vale, West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007

¹⁸ LCA 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale, Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, Land Use Consultants 2005

¹⁹ Page 49 LCA C2 Semington Open Clay Vale, West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007

4.5.47 Overall Tranquility

Overall the village of Semington and the parish have a rural/peaceful quality despite the presence of two major transport corridors crossing the parish.

4.5.48 Tranquility levels are low on land adjacent to the transport corridors but surprisingly higher within the rest of the parish. Visual tranquility is disturbed by the presence of pylons to the west of Semington village. Semington village benefits visually and aurally from the lack of through traffic. The Kennet and Avon Canal also affords a sense of calm and peacefulness.

4.5.49 The A350 and A361 transport corridors are relatively well screened by well-established banks of trees and that minimise visual tranquility disturbance across the parish.

4.5.50 The highest levels of tranquility relate to the eastern part of the parish beyond the A350, the north-west portion of the parish and the Kennet and Avon Canal corridor.

4.5.51 Wildness or Remoteness

It is not a wild or remote parish but one that is the product of centuries of intervention by man.

Sense of Place

4.5.52 The rich industrial heritage of the parish associated with the picturesque route of the Kennet and Avon Canal plus the attractive historic core of Semington village provide a sense of place and identity to the parish. The scenic route of the Semington Brook corridor that meanders across the parish also provides a strong sense of character and identity within the landscape with its distinctive floodplain topography and riparian vegetation.

4.5.53 Sense of place is eroded within the parish by the presence of unsympathetic 20th century developments, the major transport corridors and pylons.

Landscape Setting to the Parish of Semington

- 4.5.54 To the north and north-east (as identified in the published Character Appraisals) the urban fringe character is apparent adjacent to Melksham/Bowerhill²⁰ and the large scale industrial units associated with the Police HQ and Wiltshire Ambulance are incongruous, prominent elements of built form within the landscape adjacent to the parish. The Southern edge of Melksham at Berryfield and Bowerhill extends up to the line of a disused railway that is located approximately 400m from the Semington Parish boundary. This disused railway line is slightly elevated in relation to the parish of Semington, and creates a buffer zone against the spread of development towards the parish boundary. Larger developments are located beyond this line and this provides partial screening of their lower levels when seen from within the parish.
- 4.5.55 To the north of the parish boundary is Giles Wood, a mixed deciduous woodland, located just to the north of the Kennet and Avon canal. The West Wilts Way passes through this woodland from the north and then crosses the Kennet and Avon canal where it enters the parish. Giles Wood is a visually prominent and attractive feature in the landscape setting of the parish and also forms a visual buffer to development to the north at Melksham and Bowerhill. This woodland serves to partially screen views both from locations within the parish and also from locations around Seend Head.
- 4.5.56 To the north-west, the pastoral/rural flat landscape that forms the floodplain to the corridor of Semington Brook (forming part of the larger river Avon corridor), continues towards the historic hamlet of Whaddon at 0.6km. Beyond this, open countryside continues towards Holt and Broughton Gifford at approximately 1.3km and 1.2km respectively. From within this north-west area, distant panoramic views towards Gastard and Claverton Down are afforded.
- 4.5.57 To the west and south-west, the land consists of larger mixed-use arable and pasture fields. The A361 runs through this landscape and connects Semington with the urban edge of Hilperton and Trowbridge. The edge of the settlement of Hilperton extends to the north-east of Trowbridge up to approximately 0.6 km from the parish boundary.

²⁰ LCA C2 Semington Open Clay Vale, West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment 2007

- 4.5.58 To the south south-east and east, the land rises to form a long ridge line, upon which are located the small settlements of Great Hinton, Cleeve Seend, Seend Head and Seend. These villages are well vegetated and integrated with their surroundings. Open panoramic views are afforded from this ridge across the Semington parish and beyond.
- 4.5.59 To the south south-west the land rises to form Hag Hill from which open panoramic views are also afforded across the Semington parish and beyond.

5. VISUAL BASELINE

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The visual analysis process helps determine an area's visual sensitivity. The process identifies the visual receptors (i.e. people) within an area, what they can see, and to what degree, i.e. their visual experience and visual amenity.

5.1.2 As part of the Semington Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base, the Steering Group has assembled a local Key Views report and the Key Views/ Viewpoint (VP) location plan is shown at Figure 4. This document identifies valued views within the parish and is discussed further below. Any viewpoint (VP) locations referred to in this document are the key views identified in the Local Key Views Report.

5.1.3 In addition, this section 5 should be read in conjunction with Figures 3:PRoW. A detailed Visual Methodology is set out in Appendix 1.

5.2 Visual Receptors

5.2.1 The following types of visual receptors are identified within the parish of Semington:

- People using facilities/undertaking activities specifically associated with experience and enjoyment of the landscape.
- Users of the PRoW. There are numerous footpaths crossing the parish, in addition to a number of bridleways, byways, cycle routes (4 & 403) and rural lanes.
- Users of scenic routes. The SEM 128 is a particularly valued scenic route across the parish. The Mid Wilts Way, a nationally recognised long distance path, crosses the eastern portion of the parish.
- Users of tourist facilities.
- Recreational users of canals and rivers. The Kennet and Avon Canal (a nationally recognised route) is used by the public for recreational activities

and by residents of houseboats as a dwelling place. The canal tow path has a high footfall and affords frequent views into and across the parish.

- People passing through the area on transport routes.
- People engaged in other recreational activities, such as users of the football club and tennis courts.
- People visiting the setting of any heritage assets within the parish.
- People living and working within the area.

5.3 Visual Overview

5.3.1 The nature of views varies across the parish. There are frequent open, long distance and panoramic scenic views, e.g. around PRow SEMI15 and 16 to the southeast of Semington village, PRow SEMI28 and Swingbridge over the Kennet and Avon Canal (junction of PRow SEM1,16,17 & 138). In some areas the degree of enclosure is higher due to vegetation (hedgerows and trees) or buildings that restricts views of the surrounding landscape e.g. alongside National Cycle Network (NCN) route 4 to the west of Semington or within the settlement itself.

5.3.2 Intervisibility between the parish and the surrounding landscape (i.e. its setting) is high. From elevated areas outside the parish, e.g. at Seend Head, Great Hinton and Hag Hill, there are extensive long distance views into the parish and beyond.

5.4 Key Views

5.4.1 The Key Views Report provides a photographic record of viewpoint (VP) locations that:

- Demonstrate specific key and sometimes promoted viewpoints within the landscape.
- Are representative views, e.g. they represent the overall visual experience of people using a particular route.

- Are illustrative of and demonstrate visual character/qualities/uniqueness that are of value to the community.
- Demonstrate the value of Semington village and its countryside setting plus the value of the wider parish context and its setting.

5.4.2 The sensitivity (value and susceptibility) of these views to potential development is discussed further in section 6 below.

5.4.3 A number of the key viewpoints selected identify key approaches/gateways to the parish (also to Kennet and Avon Canal) and village of Semington e.g. 2, 9, 10, 16 & 18

5.4.4 A large proportion of the key viewpoints are located to the north, north-east and north-west of the village of Semington and the Kennet and Avon Canal. This is due to the high value attached to views in this area from the both the PRow network and the canal, its towpath and bridges, where scenic, panoramic countryside views across the parish and beyond (long distance) are afforded.

5.4.5 In contrast, other than VP 24 at Hag Hill, there no key viewpoints to the south of Semington village and A361, in the vicinity of Little Marsh. In this area views tend to be shorter range (there are intermittent views towards Hag hill and Great Hinton), being either bounded by the vegetation alongside the A350 and A361 or enclosed by hedgerow vegetation. The quality of the visual amenity experience is reduced when compared to the above area due to the nature of the topography, distracting presence of the major A roads and other detractors such as pylons and inaccessible/neglected PRow. The landscaped grounds with variety of mature trees at the West Wiltshire crematorium provide a pleasurable visual amenity experience within this context.

5.4.6 A cluster of key viewpoints are located to the far east of the parish [VP's 6, 7, 8, 21 and 22]. These illustrate the scenic experience and quality/intactness of this rural landscape and key characteristics of the Semington Brook river corridor and floodplain. They also demonstrate the extent of intervisibility with land to the north, southeast and south of the parish.

6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 As already stated the main aim of this Appraisal is to establish the Landscape and Visual sensitivity of the parish of Semington, in relation to its potential to accommodate new residential development, to identify areas that require protection and/or enhancement.

6.1.2 In order to make judgements regarding levels of landscape and visual sensitivity the following have to be established:

- Levels of landscape and visual value.
- Levels of landscape and visual susceptibility to change.

6.1.3 These are ascertained through the analysis of the landscape and visual baseline studies carried out in earlier sections of this report and in accordance with the detailed description and tables set out in Appendix 1: Methodology.

6.1.4 Levels of assessed Landscape and Visual sensitivity are discussed below. Assessed levels of Landscape sensitivity are shown on Figure 5. Levels of visual sensitivity are described in relation to the Key viewpoints shown on Figure 4 as identified in the Key Views report.

6.2 Summary of the meaning of Landscape Value and Susceptibility

6.2.1 The GLVIA3 defines landscape value as:

*'The relative value attached to different landscapes by society, bearing in mind that a landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a whole variety of reasons.'*²¹

6.2.2 Paras 170 and 171 of the NPPF require that policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance valued landscapes and allocate land for development with the least

²¹ Para 5.19, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition' (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (published 17th April 2013)

environmental or amenity value. See the Methodology at Appendix 1 for further information.

6.2.3 Local/neighbourhood/community value is an important consideration in this regard.

6.2.4 An area may perform a particular function and this can add to an area's value; for example it may contribute to landscape context and sit or act as an open green space/gap/gateway/corridor/Green Infrastructure/buffer

6.2.5 GLVIA3 defines landscape susceptibility to change as follows:

*'This means the ability of the landscape receptor (be it be the overall character or quality/condition of the particular landscape type or area, or individual element and or feature, or a particular ascetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences of the maintenance of the baseline situation and the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.'*²²

6.3 Landscape Sensitivity of the Parish of Semington

6.3.1 As described in Section 3, landscape character (combination of landscape elements) and quality varies across the parish and as a result areas differ in their levels of sensitivity i.e. combinations of susceptibility and value. This section therefore discusses the sensitivity of the parish in relation to these different areas as set out below.

6.3.2 Area A - Land within the parish to the north-west and west of Semington Village

6.3.3 This area covers the northwest portion of the parish beyond the Avon and Kennet Canal and area of the parish that extends to the north- west and west of the edge of the settlement up to St Georges' Road and the route of Byway SEM19A & NCN 403.

6.3.4 This area is afforded high landscape sensitivity. The landscape contains the following high-value landscape receptors:

²² Para 5.40 Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition' (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (published 17th April 2013)

- The nationally promoted and recognised route of the Kennet and Avon Canal and long-distance towpath. (also National Cycle Network route 4)
- The corridor of Semington Brook is valued for its aesthetics and perceptual factors and has limited potential to be recreated or replaced.
- The landscape forms the Setting to the Grade 11 Listed St George's Court.

6.3.5 In accordance with the Methodology at Appendix 1 the following features/elements are assessed as having medium value. Nevertheless they are highly valued at a local level, some of which would have limited potential to be recreated or replaced, for example the area provides:

- The rural countryside landscape setting to the settlement and the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- Visual and physical connection to the wider landscape to the north and north west.
- Elevated panoramic long-distance rural views with very little built form present.
- Various non statutory designations.
- Key characteristics/intrinsic character of Character Areas B1, B12 and C2 are clearly demonstrated.
- Numerous PRow.

6.3.6 The susceptibility to change is considered to be high as the landscape has limited ability to accommodate residential development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation

6.3.7 Landscape within the parish to the north of the canal forms the rural floodplain surrounding the course of Semington Brook. This landscape is in good condition and intactness and comprises part of the narrow distinctive spur of Character Area B1 Due to the narrowness and distinctiveness of this Character Area and its high level of

intactness and quality, it is considered to have a high value and high susceptibility to any residential development.

6.3.8 The judgement in the appeal decision to allow 26 houses on the plot of land to the south of St George's Court²³ highlighted that this area is highly susceptible to residential development and that it would incur harm to the intrinsic landscape character of this area. The degree of setback required and landscaping to buffer this development demonstrates that any further incursion into this area would bring additional harm to landscape character, and landscape characteristics would be irretrievably lost.

6.3.9 Area B - Land within the parish to the north and north-east of Semington village plus land to the east of the A350 up to the northern and eastern parish boundaries

6.3.10 The majority of this area is afforded high sensitivity due to the presence of landscape elements of high value and moderate to high susceptibility to change.

6.3.11 The landscape contains the following high-value landscape receptors:

- The nationally promoted and recognised route of the Kennet and Avon Canal and long-distance towpath.
- National Cycle Network Routes 403 and 4.
- The Mid Wilts Way Long Distance Walking Route.
- The corridor of Semington Brook is valued for its aesthetics and perceptual factors and has limited potential to be recreated or replaced.
- The landscape forms the Setting to a number of Listed Buildings.

6.3.12 In accordance with the Methodology at Appendix 1 the following features/elements are assessed as having medium value. Nevertheless they are highly valued at a local level, some of which would have limited potential to be recreated or replaced, for example the area provides:

²³ APP/Y3940/W/19/3236860 Land north of St George's Road, Semington BA14 6JN. Date 10/9/21

- The rural countryside landscape setting to the settlement and the Kennet and Avon Canal.
- Scenic rural views and visual connection to the wider landscape to the south east and south.
- Very little built form present to the east of the A350.
- Various non statutory designations.
- Key characteristics/intrinsic character of Character Areas B12 and C2 are clearly demonstrated.
- Numerous PRoW valued at a local level and the nationally recognised West Wilts Way long-distance route that are connected and provide the opportunity for circular walks of varying lengths both within and outside the parish.

6.3.13 In this area the floodplain associated with Semington Brook clearly exhibits many of the key characteristics that are listed in the published character appraisals, such as riparian habitats and vegetation, and it is in good condition and high degree of intactness.

6.3.14 The area has a medium high susceptibility to residential development as this would detract from the integrity and intactness of the floodplain's rural character, detracting from the visual experience of users of nationally recognised routes and PRoW in this area. It would not be easy to replace/replicate these elements once they are gone. The harm to landscape character already incurred by the route of the A350 bypass demonstrates this point.

6.3.15 Area C - around the settlement of Littleton

6.3.16 This area is afforded a medium to high landscape sensitivity as it contributes to the setting of a number of Listed Buildings that therefore raises its value from what is overall assessed as medium.

6.3.17 The area around Littleton also makes an important contribution to the intactness of the Semington floodplain and rural/countryside character of area B above.

- 6.3.18 The area also contains numerous PRoW and forms a visual connection (that is scenic and rural in nature) with countryside land to the south of the A361 leading up to the ridge around Great Hinton.
- 6.3.19 Susceptibility to residential development is therefore considered to be moderate to high overall. Susceptibility would decrease adjacent to the major road corridors of the A361 and A350 due to the reduction in aural and visual tranquillity levels and proximity to other built form (excluding the Listed Buildings). The potential to cause harm to the rural qualities/intactness and integrity of the Semington Brook floodplain raises the areas susceptibility.
- 6.3.20 Some areas would benefit from enhancement/improvement such as the somewhat neglected old route of the defunct A361 where fly tipping is evident.
- 6.3.21 Area D - Land surrounding Manor Farm, immediately adjacent to the settlement of Semington
- 6.3.22 In general, this area is given a medium to high sensitivity. It is considered to be of high value with a medium susceptibility to residential development.
- 6.3.23 It has to be borne in mind that Manor Farmhouse and the Granary are Grade 11 Listed Buildings and that raises the levels of landscape value to high. The effects of any residential development on their setting have to be taken into consideration. That said, some of the existing elements within its setting do not act to enhance or protect its setting, and there is an opportunity to provide enhancements through sensitive and proportionate well designed development.
- 6.3.24 The proximity to the corridor of Semington Brook, an element assessed as having high value (in Area B adjacent) with limited potential to be recreated or replaced, should also be taken into consideration as that also raises the areas sensitivity. Any development should avoid harm to its character and setting.
- 6.3.25 This area is well served by footpaths that hold high amenity value at a local level, providing a visual connection between the settlement with the wider countryside.
- 6.3.26 The landscape here has the ability to accommodate a small scale, proportional amount of development without undue consequences for the maintenance of baseline situation.

6.3.27 Area E - Land to the south of Church Street and Saint George's Church

Land in this area is evaluated as having a medium to high sensitivity overall. Elements that increase the value and susceptibility of this area to potential residential development are:

- The Grade II Listed Saint George's Church. There are clear views of the church and its grounds from within the fields and footpaths to the south of Church Street that would constitute the setting to the church.
- Elevated long-distance, panoramic, scenic views from PRow SEMI15 & 16 that connect Semington village with its wider setting and landscape context, such as Seend Head and Roundway Hill.
- The open arable fields reinforce the sense of openness and big skies that are an identified and valued key characteristic of this area²⁴ and provide a physical continuity/GI connection with the rural landscape to the east of the A350.
- There are a number of other Listed Buildings on Church Street and as with St George's Church the potential effects of any development on their setting would have to be taken into consideration.
- First impressions when entering the village of Semington. This area contributes to the outer gateway, sense of place experience where the countryside/rural setting of the village of Semington can be appreciated.

6.3.28 Any potential development in this area should seek to respect, protect and/or enhance these landscape elements.

6.3.29 Area F - Land to the south-east of A350 around Brickfield Farm

6.3.30 Land in this area is evaluated as having a medium to high sensitivity overall.

²⁴ Page 128 LCA 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale, Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment, Land Use Consultants 2005

6.3.31 In accordance with the Methodology at Appendix 1 There are no elements considered to be of high-value within this area.

6.3.32 Elements that are evaluated as having medium value are:

- Good network of PRow, valued at a local level with strong visual/physical connection to the ridge line around Great Hinton and areas B&C to the north.
- Rural countryside feel, very little built form, predominantly agricultural land. Apart from Gypsy traveller sites adjacent to a 350 and 8361 roundabout built form is relatively sparse and comprises a few farmsteads and isolated properties
- Contains a tributaries to the Semington Brook (Key landscape characteristic) comprising part of its floodplain
- A number of non-designated/scheduled monuments

6.3.33 The area is considered to have a medium to high susceptibility to change due to the potential loss of agricultural land and countryside, with potential harm to the interrelationship of the setting with land to the north in areas B&C and land to the south in the neighbouring parish of Great Hinton.

6.3.34 Area G - Land to the south of the A361 around Little Marsh and Crematorium

6.3.35 While there are a couple of elements of high local amenity value, i.e. the Semington Crematorium and football club pitches, this area has limited aesthetic perceptual value and sense of place. There are no distinctive features or identified views of high value or heritage assets/scheduled monuments.

6.3.36 There are some notable mature trees near and on the crossroads roundabout.

6.3.37 The area is dominated by the presence of the A361 and A350 which generates a high volume of traffic noise and physically and visually separates (overgrown and disused PRow) this area from the rest of the parish, especially for those travelling by foot or bicycle.

- 6.3.38 The area is therefore assessed as having medium value and low to medium susceptibility to potential residential development. Sensitivity is therefore assessed as low to medium. Sensitivity increases to the west and south-west of Little Marsh due to the potential need to retain a green buffer should development occurring outside the parish and extend up to the parish boundary.
- 6.3.39 Area H - Land to the south of new development along St George's Road, up to the A361 and parish boundary (also Byway SEM39 to the west)
- 6.3.40 Land to the north of the A361 adjacent to Turnpike Close is evaluated as having low sensitivity due to its close proximity to the A361 and other residential development. This field does not contain any public rights-of-way or features of any notable value and its susceptibility to residential development is considered to be low.
- 6.3.41 The fields immediately to the west are considered to be of low to medium sensitivity. They do not contain any elements of high value and already contain the built form of the caravan park at Fairfield(s) and a line of pylons. However they do contain Public Rights-of-Way that have value locally and National Cycle Route 403 passes to the north to join St George's Road. There are also a few non-designated assets/monuments.
- 6.3.42 Some of the fields are located alongside the A361, which generates a relatively high level of traffic noise, audible throughout this area. The line of pylons crossing these fields exerts a dominant visual detracting presence.
- 6.3.43 The land is assessed overall as of medium value with a low to medium susceptibility to change. Susceptibility and sensitivity increase towards the parish boundary, Byways and NCN Cycle Route 403. A degree of setback of development would protect visual amenity and safeguard against coalescence with potential built form within the neighbouring parish of Trowbridge. Some fields have a high degree of enclosure created by mature trees and established hedgerows that would help to assimilate any development with its surroundings.

6.4 Visual Sensitivity of the Parish of Semington

6.4.1 Introduction

This section examines the visual sensitivity (i.e. a combination of levels of visual value and susceptibility) of the parish of Semington in relation to Key Views of high value as identified in the Key Views Report produced by the Semington Parish Steering Group.

6.4.2 As defined in GLVIA3²⁵ the value attached to views takes into account the value attached to particular views by people, and takes into account heritage assets and planning designations. The value attached to views is often indicated by reference to views in art and literature, in guide books, on tourist maps and by the provision of facilities for the enjoyment of the views, such as signboards, interpretive materials, parking areas and benches.

6.4.3 In summary, visual susceptibility is a function of the occupation/activity of the receptor at that particular location and, as a consequence, the extent to which their attention/interest will therefore be focused on the view and the visual amenity they experience.

6.4.4 Key viewpoint locations and the viewer's levels of visual sensitivity

6.4.5 All of the key views identified in the Key Views Report are considered to have high value at a local level, a large proportion of which hold high value at a national or regional scale.

6.4.6 These valued views, their susceptibility to change and resulting levels of sensitivity are discussed further below in relation to the following categories defined by the Steering Group (as already referred to in Section 5: Visual baseline of this report):

- Section A includes views 1 to 8 (extensive views looking out beyond the parish, from viewpoints within the parish).
- Section B includes views 9 to 12 (views from along the Kennet and Avon Canal).

²⁵ Para 6.37 Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition' (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (published 17th April 2013)

- Section C includes views 13 to 22 (views within the parish).
- Section D includes views 23 to 24 (views looking into the parish).

6.4.7 Section A: Views 1 to 8 (extensive views looking out beyond the parish, from viewpoints within the parish).

6.4.8 These long-range, open, panoramic views are representative of the views experienced by users of PRow, The Kennet and Avon Canal including cyclists and horse-riders within and on the Parish boundary. These views are of high value and visual amenity to the community as they provide the opportunity for long-distance, scenic, rural views beyond the parish and a sense of the situational context/visual connection to the parish in relation its surrounding landscape context.

6.4.9 The views demonstrate the landscape qualities within the parish and the continuity of these within its setting, as identified in published landscape character appraisals. Key characteristic elements, such as the rural, picturesque Semington Brook floodplain and the Kennet and Avon canal, are evident.

6.4.10 Users at these views are considered to have a high susceptibility to visual change as the viewers focus is primarily on their setting. In accordance with Appendix 1: Table A of the Methodology, they are afforded a high sensitivity to change.

6.4.11 Section B: views 9 to 12 (views from along the Kennet and Avon Canal)

6.4.12 These views are representative of the visual experience of users of the Kennet and Avon Canal where it follows the parish boundary and crosses the parish. The route holds high visual and amenity value at a local and national level. The Viewpoints (VP's) are also representative of the views experienced by people crossing the canal, such as the humpback bridge at VP10 and swingbridge at VP12. The humpback bridge at VP10 also acts as both a scenic and historic gateway to the parish of Semington, and forms part of NCN4.

6.4.13 These views demonstrate the scenic and historic qualities experienced along the canal and from its bridges. Overall, the views are well vegetated and rich in habitat. As shown by VP's 12 & 10, enclosure by vegetation varies from close-up views of

established trees and hedgerows to open long-distance panoramic views, both into and out of the parish.

- 6.4.14 Whilst the area is evidently inhabited and highly visited, it maintains a simple and picturesque rural quality and timelessness, with very little visual disturbance.
- 6.4.15 In accordance with Appendix 1: Table A of the Methodology viewers at these locations and using this stretch of the canal are assessed as having high visual sensitivity. These views have a high value at a local and national level and susceptibility to visual change is high, as the viewer's focus is primarily on their setting.
- 6.4.16 It is important to note the potential effects of the proposed restored route of the Wilts and Berks Canal in VP's 9, 10 & 11 in relation to the high sensitivity (high value and susceptibility) attached to these views.
- 6.4.17 Section C: Views 13 to 22 (views within the parish)
- 6.4.18 These viewpoint locations are chosen by the community as being representative of their valued views within the parish.
- 6.4.19 In accordance with the Methodology at Appendix 1 views at these locations are afforded high sensitivity due to the reasons set out below.
- 6.4.20 The value attached to views at Viewpoints 13, 14 and 15 is assessed as high as there are clear views of St George's Court; the viewer is therefore considered to be within its setting. Otherwise the value attached to views from these locations is considered to be medium i.e. the viewer is within a landscape judged to be of moderate/good strength of character and locally valued features are major components of the scene e.g. Open/picturesque countryside views comprise the formal setting to the canal.
- 6.4.21 All of these viewpoint locations are taken from PRoW and they are considered to have a high susceptibility to change as the focus of the viewer is primarily on their setting.
- 6.4.22 The value attached to views at Viewpoints 16, 17 and 18 is assessed as high as the views incorporate the historic core of Semington Village within which there are numerous Listed Buildings that front onto the high-street, the viewer is therefore

considered to be within their setting. Also facilities are provided for the enjoyment of the visual experience of the historic core via signboards.

- 6.4.23 As all of these viewpoint locations are taken from PRoW, views at these locations are considered to have a high susceptibility to change as the viewers focus is primarily on their setting. It is acknowledged that visual receptors in this area will have differing susceptibility to change, however the high street is frequently used by walkers as a popular walk and cyclists using National Cycle Network 4 that raise levels of visual susceptibility.
- 6.4.24 The value attached to views at Viewpoint locations 19, 20 and 21 is assessed as medium. Viewers are within a Landscape judged to be of moderate strength of character and within areas where locally valued features are a major component of the scene e.g. the course of Semington Brook and its rural, picturesque floodplain character, big skies, and panoramic distant views.
- 6.4.25 As all of the above viewpoint locations are taken from PRoW, views at these locations are considered to have a high susceptibility to change as the viewer's focus is primarily on their setting and enjoyment of the surrounding countryside.
- 6.4.26 Section D: views 23 to 24 (views looking into the parish)
- 6.4.27 These viewpoint locations are chosen by the community as being representative of their valued views that look into and across the parish.
- 6.4.28 In accordance with the Methodology at Appendix 1 viewers at these locations are afforded high to medium sensitivity due to the reasons set out below.
- 6.4.29 The value attached to views at Viewpoint locations 22 and 23 is assessed as medium. Viewers are within landscapes judged to be of moderate strength of character and the viewers are within areas where locally valued features are a major component of the scene e.g. long distance, panoramic, scenic views.
- 6.4.30 As all of the above viewpoint locations are taken from PRoW, views at these locations are considered to have a high susceptibility to change as the viewer's focus is primarily on their setting and enjoyment of the surrounding countryside due to the nature of the views afforded. It is acknowledged that visual receptors in this

area will have differing susceptibility to change (i.e. medium) as some may be using the area for specific enjoyment such as dog walking.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This report analyses the Landscape and Visual baseline of the parish and its levels of landscape and visual sensitivity. From this study, it is evident that there are areas and elements within the parish that by virtue of their sensitivity, value and function would warrant safeguarding/protection and/or enhancement.

7.1.2 These are primarily:

- The setting to the settlement of Semington
- The corridor of the Kennett and Avon Canal and its setting (also forming part of the parish boundary)
- The course of Semington Brook and associated floodplain
- Key views
- Key assets (the historic core of Semington)
- Other existing Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) assets.

7.1.3 This report has been prepared in accordance with Core Policies in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. It also takes into account management guidelines/strategies set out in the relevant published character area appraisals (12B, C2 & B1). This report therefore makes recommendations as follows:

- The creation of a number of interconnected landscape gaps and green spaces to protect the setting and identity of Semington village.
- The enhancement and reinforcement of Green and Blue infrastructure (GBI) networks
- The creation and/or enhancement of elements/areas within the parish that are outside the recommended areas above but which are considered worthy of protection or enhancement by virtue of their having high sensitivity or high value at a local level.

These will be examined in detail below.

7.1.4 The recommendations could also form the basis of future NDP policies. For example, where key views or GBI are identified, an NDP policy with the objective of their

protection / enhancement would have to be taken into account in any future development proposals.

7.2 Proposed Landscape Gap(s) and Green space to protect the setting and identity of Semington village.

- 7.2.1 This report makes recommendations for defining the extent of a Semington Landscape Gap that is based on the complex interaction between both the visual analysis and landscape character analysis carried out. Furthermore, it takes account of the potential site allocations for new residential development outside the parish on land within the Trowbridge and Melksham Community Areas.
- 7.2.2 The policy context for the provision of a Landscape Gap is set out in Section 3 of this report. In summary, Landscape Gaps are spatial planning tools that seek to prevent the coalescence of settlements and to protect their identity. They are also intended to be multifunctional and work to protect landscape quality and amenity (access and recreation), provision of Green Blue Infrastructure and land for agriculture.
- 7.2.3 A Landscape Gap should also be a contiguous, uninterrupted, integral whole in order to be a 'meaningful gap' and not broken or partially subdivided by significant development which would undermine its landscape setting function. The proposed Landscape Gap(s) in this report are contiguous with other existing and proposed green spaces to ensure an effective GBI network.
- 7.2.4 The extent of the proposed Semington Landscape Gap(s) and Green Spaces is shown on Figure 6 and the rationale for the recommended extents/areas is described below.
- 7.2.5 The importance of maintaining physical separation between settlements and avoiding coalescence is an important consideration for the community of Semington.
- 7.2.6 Site allocations show that there is potential for housing development in the neighbouring parishes to extend up to the boundary of Semington Parish, which itself is located relatively close to the edge of the settlement of Semington village. Therefore in order to avoid the coalescence of this potential development with

Semington, it is suggested that a Landscape Gap(s) be established. This would maintain the rural/countryside setting that exists around the settlement of Semington.

- 7.2.7 The proposed Landscape Gap(s) are outlined below. These would also serve, alongside other existing and proposed areas of green space and GI, to protect the integrity of elements/areas of high landscape and visual sensitivity within the setting of Semington village. Examples would be the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal, the corridor of Semington Brook and Key Views within and across the parish.
- 7.2.8 Proposal A - Proposed Landscape Gap to the north, north east and north west of Semington village
- 7.2.9 The northern gateway to Semington village is defined by the distinctive stone bridge over the course of Semington Brook. Here the edge of the settlement is well vegetated with mature trees that form a well-defined green edge to the area with filtered or glimpsed views of residential properties. See key view 6.
- 7.2.10 The distance between this bridge (gateway to the settlement) and the northern parish boundary (marked by the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal) is relatively short. Although some residential development exists along this street, it is low key and as the land rises to meet the bridge over the canal, views are afforded over the parish where the countryside setting to the settlement can be appreciated.
- 7.2.11 The landscape here provides a distinctive rural edge character to the settlement and provides a strong sense of separation between the settlement boundary and parish boundary with Melksham Area beyond. It is strategically important to retain the fields either side of the High Street both:
- to maintain the separation of the settlement of Semington from the parish boundary with Melksham Area, and
 - to protect the landscape setting of Semington Brook, the route of the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington village.

- Maintain land for agriculture

7.2.12 This area of proposed landscape gap takes into consideration the potential landscape and visual effects of housing allocations and the proposed Canal Link Project that extends up to the canal and parish boundary. The Core Policy 16 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires that the Canal Link project promotes GI links. The proposed gap would therefore help to insure a GI link is supported and that a green buffer and sense of separation would remain despite development occurring to the north of the parish.

7.2.13 To the north-west, heading westwards along the canal towards the aqueduct, the overall visual impression is one of fields and countryside with very little built form in the view. The edge of the settlement is set back in the view and well vegetated at its edge. Here the proposed Landscape Gap would serve two functions, i.e.:

- -to maintain this visual link, and
- to maintain the continuity of this green space/GI network with the countryside setting to the canal and beyond, such as the rural picturesque character of the area of the north west portion of the parish. See VP's 4, 13, 14 and 15.

7.2.14 Proposal A1 – Proposed Landscape Gap and retention of Green space to the northeast and east of the A350

7.2.15 This is a continuation of area A and would perform the same function. The area would act as a buffer to development occurring within the Melksham Area and prevent any potential coalescence with the existing small amount of built form that exists in the vicinity of Littleton Mill.

7.2.16 The area also forms and is contiguous with the adjacent open countryside that is identified for protection.

7.2.17 The protection of this area would also protect the visual amenity experience of users of the Mid Wilts Way Long distance path.

7.2.18 Proposal B – Proposed Landscape Gap to the west of Semington Village between Pound Lane and St George’s Road/Byway SEM19A (also NCN Route 403)

7.2.19 Taking into account the consented development to the north of St George’s Court²⁶ it is recommended that the remaining green space in this area be retained up to the parish boundary. There is a complex set of interactions between elements: see Section 6 and VP’s 4, 13, 14 and 15. The proposed safeguarding of this green space would ensure that:

- The countryside/rural setting to the settlement would remain intact. The visual and physical continuity of green space with the wider countryside beyond (that includes the north-west portion of the parish) would also be maintained.
- The countryside/rural setting to the Kennet and Avon Canal would be preserved
- Heritage assets would be protected
- The visual amenity of a variety of users and their Key Views would be protected.
- Continuity of Green Space and GBI networks would be protected.

7.2.20 Proposal C- Area to the south of Byway SEMI9A/NCN403 up to A361 alongside parish boundary

7.2.21 This area of the gap located to the southwest edge of Semington is defined by fields, hedgerows and trees. The area lies between Byways SEMI9A (NCN403) and SEMI39 (which also forms the parish boundary), and footpath SEMI10 that runs south to the A361. There is an isolated area of development (caravan storage site) at Fairfield(s), adjacent to the parish boundary. This area is not particularly distinctive: however a narrower green gap is proposed to:

- To avoid coalescence with potential development in the Trowbridge area.
- To maintain the continuity of the green corridor and GI with the open green

²⁶ APP/Y3940/W/19/3236860 Land north of St George's Road, Semington BA14 6JN. Date 10/9/21

space proposed to the north.

7.2.22 Proposal D – Existing open countryside/green area to the south and south east of Church Street and Manor Farm.

7.2.23 This proposed area cannot technically be described as a Landscape Gap; however it does form an important function as a green space. This area has been assessed as having high sensitivity as it is within the setting of St George’s Church, Manor Farm and potentially other Listed Buildings on Church Street.

7.2.24 Also, this area is identified by the community as of high amenity value and contains a number of PRow, from which panoramic long-distance scenic views across the parish and beyond are afforded (a key characteristic in published Character Area Appraisals). These views provide a sense of visual and physical connection with the surrounding landscape context, both within and outside the parish (see Key view 2)

7.2.25 The area also contributes to the gateway experience to the settlement i.e. the first impressions as one enters the village off the A361 roundabout.

7.2.26 The proposed area is shown as contiguous with the Landscape Gap proposed to the north of Manor Farm to ensure a continuous green corridor that protects and enhances GBI assets around and within the settlement.

7.3 Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) assets and additional green space.

7.3.1 Core Policies 16 and 2 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy recognise that the protection and provision of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) offer important recreational, health and landscape benefits to local communities as well as potentially valuable habitat and biodiversity benefits.

7.3.2 Semington parish has a relatively good local GBI network, performing a variety of highly important GBI functions.

7.3.3 The proposed landscape gaps identified above also take into account the need for the protection of and provision of GBI. Existing significant GBI assets are identified as:

- Semington Brook and associated floodplain
- The corridor of the Avon and Kennet Canal
- Strong network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees

7.3.4 It should be noted that any development would need to retain existing significant trees, hedgerows and watercourses. The existing brook is within a medium risk Flood Zone and any development would need to be suitably offset. As identified in the Draft Wiltshire Housing Sites Allocation Plan (Draft June 2017), *‘these features provide wildlife corridors that link habitat features within the local area; in particular, ‘dark corridors’ for foraging bats which should be protected and enhanced where possible by additional planting with native species’.*

7.3.5 There may be opportunities to develop a GBI Strategy for Semington, and perhaps a GI NDP policy.

7.4 Other recommendations

7.4.1 Based on the findings and observations of this assessment the following additional recommendations are made:

- In relation to the proposed retention of a green gap to the north-west of the settlement of Semington, there is an opportunity to enhance and soften the appearance of built form at this edge through the planting of trees and enhancement of hedgerows.
- There is scope to increase the settlement size of Little Marsh whilst ensuring a green gap is maintained between the settlements and neighbouring parishes.
- The identification and allocation of land as Local Green Space should respond to the location of any proposed Landscape Gaps or Green Spaces. This is in order to support the continuity of GBI and capitalise on the location of key views and opportunities for visual amenity.
- Steps could be taken to protect significant vegetation e.g. mature trees and hedgerows.
- Steps could be taken to enhance and protect key gateways in order to maintain/enhance sense of place.

- There is a diverse range of ecological habitats in and around the village and parish. Their protection and appropriate management is essential, and could be the subject of NDP policy.
- There is also evidence of erosion and loss of habitats (e.g. riparian vegetation along the river corridor) which has resulted in connectivity being broken in places. These habitats are highly valuable features in the landscape, and active management of these habitats is recommended.
- Renovation of the disused route of the old A361 offers potential for recreational activities to a variety of users. This could improve the visual amenity of potential users accessing the route at Littleton. This could also improve access to Littleton.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1.1 The findings of this appraisal can be used to help guide decisions about where new houses (and potentially, other forms of development) would be most appropriately located in and around the village, especially in terms of the local and wider parish landscape context.
- 8.1.2 This appraisal has made an analysis of the relevant policies, published Character Area appraisals and potential site allocations in neighbouring parishes. The author has conducted an analysis of the landscape character baseline and visual baseline, as set out in the preceding chapters. Following this, the author has been able to assess the landscape and visual sensitivity to residential development, of both the parish and the settlement of Semington. The judgements regarding sensitivity to residential development are based on the value attributed to landscape and visual elements and their particular susceptibility to change.
- 8.1.3 Based on the above criteria, the author has concluded that measures are required to:
- protect the setting of Semington village, including protection from coalescence with development in neighbouring parishes.
 - protect visual amenity, landscape character, key valued assets and GBI of the parish as a whole.
- 8.1.4 The author has concluded that in order to do this, a number of Landscape Gaps and interconnecting green spaces are required. The author has also made specific recommendations that could potentially form the basis of NDP policies.
- 8.1.5 The findings of this appraisal can be used to help guide decisions about where new houses (and potentially, other forms of development) would be most appropriately located in and around the village, especially in terms of the local and wider parish landscape context.