M20 Junction 10a

TR010006

Environmental Statement

Chapter 7 Landscape

APFP Regulation 5(2)(q)

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Environmental Statement

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Content

7 Landscape

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This landscape and visual impact assessment chapter identifies potentially Significant Adverse impacts of the proposed Main and Alternative Schemes upon surrounding landscape character and visual receptors. The assessment follows the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Volume 11[1], and also takes guidance from the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment[2], identifying landscape and visual baseline including value and sensitivity to change, prior to considering appropriate mitigation, the magnitude of change and resulting significance of effect.

7.2 Legislative and Policy Framework

National Policy

National Policy Statement for National Networks [3] (NPSNN).

7.2.1 Where a development is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), an assessment of any likely significant landscape and visual impacts should be undertaken by the applicant within the EIA and described within the Environmental Statement (ES) (Paragraph 5.144). The Applicant's assessment should consider any relevant national and local development policy, significant effects during construction and operation, and visibility and conspicuousness (Paragraphs 5.146-148). Compliance with the respective duties in section 11A of the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949 and section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 is required. Local designations should be given consideration in decision making by the Secretary of State (Paragraph 5.156), but not be used in themselves to refuse consent. The Secretary of State will judge whether visual effects on sensitive receptors outweigh the benefits of the development (Paragraph 5.158).

National Planning Policy Framework 4 (NPPF).

7.2.2 Current policy for planning and the environment is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework[5] (NPPF). The NPPF sets out the Government's

[1] http://www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/ha/standards/dmrb/vol11/index.htm, accessed 23/03/16

[2] Landscape Institute, 2012, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition

[3] Department for Transport (2014) National Policy Statement for National Networks: Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 9 (8) and Section 5 (4) of the Planning Act 2008. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387222/npsnn-print.pdf (Accessed January 2016).

[4] Communities and Local Government (2012), National Planning Policy Framework

[5] National Planning Policy Framework

planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Part 11 of the NPPF sets out the framework with respect to conserving the natural environment. Section 109 states the following:

7.2.3 The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- *Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils.*
- *Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services.*
- *Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.*
- *Preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability.*
- *Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.*

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

7.2.4 The following policies taken from the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan are considered to be of particular relevance:

- *SD1 - The need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB is recognised as the primary purpose of the designation and given the highest level of protection within statutory and other appropriate planning and development strategies and development control decisions.*
- *SD3 - New development or changes to land use will be opposed where they disregard or run counter to the primary purpose of the Kent Downs AONB.*
- *SD7 - To retain and improve tranquillity, including the experience of dark skies at night, careful design and the use of new technologies should be used. New developments and highways infrastructure which negatively impact on the local tranquillity if the Kent Downs AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.*
- *SD8 - Proposals which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.*

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf , accessed November 2014

- *SD10 - Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the AONB will be supported.*
- *SD11 - Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.*
- *SD12 - Transport and infrastructure schemes are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB so far as practicable. Essential developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape and design measures and provide environmental compensation by benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.*

Local Policy

7.2.5 Ashford Borough Council's (ABC) Core Strategy (2008) does not contain any relevant landscape policies and as such is not referenced within this chapter. Instead, reference is made to ABCs Local Plan.

7.2.6 ABC Draft Local Plan 2030 has yet to be adopted. As a result, the policies from the ABC Local Plan 2000 which were "saved" in 2014 remain in place in a number of instances. Relevant saved policies to both the Main and Alternative Schemes include the following:

- *EN13 (Green Corridor Action Plan SPG1)*
- *The Council will protect and enhance the "green corridors" in Ashford. Measures to improve their appearance and nature conservation value, to provide access for pedestrians and cyclists, and suitable leisure facilities will be permitted provided they do not damage the "green corridor "environment, including the rivers and other watercourses. Proposals for new buildings will not be permitted within the "green corridors" in Ashford - except in accordance with Development Site policies, or where the development would be ancillary to the open space use or other existing uses within them. Any development should not damage the green corridor environment.*
- *EN14 (Green Corridor Action Plan SPG1).*
- *Development proposals on land adjoining the "green corridors" in Ashford will be permitted, provided they also make a positive contribution to the function and amenity value of these corridors - for example, by improving their appearance and habitat value, providing pedestrian and cycle routes and related leisure opportunities.*
- *EN9 Development proposals which would damage significantly buildings, landscape features, or important views, which contribute to the settings and entrances of towns and villages will not be permitted.*

- *EN28 Proposals which would harm the character or setting of a historic park or garden will not be permitted.*
- *EN32 Planning permission will not be granted for any development proposals which would damage or result in the loss of important trees or woodlands.*

7.3 Method of Assessment

Overview

7.3.1 Landscape encompasses many more elements than the common association which focuses merely upon the view or appearance of the land. The notion of landscape can be applied to both rural and urban environments with the term 'townscape' frequently adopted within the urban context. From the perspective of EIA, 'landscape' applies to physical elements such as topography, drainage, land use and management, and vegetation as well as ecology and historical and cultural associations.

7.3.2 No single methodology exists for assessing landscape and visual impact. However, this detailed landscape assessment follows the recommendations set out in the following documents:

- Highways England's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11: Environmental Assessment and Interim Advice Note 135/10.
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3 produced by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, third edition, 2013.
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment Natural England, 2014.

Consultation

7.3.3 A Mott MacDonald Sweco Joint Venture (MMSJV) Chartered Landscape Architect has been in communication with ABC as a key consultee to the Main and Alternative Scheme. Consultation was undertaken via email on 6 March 2015 in which an explanation of proposed visual receptor locations was given. No further viewpoints were suggested in response to this correspondence, with MMSJV directed to the 2015 Scoping Opinion, which has been taken into account. During Public Consultation held in early 2016, a series of comments were made in regard to this assessment. All comments have been considered and accommodated as summarised in the Consultation Report, DCO submission document number 5.1.

Study Area

7.3.4 This assessment covers not only the site itself, but also a wider area of approximately 1km to provide an insight into the effects of the Main and Alternative Schemes on the surrounding landscape. Further distant views from

elevated ground within the Kent Downs AONB have also been considered, at approximately 4.5km from site.

Baseline Methodology

7.3.5 The landscape and visual baseline were established through a desk study and site survey. The desk study used mapping and literature in order to gather an understanding of the study area and its surroundings. This included a review of Ordnance Survey mapping and several Landscape Character Assessments at a regional and local level, as well as the identification of any key designations that may be impacted by both the Main and Alternative Schemes. Site visits were carried out in March and June 2015, during which, likely visual impacts from local key receptors were identified. Photographs of the site were also taken from each receptor, with both winter and summer Key Viewpoint photographs presented in Figure 7.8, Volume 6.2.

7.3.6 Current good practice indicates that a study area should extend to contain all areas in which visual impacts have the potential to occur based on topographical indications only. This is known as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). However, in order to identify the true visibility of the Main and Alternative Schemes, a ground model was run in GIS using topographical LiDAR data and mapping, to identify the likely area affected when considering intervening topography. This high level model was then refined on site to account for built form and vegetation to form the basis for the Visual Envelope presented in Figure 7.1, Volume 6.2.

7.3.7 An Arboricultural survey report has been undertaken and is contained within Appendix 7.1, Volume 6.3.

Impact Methodology

7.3.8 Landscape and Visual Impacts are determined by a number of factors, which collectively provide a level of significance of effect. Significance is based on the sensitivity of an area to a perceived change, along with an assessment of the magnitude of the visual impact. Impacts upon landscape character and visual amenity are considered during both the Construction and Operational phases of the Main and Alternative Schemes.

Significance Criteria

7.3.9 The significance of impact upon landscape character considers a combination of the magnitude of change against the quality, value and sensitivity to change of the affected landscape.

7.3.10 Visual Impact significance has been determined by combining the sensitivity of the visual receptor to the proposed change in conjunction with the magnitude of change. Magnitude has been assessed on the basis of the scale of the change in view, as well as the duration and distance of visual receptors concerned from the proposed Main and Alternative Schemes.

Table 7.1 Landscape Sensitivity to Change Evaluation Criteria

Sensitivity to Change	Evaluation Criteria	Landscape Value
High	Landscapes which by nature of their character would be unable to accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be; • Of high quality with distinctive elements and features making a positive contribution to character and sense of place. • Likely to be designated, but the aspects which underpin such value may also be present outside designated areas, especially at the local scale. • Areas of special recognised value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain features and elements that are rare and could not be replaced.	International or national: the landscape might be located in world heritage site, AONB, historic park and garden, Conservation Area or similarly designated area.
Moderate	Landscapes which by nature of their character would be able to partly accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be; • Comprised of commonplace elements and features creating generally unremarkable character but with some sense of place. • locally designated, or their value may be expressed through non-statutory local publications. • Containing some features of value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain some features and elements that could not be replaced.	Regional or district: the landscape might be located in green belt, regional park, historic park and garden, Conservation Area or similar or in an undesignated area, but is of significance through literary or cultural associations or through demonstrable use.
Low	Landscapes which by nature of their character would be able to accommodate change of the type proposed. Typically these would be; • Comprised of some features and elements that are discordant, derelict or in decline, resulting in indistinct character with little or no sense of place. • Not designated. • Containing few, if any, features of value through use, perception or historic and cultural associations. • Likely to contain few, if any, features and elements that could not be replaced.	District or local: generally undesignated landscapes which might be valued by the local community, containing elements or features that might benefit from restoration or enhancement.

Source: Based on GLVIA, IEMA and LI, 2013 and IAN 135/10 Highways England

Table 7.2 Visual Receptor Sensitivity to Change Criteria

Sensitivity	Receptor
High	• Users of Public Rights of Way or other recreational trails (e.g. National Trails, footpaths, bridleways etc.). • Occupiers of residential properties. • Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by the community. • Users of recreational facilities where the purpose of that recreation is enjoyment of the countryside (e.g. Country Parks, National Trust or other access land etc.). • Visitors to heritage assets or other attractions where the surroundings make an important contribution to the experience. • Protected or designated views.
Moderate	• Users of scenic roads, railways or waterways or users of designated tourist routes . • Outdoor workers. • Schools and other institutional buildings, and their outdoor areas. • People staying in hotels. • Users of restaurants and bars and recreational users of rivers where the views contribute to the landscape setting.
Low	• Indoor workers • Users of main roads (e.g. trunk roads) or passengers in public transport on main arterial routes. • Users of recreational facilities where the purpose of that recreation is not related to the view (e.g. sports facilities).

Source: Based on GLVIA, IEMA and LI, 2013 and IAN 135/10 Highways England

Table 7.3 Magnitude of change upon landscape Criteria

Magnitude	Criteria
Major	Total loss or large scale damage to existing character or distinctive features and elements, and / or the addition of new but uncharacteristic conspicuous features and elements.
Moderate	Partial loss or noticeable damage to existing character or distinctive features and elements, and / or the addition of new but uncharacteristic noticeable features and elements.
Minor	Slight loss or damage to existing character or features and elements, and / or the addition of new but uncharacteristic features and elements.
Negligible Adverse	Barely noticeable loss or damage to existing character or features and elements, and / or the addition of new but uncharacteristic features and elements.
No change	No noticeable loss, damage or alteration to character or features or elements.
Negligible Beneficial	Barely noticeable improvement of character by the restoration of existing features and elements, and / or the removal of uncharacteristic features and elements, or by the addition of new characteristic elements.

Magnitude	Criteria
Minor Beneficial	Slight improvement of character by the restoration of existing features and elements, and / or the removal of uncharacteristic features and elements, or by the addition of new characteristic elements.
Moderate Beneficial	Partial or noticeable improvement of character by the restoration of existing features and elements, and / or the removal of uncharacteristic and noticeable features and elements, or by the addition of new characteristic features.
Major Beneficial	Large scale improvement of character by the restoration of features and elements, and / or the removal of uncharacteristic and conspicuous features and elements, or by the addition of new distinctive features.

Source: IAN 135/10 Highways England

Table 7.4 Magnitude of Change to Visual Amenity Criteria

Magnitude	Criteria
Major	The development would be the dominant feature of the view in which other elements become subordinate.
Moderate	The development would be a noticeable feature of the view which is immediately apparent to the receptor.
Minor	The development would be perceptible, but will not alter the overall balance of features and elements that comprise the view.
Negligible	Only a very small part of the project would be discernible, or it is at such a distance that it would form a barely noticeable feature or element of the view.
No change	No part of the project, or work or activity associated with it, is discernible.

Source: Based on GLVIA, IEMA and LI, 2013 and IAN 135/10 Highways England

Assessment of Significance

7.3.11 Effects have been evaluated by combining the assessment of both magnitude (Table 7.3 and Table 7.4) and sensitivity (Table 7.1 and Table 7.2) to predict the significance of effect, as shown in Table 7.5 below. Magnitude has been assessed on the basis of the scale of the change in landscape character / view, as well as the duration and distance of character area / visual receptors concerned from the proposed works. These effects can be beneficial or adverse and temporary or permanent depending on the nature of the development and the mitigation and any enhancement measures proposed.

Table 7.5 Matrix for the Assessment of Significance of Landscape and Visual Effects

Value / Sensitivity	Magnitude of impact				
	No change	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major
Very High	Neutral	Slight	Moderate or Large	Large or Very Large	Large or Very Large
High	Neutral	Slight	Slight or Moderate	Moderate or Large	Large or Very Large
Medium	Neutral	Negligible or Slight	Slight	Slight or Moderate	Moderate or Large
Low	Neutral	Negligible or Slight	Neutral or Slight	Slight	Slight or Moderate
Negligible	Neutral	Negligible	Neutral or Slight	Neutral or Slight	Slight

Source: Adapted from IAN 135/10 Highways England

7.3.12 The assessment used structured, informed and reasoned professional judgement, taking into account a combination of data, derived from desk study and fieldwork.

7.4 Assumptions and Limitations

7.4.1 The assessment has been based on design drawings (Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 a to d and Figure 2.5 a to d, Volume 6.2).

7.4.2 Both summer and winter site visits were undertaken to establish the seasonal variation in baseline conditions and the likely changes when vegetation is in leaf compared to when it is not.

7.4.3 Not every residential receptor was addressed in its own right; instead properties were captured as small groups in some instances. Photographs were taken from the curtilage of properties, on publicly accessible roads and footpaths.

7.4.4 Whilst there may be numerous receptors within the study area, only those receptors identified as falling within the Visual Envelope of the Main and Alternative Schemes were assessed.

7.4.5 Night time effects were identified during Construction and Operation. It has been assumed that Public Rights of Way away from paved footways would not be used at night and as such, a description of night time views from those receptors has not been given.

7.4.6 The Historic Landscape Assessments for the Main and Alternative Schemes are contained in Chapter 6 Cultural Heritage.

7.5 Baseline Information

7.5.1 Baseline information was gathered by both desk top study and a series of site visits to confirm the existing baseline for both landscape character and identified visual receptors on site.

The Study Area

7.5.2 Transport corridors form dominant features within the area, with the M20 running through the study area to the north east of Ashford and the more southerly village of Mersham. The A2070 and A20 also form important transport corridors as they move through the centre of the study area, with the A2070 travelling south towards Romney Marsh and the A20 running parallel with the M20. Likewise, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) also traverses the landscape, although its impact is limited by running in cutting as it travels through the study area.

7.5.3 Away from transportation corridors, land use is varied, with the central core of the study area set to agriculture, with large scale open agricultural fields. Historic villages are found amongst the more rural agricultural scene, whilst to the north of Sevington, the A2070 forms the southern urban fringe of Ashford to the north.

Site Description

7.5.4 The village of Willesborough has become adjoined with the more northerly town of Ashford, a clear example of urban infilling extending south to previously outlying communities.

7.5.5 To the east of Ashford, built development has extended beyond the M20, characterised by a mixed land use of Willesborough Lees, the attractive village of Lacton Green, a designated Conservation Area, and dominating footprint of The William Harvey Hospital which sits on slightly elevated ground to the north of Lacton Green. A large Tesco superstore lies between the M20 and A20.

7.5.6 Away from the larger scale settlement of Ashford, the landscape is more open and rural in nature with irregular fields and blocks of woodland dominating, interspersed with small scale settlements such as the village of Mersham, also a Conservation Area, and isolated groups of houses.

7.5.7 A number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) traverse the landscape, particularly to the south east of the A2070 between the CTRL and the M20 running parallel to the north. There are no long distant footpaths within the study area.

Relevant Designations

7.5.8 There are a number of designated sites within the study area. These include 3 Conservation Areas, 1 in the north at Willesborough Lees, 1 at Lacton Green in the north east of the study area and 1 covering the village of Mersham in the south.

7.5.9 There are numerous Listed Buildings within the study area, with a high density within the 3 Conservation Areas. St Marys Church Sevington is particularly notable landmark within the study area.

7.5.10 Other relevant designations relate to 2 Scheduled Monuments found within the study area. The first, Boys Hall Moat, a moated site and associated garden located immediately adjacent to the CTRL just west of Ashford Industrial Estate. The second is a medieval moated site at Quarrington Manor located south of Quarrington Farm in the north eastern part of the study area.

7.5.11 There is also the Grade II listed Registered Park and Garden at Hatch Park in the south east of the study area adjacent to the A20, approximately 80m from the scheme, although it has been identified as sitting outside the visual envelope of the Main and Alternative Schemes.

7.5.12 The Kent Downs AONB sits just outside of the study area, however views from the elevated Devil's Kneading Trough high in the Downs have been captured as part of this assessment.

7.5.13 These landscape designations are shown on the landscape constraints plan (Figure 7.2, Volume 6.2). Ecological designations are presented on the Environmental Constraints Plan, Figure 2.3, Volume 6.2. Topography is shown on Figure 7.7, Volume 6.2.

Landscape Character

National Landscape Character

7.5.14 The proposed site is located within Natural England's National Landscape Character Area (LCA) 120 Wealden Greensand. Key Characteristics of this National Character Area are outlined in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6 National LCA Features

Feature	Description
Topography	Long narrow belt of Greensand. Scarp and dip slope topography.
Land Use	Mixed agricultural land with pasture and arable farming within a wooded framework. Small to medium sized fields.
Vegetation Cover	Extensive areas of mixed ancient woodland.
Development	Rural settlement pattern-mixture of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and nucleated villages. East of LCA is more developed with majority towns and infrastructure corridors such

Feature	Description
	as the M26, M25, M20 and CTRL.
Vernacular Style	Frequent use of varying local stones, as well as timber framing and weather boarding.
Historic Features	Sunken lanes form historic and highly characteristic feature, as do old deer parks and more recent 18th Century Parklands. Other features include: field monuments, historic military defences, pre-historic tumuli, iron age hill forts, roman forts, Royal military canal.
Water environment	Numerous streams and rivers including Great and East Stour, Western Rother, Wey, Arun and Medway rivers.

Kent Downs AONB

7.5.15 The AONB Management Plans from 2004 and 2014 give the following vision for the AONB: *'In 2034…* the *qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened*.' The AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 identifies 9 special characteristics and qualities as set out in Table 7.7 below.

Table 7.7 Kent Downs AONB Special Qualities

Characteristic	Quality
Dramatic Landform and Views	The Kent Downs dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology.
Biodiversity Rich habitats	Rich mosaics of habitats, plant and animal communities of national and local importance are sustained, although they may be isolated or fragmented in a modern agricultural landscape.
Farmed Landscape	A long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create the natural beauty of the Kent Downs.
Woodland and Trees	Broadleaf and mixed woodland cover 23% of the Kent Downs and frame the upper slopes of the scarp and dry valleys and plateaux tops.
A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage	Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs.
Geology and natural resources	The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology.
Vibrant communities	The Kent Downs is a living, working landscape shaped and managed by people.
Development Pressures	The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than

Characteristic	Quality
	any other of Britain's protected landscapes - AONBs, Heritage Coasts or National Parks, has faced severe development pressure.
Access, enjoyment and understanding	The Kent Downs is an easily accessible and charming landscape; over 1 million people live within a kilometre of the AONB boundary.

Local Landscape Character

7.5.16 This assessment has been informed at the county level by The Landscape Assessment of Kent dated October 2004 which brings together and updates a number of local Landscape Character Areas (LCA) produced in the 1990s.

7.5.17 Despite its proximity to Ashford, the majority of the study area was not covered in the Ashford Landscape Character Assessment 2009. Instead, the rural areas surrounding Ashford were addressed within the Kent Landscape Character Assessment.

7.5.18 There are 6 character areas covering the study area for the Main and Alternative Schemes, 4 of which are covered by the Kent Landscape Character Assessment. These are shown in Figure 7.3, Volume 6.2. A further 2 LCAs have been included in this assessment to cater for the small urban area of Ashford (LCA2) within the study area, and Mersham Village (LCA5) as its own entity. A description of key characteristics associated with each character area is defined below with further detail and a character area photograph in Appendix 7.2, Volume 6.3.

Landscape Character Area 1 Stour Gap

7.5.19 LCA 1 is located to the north east of Ashford. It is characterised by a flat to gently undulating agricultural landscape. The predominant land use is arable farming of mixed cereal and vegetables. Fields tend to be large scale, resulting in an open landscape. Whilst woodland is not a feature in the area, small copses and tree clumps do punctuate the landscape. The eastern boundary of the LCA is defined by the Canterbury railway line traversing the landscape, although it does not greatly influence the surrounding area. The neighbouring North Downs have a dominant effect upon the LCA, containing views to the north east. To the north of Ashford the parklands of the Grade II listed Kennington Hall form a notable feature, although this sits outside the 1km study area for this assessment.

7.5.20 Over the last 50 years this character area has seen a change from pasture and orchards to the open larger scale farming practices seen today; resulting in the demise of hedgerows which once formed the boundaries to smaller fields.

7.5.21 The low value of LCA1, results in a landscape with a low sensitivity to change. This is due to the lack of designations within the landscape and the weakening of landscape features over previous years.

Landscape Character Area 2 Ashford Urban Centre

7.5.22 Ashford urban centre is heavily dominated by a mix of residential dwellings in a tight urban environment. The main proportion of this LCA within the study area focuses on the urban area of Willesborough. The majority of properties are modern red brick semi-detached and detached properties forming a townscape which appears to have evolved over a number of years as shown by the minor variations in architectural style. The street pattern is tightly knit, creating a relatively dense built form. The southern edge of the LCA is defined by the presence of the A2070, which currently forms the boundary between the urban edge of Ashford and rural farmland at Sevington and beyond, to the south. The CTRL forms the south western boundary of the LCA, and separates the residential area of Willesborough from the more industrial / shed retail developments in South Willesborough (LCA 4). The Church at Willesborough forms an important visual connection with churches in the villages of Sevington and Mersham to the south.

7.5.23 Ashford Urban Centre LCA is considered to be of low value due to the lack of landscape designations in the area. Features are common with few historical connections aside from the historic St. Mary the Virgin Church. Consequently its sensitivity to change is low.

Landscape Character Area 3 Mersham Farmland

7.5.24 LCA 3 is defined by undulating farmland of open arable fields and small scale pastoral / grazing fields. Vegetation cover is limited in an essentially open landscape, apart from a small number of hedgerows which delineate the large field boundaries. However, these hedgerows are fragmented in places. The M20, whilst being hidden from view due to undulating topography and the road being in cutting, is still audible, and reduces the audible tranquillity of the otherwise quiet landscape. The south of the character area is defined by another major transport route, the CTRL.

7.5.25 It is considered that LCA3 is of moderate value, due to it having a degree of scenic value but with detractors such as the major transport links that traverse this landscape. The setting of St Marys church in Sevington is of local importance, as is its connection with the neighbouring churches in Willesborough (LCA2) and Mersham Village (LCA 5). The sensitivity to change is therefore considered to be Moderate.

Landscape Character Area 4 Upper Stour Valley

7.5.26 This LCA is defined by a flat, generally open landscape formed by Great Stour and East Stour Rivers. Occasional views of Ashford can be afforded towards the north east, over the low rise of Greensand and North Downs beyond. Small groups of field trees and copse add interest to a flat landscape otherwise dominated by arable and improved grass fields.

7.5.27 Hedgerows appear relatively infrequent and fragmented due to previous removal associated with the conversion of unimproved pasture to vast arable or improved pastureland. This has degraded the visual unity of the landscape.

7.5.28 Only a small area of the LCA sits within the study area, the northern most boundary defined by the CTRL. It is dominated by an open and more industrial character to the south of the A2070 with the presence of the Ashford International Truck Stop and disused railway freight terminal. To the north of the A2070, a large shed style Retail Park, hotel and fast food restaurant characterise this portion of the LCA.

7.5.29 Within the study area LCA 4 is considered to be of low landscape value, resulting in a low sensitivity to change. This is due to fragmented nature of the LCA, and dominance of transport infrastructure in the south and retail park in the north of the area.

Landscape Character Area 5 Mersham Village

7.5.30 Mersham Village is a historic village dating back to Saxon times, now a designated Conservation Area. This once nucleated village has expanded along Kingsford Street and Bower Road, with larger residential properties when compared with the small scale intimate character of the nucleus of the village. Generally architectural style varies as the village has grown over the centuries and particularly in the last 100 years. Red brick still remains the most dominant building material, although there are examples of rag stone, brick and tile hung buildings, as well as painted render. Vegetation is mostly focused on private gardens. The periphery of the LCA is surrounded by farmland, although the M20 sits a short distance north east of the village.

7.5.31 Mersham Village LCA is considered to be of moderate landscape value, particularly due to the distinctive character of the centre of Mersham village which is a designated Conservation Area. This results in a moderate sensitivity to change.

Landscape Character Area 6 Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmland

7.5.32 Located to the east of Ashford, this character area is defined by gently undulating mixed farmlands. The topography varies with flatter lowlands around Ashford, becoming increasingly undulating towards Hatch Park in the east. The southern extent of the character area is dominated by the M20 motorway corridor which forms a dominant linear feature within the surrounding landscape. Its presence has an impact upon audible tranquillity given the noise associated with passing traffic. It is worth noting that the M20, whilst dominant in some parts of the character area, is actually well contained in cutting in places, reducing its presence in the landscape.

7.5.33 Urban development is not prevalent in this LCA, with little built form present. This is with the exception of the village of Willesborough Lees, a designated Conservation Area; William Harvey Hospital campus; and an area immediately around the A20 where residential properties, Tesco Superstore, the

Willesborough Garden Centre, and Pilgrims Hospice have established a linear development to the north east of the M20.

7.5.34 Away from development, agriculture and woodland form the dominant land cover. The large expanse of woodland to the eastern extent of the character area encloses Hatch Park, a Grade II Listed mid-18th century Registered Park and Garden to the north of the village of Mersham. The large extent of tree cover creates an enclosed landscape limiting views out from the central core of the estate.

7.5.35 The moderate value of LCA6, results from the presence of local designations including the Willesborough Lees Conservation Area and Registered Park and Garden in the south east of the study area in a landscape with a moderate sensitivity to change.

Visual Baseline

Zone of Theoretical Visibility and Visual Envelope

7.5.36 The initial study area extended to a distance of approximately 1km from site. Upon consultation with ABC, the study area was increased to include the views afforded from the Devil's Kneading Trough 4km west from site (see Figure 7.4, Volume 6.2). The actual visual envelope, based on not only topography but intervening built form and vegetation, contained the area affected by the proposed Main and Alternative Schemes (as detailed in Figure 7.1, Volume 6.2), with the majority of views being contained within 500m or less.

Visual Receptors

7.5.37 A number of visual receptors have been identified during the baseline study including residential properties, Public Rights of Way (PRoW), a hospice, and local church. These have been identified within the study area of 1km from the centre line of the proposed Main and Alternative Schemes and are defined in Figure 7.4, Volume 6.2. Photographs were taken from each Key Receptor and are presented in Figure 7.8, Volume 6.2. A long distance receptor was identified during consultation and as such the site visit incorporated the highly elevated view from the Devil's Kneading Trough, some 4km from site.

7.5.38 The visual sensitivity of individual receptors will depend upon the location and context of the view from the receptor, the activity associated with the receptor, and the importance of the view. Those receptors often considered to have a higher sensitivity to change include occupiers of residential properties and users of outdoor recreation facilities and PRoWs, who are likely to be focused upon the surrounding landscape. Other visual receptors which may be impacted to a lesser degree, due to a reduced level of visual sensitivity, include those where the vista is not the primary draw (e.g. people involved in recreation activities such as sport, road users, and people in their place of work / school). The visual sensitivity of a receptor will influence the overall

impact associated with both the Main and Alternative Schemes as defined in Table 7.2.

7.6 Mitigation and Compensation Measures

7.6.1 An Environmental Masterplan has been produced for the Main and Alternative Schemes (Figures 2.6 and 2.7, Volume 6.2), informed by this assessment, in order to mitigate for adverse impacts associated with both schemes. The landscape strategy has been prepared to address mitigation requirements for both ecology and landscape assets. The design rationale has focused on replacement of vegetation lost during construction. Where planting is proposed, it would include native species reflecting those currently on site, and would be of local provenance, in accordance with the Forestry Commission's Practice Note on Using Local Stock for Planting Native Trees and Shrubs[6]. This design rationale reflects the requirements of the Kent Downs AONB, where '*proposed landscaping should be based on indigenous species appropriate to the specific locality and should use plants of local provenance'*.

Construction

7.6.2 Landscape and visual amenity mitigation opportunities during the construction of both the Main and Alternative Schemes are somewhat limited. However, impacts upon landscape character and visual amenity would be reduced through keeping a well-managed and tidy site as well as well-managed compounds. Ensuring materials are delivered on an as and when basis to avoid unnecessary stockpiles, would also help to reduce construction impacts. Construction would in the most part be limited to daylight hours thereby limiting night time impacts. Temporary offices and welfare facilities within site compounds would be of a recessive colour to blend in with the local surroundings. Lighting would be kept to a minimum with options for infrared lighting or timers explored for compounds where practicable.

7.6.3 Mitigation in relation to trees is detailed in the Arboricultural Implications Assessment (AIA) contained in Appendix 7.3, Volume 6.3. An Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) would be produced to prevent damage to any vegetation to be retained.

Operation

7.6.4 Reinstatement planting would form the main mitigation measure for the Main and Alternative Schemes during operation. Local native species would be introduced in areas where vegetation removal is required to accommodate construction. Swathes of native tree and shrub species would be punctuated with more mature Standard trees giving instant height and impact, helping to settle the Main and Alternative Schemes within the surrounding landscape. Over time, this vegetation would mature to offer effective screening where

[6] Forestry Commission, 1999, available http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcpn8.pdf/%24FILE/fcpn8.pdf, accessed 23/03/16

required as well as general landscape integration. Hedgerows would also be incorporated to help screen the proposed acoustic fencing along Kingsford Street.

7.6.5 An AIA has been produced which has identified specific mitigation in relation to potential remediation measures post-works (Appendix 7.3, Volume 6.3).

7.7 Predicted Effects

Main Scheme - Effects upon designated sites

7.7.1 Three Conservation Areas were identified within the baseline, Willesborough Lees, Lacton Green and Mersham. All 3 Conservation Areas sit outside of the ZTV and as such are considered to be unaffected by the Main Scheme. Whilst Lacton Green is in close proximity to the Main Scheme, the area would not be directly affected. Due to the visual containment of the settlement, it is not considered there would be indirect significant impacts upon the Conservation Area. Audible tranquillity is also unlikely to be significantly affected due to the presence of the existing M20, A20 and more urban nature of the existing surroundings.

7.7.2 A number of Listed Buildings and 1 Registered Park and Garden have been identified within the study area. Whilst the majority fall outside the visual envelope, a small number of Listed Buildings would sit within the affected area and have consequently been addressed within this assessment. In summary, St Marys Church Sevington and nearby Court Lodge would experience Significant Adverse effects during Construction and Year 1 of Operation, reducing to Slight Adverse by Year 15. Listed building on Kingsford Street would also experience Significant Adverse effects during construction and Year 1, again reducing to Non-Significant as mitigation planting matures, reducing the visual prominence of the scheme. Details of the change in view during construction and operation have been detailed in the Visual Impact Schedules in Appendix 7.4, Volume 6.3.

7.7.3 Neither of the 2 Scheduled Monuments within the study area would be directly affected by the Main Scheme or fall within the visual envelope.

7.7.4 Kent Downs AONB, whilst outside of the study area, has been addressed within the visual assessment (refer to Visual Impact Schedules, Appendix 7.4, Volume 6.3) in relation to a key viewpoint identified at the Devil's Kneading Trough. Given the distance from site and expansive nature of this long distance view it is considered that the Main Scheme would be barely perceptible from this location.

Main Scheme – Landscape Effects During Construction

7.7.5 The following paragraphs provide a description of the likely effect upon the 6 LCAs identified within the study area, during construction.

Landscape Character Area 1 Stour Gap

7.7.6 Stour Gap LCA only just falls within the boundary of the assigned study area, with just the very southern tip of the character area being captured within the assessment. The character area is isolated from the proposed Main Scheme site by intervening topography and vegetation and it is therefore considered there would be no impact upon LCA1 during construction. Neutral Effect.

Landscape Character Area 2 Ashford Urban Centre

7.7.7 The vast majority of LCA2 would remain unaffected by works during construction of the Main Scheme. This is with the exception of some localised works in the very southern section of the character area close to the A2070. The topographical and built up nature of this LCA forms a tight grain and encloses the character area from within. As such, the works in the south would have little bearing on the wider character area, as there would be limited visual connectivity and consequently landscape features would remain unchanged in the most part. Works within the southernmost part of the LCA would be limited to the introduction of new temporary features associated with localised highway improvements at Barrey Road and the replacement of the existing Church Road footbridge. Works would also occur along the periphery of the LCA adjacent to the A2070, offering indirect impacts upon visual and audible tranquillity. However these impacts would be set in the context of the tight urban grain of Ashford and the existing A2070.

7.7.8 Given the limited proportion of the LCA directly affected by the Main Scheme and the indirect nature of impacts occurring within neighbouring LCA 3, the magnitude of change upon LCA2 during construction is considered to be minor, resulting in a Slight Adverse landscape impact at worst.

Landscape Character Area 3 Mersham Farmland

7.7.9 LCA3 would be directly impacted by the works during construction of the Main Scheme, with the vast majority of the Main Scheme extents falling within this LCA. This essentially rural farmland LCA would have new elements, including the construction compound and associated lighting for the Main Scheme, as well as the works associated with the construction of the route corridor and new junctions with the M20 and A2070. In addition to construction activity, associated elements such as materials stockpiling, heavy plant and machinery would be present within the landscape and at odds with the more rural character currently afforded. However, whilst there would be a notable change in the LCA during construction of the Main Scheme, the undulating topography would enclose the change from southern parts of the LCA from a visual connectivity perspective. The southern area would likely afford reductions in audible tranquillity; however this would be set in the context of the existing CTRL forming the southern boundary to the LCA. To the north works would be most prevalent, however they would also be set in the context of a busy transport corridor, in this instance, the A2070, M20 and A20.

7.7.10 The change upon this LCA during construction of the Main Scheme is likely to see substantial alteration to part of the character area, and as such the magnitude of change is considered to be Major resulting in a Large Adverse significance of effect.

Landscape Character Area 4 Upper Stour Valley

7.7.11 There would be no works within this LCA during construction. Given the sense of severance presented by the CTRL, it is unlikely there would be visual connectivity with neighbouring LCA3 where the works would take place. This is with the exception of the A2070, which would be the only visual link with the works. Given this small part of the LCA is dominated by the existing highway, the connection to construction machinery and activity within LCA3 would not have a notable impact upon the character of the Upper Stour Valley. With regards to indirect impacts upon audible tranquillity, these are also likely to be minimal set in the context of the existing A2070 and CTRL. The low sensitivity of this already fragmented and industrialised character area would not experience a significant effect during the construction of the Main Scheme. The magnitude of change is considered to be Minor, resulting in a Negligible significance of effect.

Landscape Character Area 5 Mersham Village

7.7.12 Mersham Village would not be directly affected by the proposed works. There may be indirect effects afforded given its position neighbouring LCA3 where the works would dominate. However, given the nature of intervening hedge banks, built form and topography it is not considered there would be visual connectivity with the works in LCA3. There may be a limited reduction in audible tranquillity, but given the distance from site and presence of the existing M20 it is not considered to be notable. As such, the magnitude of change is considered to be Negligible, resulting in a Negligible significance of effect during construction.

Landscape Character Area 6 Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmland

7.7.13 This LCA sits immediately adjacent to the Main Scheme works boundary, and whilst there would be no works within its boundary, construction would occur along its periphery. As such, it is considered that the southernmost boundary of the LCA would be directly affected during construction of the Main Scheme. Works would see the introduction of new elements within the landscape, including heavy plant and machinery (including the short term use of a crane), as well as earthworks and construction activity associated with Junction 10a, A2070 link road and Kingsford Street footbridge. Works would however be set within the context of the existing A20 and M20 highway corridors and associated traffic including the presence of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs). Intervening vegetation between LCA6 and neighbouring Mersham Farmlands would contain the LCA to a certain degree, however visual connectivity may still be sought from more open or elevated areas within the LCA, as well as more locally where vegetation would be cleared to accommodate a temporary diversion of the A20. There may be localised reductions in audible tranquillity,

however this would be set in the context of the M20 and A20 immediately adjacent to the Main Scheme works site. As such the magnitude of change associated with the works would be Minor at worst leading to a Slight Adverse effect during construction.

7.7.14 In summary, 5 of the 6 LCAs within the study area would experience Non-Significant effects during construction. LCA 3 Mersham Farmland would experience a significant Large Adverse effect as works would be occurring directly within the character area. All other LCAs would experience Non-Significant effects with the majority being Negligible.

Main Scheme - Visual Effects During Construction

7.7.15 Effects during construction of the Main Scheme have been detailed for each visual receptor identified within the assessment process. The Visual Impact Schedules contained in Appendix 7.4, Volume 6.3 and Figure 7.5, Volume 6.2 provides a detailed description of the change in view and associated significance of effect during construction.

7.7.16 Receptors identified within the visual envelope have been assessed as part of the Main Scheme. However, when considering the temporary use of a crane to install new bridge structures, there would be an increase in the number of receptors temporarily captured within the visual envelope. Given the very short duration and non-significant nature of the effect, these receptors have not all been detailed within this assessment, however, it is noted that a number of additional receptors may afford views to the top of a crane only for a very short period during construction. The visual effects of the crane are not considered to be significant.

7.7.17 Of the 25 receptors identified, 16 would experience Significant Adverse effects during construction. Ten of the 16 would experience a Large Adverse effect, with the remaining 6 experiencing Moderate Adverse effects. A summary of effects upon visual receptors, grouped by type is outlined below.

Residential Receptors

7.7.18 All 4 residential receptors reporting a Significant Adverse effect would experience a Moderate Adverse effect during construction. Three of the four of those receptors are situated within very close proximity to the works adjacent to Kingsford Street.

Public Rights of Way

7.7.19 A total of 7 PRoW would be closed as part of the Main Scheme works, either temporarily to accommodate the works during construction or permanently. The PRoW to be permanently closed are located to the north of Aylesford Stream in the small parcel of land to the south of the M20 (receptor 2 shown on Figure 7.5). Of the PRoW and footways remaining, 5 would experience Large Adverse significance of effects during construction, with 1 receptor (No. 7) experiencing a Moderate Adverse effect. Impacts during construction would

result from the introduction of new features within the view, which would be incongruous in the otherwise more rural scene. Views would however be set in the context of the nearby M20 corridor, A2070 and associated passing traffic.

Road users

7.7.20 During construction all 3 roads identified within the assessment would experience Significant Adverse effects. Bockham Lane (No.19) and the M20 (No.23) would experience Moderate Adverse effects, whilst Highfield Lane (No.7), with views across what was once open farmland to a considerable construction site, would experience a Large Adverse effect.

Main Scheme - Landscape Effects During Operation

7.7.21 The following paragraphs provide a description of the likely effect upon LCAs within the study area during operation.

Landscape Character Area 1 Stour Gap

7.7.22 Given the audible and visual isolation of this LCA from the Main Scheme, it is not considered that the LCA would be affected by any change during operation. This would result in a Neutral effect.

Landscape Character Area 2 Ashford Urban Centre

7.7.23 The direct impact of the works within this LCA would be minimal, with works limited to improvements within the existing highway corridor at Barrey Road and the replacement of the footbridge at Church Lane, which would encroach very slightly outside the highway boundary. Whilst there would be a very localised change, the essence of the LCA would remain unchanged during operation, particularly as proposed vegetation around the new footbridge develops to soften the structure by Year 15. There may be a degree of inter-visibility with the Main Scheme in the neighbouring LCA3 (potentially from the rear views of some properties, although this could not be fully assessed during the site visits), however this would be set in the context of the tight grain of the intervening townscape and the existing highway network. Any views to the Main Scheme would decrease over time as mitigation planting establishes, helping to settle the new footbridge and works at Barrey Road into the landscape. Given the isolated nature of the change and the minimal connectivity with LCA3, the magnitude of change for LCA 2 is considered to be minor, resulting in a Slight Adverse impact at worst in Year 1, reducing to a negligible magnitude of change in Year 15, resulting in a Negligible impact.

Landscape Character Area 3 Mersham Farmland

7.7.24 This LCA would see a notable change during the operation of the Main Scheme, particularly in the north western corner where the proposed A2070 link road, associated infrastructure including lighting, and the new soft estate would be present. These new features would be a distinct change from the

existing arable farmland setting, however, they would be set in the context of the neighbouring A2070 and M20 highway corridors that traverse the western and northern boundaries of this character area. The new A2070 link road would be accompanied by landscape mitigation measures, including a buffer of native trees and shrubs, standard trees and swathes of species rich grassland, as well as more ornamental planting along the south eastern edge of Ashford. This would help integrate the A2070 link road with its surroundings and reduce its prominence within the LCA. Night time effects would be associated with new lighting columns along the length of the new link, junction, Kingsford Street and footbridges. Whilst this would be at odds with the existing immediate landscape, lighting has been designed to limit light spill and would be set in the context of lighting found within the wider landscape on the edge of the LCA with local urban settlements in the south of Ashford and around junction 10. Whilst the mitigation planting may have limited effect in Year 1, over time the planting would establish to soften its presence within the landscape.

7.7.25 Given the visual containment provided by local topographical variations, the impact upon the wider character area would be limited and as such the magnitude of change is, on balance, considered to be Moderate Adverse in Year 1 reducing to Minor in Year 15, leading to a Moderate significance of effect in Year 1, and Slight Adverse effect by Year 15.

Landscape Character Area 4 Upper Stour Valley

7.7.26 The Upper Stour Valley would not be directly affected by the Main Scheme during operation, due to lack of visual connectivity with the neighbouring LCA 3 where the Main Scheme would be located. There may be a very limited connection from the A2070 north to the new roundabout in 1 very isolated area. It is not considered there would be a notable change in audible tranquillity given the presence of the CTRL that forms the northern boundary of this LCA. Consequently the Main Scheme works are unlikely to result in a change in character, as such the magnitude is considered to be Negligible, leading to a Negligible significance of effect at worst during Operation.

Landscape Character Area 5 Mersham Village

7.7.27 There would not be any works associated with the Main Scheme within this LCA. Given the lack of visual connectivity and distance from the proposed Main Scheme, it is not considered there would be a direct impact upon visual or audible tranquillity of the LCA. However, according to the traffic model used to inform the noise assessment, there would be an increase in local traffic which may have a detrimental impact upon the character area. As such a Negligible Significance of effect is expected.

Landscape Character Area 6 Brabourne Lees Mixed Farmland

7.7.28 Brabourne Lees LCA would not be directly impacted by the Main Scheme during operation, however there may be limited visual connectivity to Junction 10a and the new footbridge prior to mitigation planting establishing. Given the

very small indirect change to the very periphery of the LCA set in the context of the existing M20 and A20, the magnitude of change is considered to be Negligible, resulting in a Negligible significance of effect during Operation, from the outset.

Summary

7.7.29 In summary, 5 of the 6 LCAs within the study area would experience non-significant effects during Operation. LCA 3 Mersham Farmland would experience Significant Adverse effects in Year 1, reducing to non-significant by Year 15, as mitigation planting establishes to settle the Main Scheme within its surrounding and improve the level of visual containment. Consequently there would be no significant residual impacts upon Landscape Character as a result of the Main Scheme.

Main Scheme - Visual Effects During Operation

7.7.30 Effects upon visual receptors during operation of the Main Scheme are presented within the Visual Impact Schedules in Appendix 7.4, Volume 6.3. Photomontages for 3 key views are presented in Figure 7.9, Volume 6.2., with accompanying methodology provided in Appendix 7.5, Volume 6.3.

7.7.31 Of the 25 visual receptors identified within the visual envelope, 12 receptors would experience significant adverse effects during Year 1 of operation. By Year 15, mitigation planting would have matured to aid the integration and screening of the Main Scheme from the surrounding area. As such, by Year 15, only Receptor No. 5 (PRoW AE175), which meets the A20 north of the Willesborough Garden Centre, is reported to have a significant residual effect.

7.7.32 A summary of effects upon each receptor type are presented below:

Residential Receptors (including Pilgrim's Hospice)

7.7.33 During Year 1 of Operation, 3 of the 9 residential receptors identified would experience significant adverse effects. Two of these receptors would experience Moderate Adverse effects in Year 1 given their close proximity and open views to the Main Scheme and 1 would experience a Large Adverse effect due unscreened lighting. Over time, mitigation planting, including plots of trees and shrubs, standard trees and hedge planting, would mature and help to reduce the visual impact of the Main Scheme. By Year 15 the significance of effect would have reduced to being Non-significant for all residential receptors.

PRoWs and Footpaths

7.7.34 A total of 12 PRoW were assessed as part of the Main Scheme, 6 of which would experience Significant Adverse effects in Year 1 of Operation. Those affected are generally within close proximity to the Main Scheme, with Receptors 3 and 5 immediately adjacent or adjoining the scheme. Receptors 1, 5, 11 and 25 would be slightly distanced from the Main Scheme but afford

open wide angle views to the scheme in Year 1 of Operation. At this time, mitigation would have yet to establish, however by Year 15 it would have matured to help settle the Main Scheme into the landscape and reduce its visual prominence. As such, only Receptor 5 would have a residual Significant Adverse effect in Year 15 as it would directly intersect the new Junction 10a.

Road Users

7.7.35 Of the 3 roads assessed, only Highfield Lane would experience a significant effect during Operation. This is due to the more scenic nature of the route in close proximity to the new Junction 10a and A2070 link road as it travels south west towards the A2070. In Year 1 mitigation planting would have yet to establish to soften the scheme. By Year 15 it is considered that planting would have matured to help fragment views towards the Main Scheme, settling it within its surroundings within the angle of view. As such, there would be no significant effects upon road users by Year 15.

Other

7.7.36 St Marys Church in Sevington would experience a Moderate Adverse significant effect in Year 1 of Operation as proposed vegetation would have yet to establish to form a visual screen amongst intervening retained vegetation. There would however be a landscape bund and acoustic fence within the field of view which would go some way to screening the new link road and elements of traffic. By Year 15 planting would have developed sufficiently to help screen the A2070 link road from view, resulting in a non-significant visual effect.

Alternative Scheme - Predicted Effects During Construction

7.7.37 The Alternative Scheme would see the construction of a new roundabout access from the new link road opening onto the Stour Park development immediately south of the new link road. The impacts would be akin to that of the Main Scheme with the presence of machinery and construction activity associated with the new junction set in the context of the construction of the new link road immediately adjacent. It is considered that the assessment presented above for the Main Scheme is also applicable to the Alternative Scheme. As such, there would be no change in the significance of effects from the Main Scheme when considering the Alternative Scheme during construction. This applies to both landscape character and visual amenity.

Alternative Scheme - Predicted Effects During Operation

7.7.38 The presence of the new roundabout would be set in the context of the newly constructed link road to which the junction would tie in. The roundabout would be planted with trees and shrubs as well as standard trees to aid its integration with both the new link road and the existing surrounding landscape. Given the nature of the new junction, set in the context of the proposed mitigation, there would be no change in the significance of effects

from the Main Scheme when considering the Alternative Scheme during operation. This applies to both landscape character and visual amenity.

7.8 Conclusions

7.8.1 The potential impact upon 6 LCAs was assessed as part of this LVIA. Of the 6 identified, only 1 LCA would experience Significant Adverse effects during the construction of either the Main or Alternative Schemes, and only 1 (LCA 3 Mersham Farmlands) likely to experience significant effects in Year 1 for both Schemes. There would be no residual significant effects upon landscape character at Year 15 and beyond from either the Main or Alternative Schemes.

Table 7.8 Summary of Landscape effects

Significance of Effect	LCAs affected during Construction	LCAs affected during Operation
Large Adverse	LCA 3	
Moderate Adverse		LCA 3 (Yr 1)
Slight Adverse	LCA 2	LCA 2 (Yr 1) LCA 3 (Yr15)
Negligible	LCA 4, LCA5 and LCA6	LCA 2 (Yr 15), LCA 4, LCA 6
Neutral	LCA 1	LCA1, LCA 5

7.8.2 The potential impacts upon visual amenity were addressed through the assessment of 25 receptors identified within the visual envelope of both the Main and Alternative Schemes. Two of those receptors were removed due to them no long being present when construction begins. Of those 25, 16 receptors would experience Significant Adverse effects during construction of the Main and Alternative Schemes, reducing to 12 in Year 1 of Operation. When considering the establishment of mitigation planting by Year 15, only 1 visual receptor (No.5), a PRoW, was considered to have a residual significant effect as a result of either the Main or Alternative Schemes.

Table 7.9 Summary of Visual effects

Significance of Effect	Number of visual receptors affected during Construction	Number of visual receptors affected in Year 1	Number of visual receptors affected in Year 15
Large Adverse	10	2	
Moderate Adverse	6	10	1
Slight Adverse	2	5	13
Negligible	3		3
Neutral	2	6	6