

Topic Paper

Sites of Urban Landscape Value

January 2020

To accompany the Draft Local Plan Update consultation



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Background

1.1. This paper provides background evidence and justification for Wokingham Borough Council's designation of Sites of Urban Landscape Value (SULVs) as per Policy NE7 of the Draft Local Plan. It sets out the relevant legislation and policy guidance and details the methodology used for determining Sites of Urban Landscape Value across the Borough. It is intended that this paper inform the development of the Local Plan Update and demonstrate how evidence has been applied in order to formulate the SULV planning policy for Wokingham Borough.

1.2. This paper will also help inform Wokingham Borough Council's site assessments and site allocations as part of the Local Plan Update and assist officers in Development Management when assessing future planning applications.

1.3. Four Sites of Urban Landscape Value were originally designated in the Wokingham District Local Plan (2004) as per Policy WLL5:

- Bulmershe, Woodley
- South Lake, Woodley
- Maiden Erlegh Lake, Earley
- Joel Park, Wokingham

1.4. The four areas were re-assessed and designated once again as part of Policy TB22: Sites of Urban Landscape Value, in the Managing Development Delivery Document (MDDD), adopted in February 2014.

1.5. It is necessary to review the four current SULVs to establish whether they warrant re-designation in the Local Plan Update.

1.6. This is also an opportunity to consider whether any other areas of land qualify for SULV designation given development since the MDDD was adopted. This is largely as a result of the development strategy set out in the Core Strategy (2010), including four planned Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) for major growth, at:

- North Wokingham
- South Wokingham
- South of the M4
- Arborfield Garrison

2. Planning Framework

2.1. Paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) states: *'The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development'*. Paragraph 8c) further states that one of three 'overarching objectives' is an environmental one:

'c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy'.

2.2. Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that: *'Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and make sufficient provision for:*

d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.'

2.3. Paragraph 170 of the NPPF says:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland'*

2.4. The overall objective for the natural and local environment being that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance valued landscape.

2.5. The NPPF states at paragraph 171 that:

'Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value...'

2.6. It continues that plans should: *'...take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries'*.

2.7. The Natural Environment section of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides further detail to the NPPF. The 'How can planning policies conserve and enhance spaces' section of the PPG notes:

'Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals for development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures, such as appropriate design principles and visual screening, where necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.' (Paragraph: 036 Reference ID 8-036-20190721)

3. Wokingham Borough's Sites of Urban Landscape Value

3.1. Locally valued landscape forms part of the council's strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and planning for the enhancement of natural capital. SULVs also have wider benefits, including helping to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and encouraging healthy and active lifestyles.

3.2. Wokingham Borough's SULVs are primarily open and undeveloped areas within settlements, which provide an important contribution to local character and visual amenity, ecology and the environment, as well as opportunities for recreation and improving peoples' well-being.

3.3. A SULV must meet the following criteria:

1. Be located within the settlement boundary (i.e. be within an urban area)
2. The majority of the area should have some form of public access and possible connecting routes from other green space(s)
3. Include a variety of types of spaces/land uses e.g. open space, wooded areas
4. Provide some form of recreational value (both informal and formal)
5. Provide wildlife interest and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement
6. Provide a sense of place and landscape value to the wider community.

3.4 The Borough's four current SULVs form part of the setting and identity of the settlements of Earley, Wokingham and Woodley:

- Bulmershe, Woodley
- South Lake, Woodley
- Maiden Erlegh Lake, Earley
- Joel Park, Wokingham

3.5 The Borough's SULVs are primarily open spaces interspersed with and bounded by mature trees. They also include individual landscape features such as lakes, watercourses, woodlands and hedgerows. Each SULV provides an important area of informal open, green space, alongside recreational opportunities and valuable habitats, which can enhance biodiversity. Together these complimentary roles within a within a built-up context, are sufficiently important to warrant protection and enhancement in the Local Plan, in accordance with paragraphs 170 and 171 of the NPPF (2019) and the PPG, as referenced above.

3.6 Policy NE7 of the Draft Local Plan builds upon the requirements of the NPPF and PPG seeking to ensure that the special landscape features and qualities, including the openness, visual attractiveness and capacity for informal recreation of SULVs are retained and enhanced, and their important features protected. Development proposals within or affecting SULVs shall respect their special local character and the important landscape, wildlife and recreational amenity. The policy also considers to views within, into and from the SULVs.

4. The method of assessment

4.1. Whilst the criteria for designating SULVs has remained the same over time, previously when originally designating the borough's SULVs back in 2004, there was a strong emphasis placed on ecological diversity and some of the SULV boundaries were based on local ecological designation boundaries, such as Local Wildlife Sites. It is now considered that ecological diversity should be balanced in more equal measure with the other considerations referenced above; providing an important contribution to local landscape character and visual amenity, ecology and the environment, as well as opportunities for recreation and improving peoples' well-being. The redistribution of weighting is considered to better reflect current environmental and social issues such as climate change and personal wellness and well-being.

- 4.2. A pro-forma was developed as a result of discussions between the Council's Landscape Architect and Planners (see Appendix 1). The pro-forma is an assessment of landscape, recreational, wildlife and environmental value, as well as public access. It has been designed to provide clear and reasoned justification as to whether an area of land should be recommended for designation as a Site of Urban Landscape Value. A site visit and assessment was undertaken at each of the existing SULVs as part of a reassessment against the necessary criteria as outlined above, as well as reviewing the SULV boundaries to ascertain whether alterations were required.
- 4.3. This was also an opportunity to consider whether any other areas of land would qualify for SULV designation, particularly given the development across the Borough since the MDDD (2014) was adopted as a result of the four SDLs, as described above. These areas were identified for assessment through a combination of:
- Reviewing existing settlement boundaries (the Draft Local Plan Update proposes to amend the settlement boundary in North Wokingham meaning that Cantley Park would be included within the settlement boundary where previously it has not been),
 - Local knowledge and suggestions from other borough council officers
 - A review of larger open spaces within the settlement boundary to consider their benefits to the local community in terms of recreation, well-being, ecological, visual amenity and environmental benefits.
- 4.4. To ascertain whether the following sites met the criteria for designation as additional SULVs, site visits and assessments were undertaken at:
- Woosehill Meadows, Emmbrook
 - Cantley Park, North Wokingham
- 4.5 Consideration was also given to whether SULVs could be recommended for designation at:
- Arborfield linear park, Arborfield SDL
 - Woodford Park, Woodley
 - Chalfont Park, Earley
- 4.6 The following sections provides a brief outline of each SULV, any proposed boundary changes, with the detailed pro-formas used in the assessment process found in Appendix 2.

Bulmershe

- 4.7 The Bulmershe SULV is the largest of the four existing SULVs, being located to the north of the A3290 and to the east of Church Road and Pitt's Road. Reading Road runs along the northern boundary of the SULV and Addington School and Kingfisher Road form the eastern boundary. The SULV is located within a predominantly residential area in Woodley. The Bulmershe SULV is considered an important landscape resource between the settlements of Earley and Woodley with High Wood a significant landscape feature, both in terms of mature woodland and ecological habitats. The strong tree screen on the site boundaries, tree groups within the site and the woodland greatly enhances the character of the SULV and provides the characteristic wooded horizon in views across the open areas of the site or in views into the SULV from the surrounding residential areas. Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource with a strong sense of place in an urban area.

- 4.8 It is proposed to make a minor amendment to the north-western boundary of the SULV, to remove a small area of land which has been the subject of a recent housing development to the rear of Pitts Lane and therefore no longer meets the SULV criteria. However, it should be noted that the landscape buffer, containing significant boundary vegetation, that forms part of the development site is proposed to be retained with the SULV.
- 4.9 Other boundary amendments have been undertaken around the new housing development on the former Reading University Campus site south of Woodlands Avenue, to ensure the boundary responds to the extent of the built form. The SULV has also been extended to include amenity space with tree planting adjacent to High Tree Drive and the triangular area of scrubby woodland at the end of Nightingale Road. A refinement to the eastern boundary also has been made to include the bridleway up to Kingfisher Drive.

South Lake

- 4.10 South Lake is a small SULV located to the south-east of the Bulmershe SULV in Woodley. It is surrounded on all sides by residential roads, many of which are cul-de-sacs. Beyond the residential streets to the south lies the A3290. The well treed/wooded characteristics of the SULV and the lake are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Woodley, giving a feeling of seclusion, which is unusual within a large area of housing. It is an important landscape and ecological resource that is well used and valued for informal recreation. The surrounding vegetation is important in terms of providing a wooded backdrop to the urban development of Woodley and contributes to the verdant character of the wider area.
- 4.11 It is proposed to amend the SULV boundary to include a small additional area of land to north-west of the site. This area of land is open in nature and includes the more formal open space and play area adjacent to Kingfisher Drive. It also forms a link between the South Lake SULV and the Bulmershe SULV to the west of the site. This additional area is an extension of the strong wooded character of the South Lake SULV and provides visual and physical links between this SULV and the adjacent Bulmershe SULV.
- 4.12 Minor boundary refinements have also been made to follow specific features on the ground such as fence lines, footpaths or roads. This has increased the area of the SULV and now includes the general amenity spaces on the edges of the current SULV designation adjacent to the residential development, which form an integral part of the wider open space.

Maiden Erlegh Lake

- 4.13 The Maiden Erlegh Lake SULV is located in a predominantly residential part of Earley to the east of Beech Lane and to the south of Lakeside and Silverdale Road. To the south/south-east of the SULV lies Laurel Park Recreation Ground. The well treed characteristics of the SULV are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Earley, giving a sense of seclusion, which is unusual in such a built up location. It is a well-used and valued site, important for informal recreation. The woodland and other vegetation is important in terms of providing a wooded back-drop to the urban development of substantial parts of Earley.
- 4.14 It is proposed to amend the SULV boundary to include Laurel Park Recreation Ground and the associated formal play area to the west of the pitches. Although these areas are more open in character than the woodlands surrounding the lake, they form an integral part of the wider public open space and represent an important recreational resource for local people. Paved footpaths cross these spaces into the more wooded parts of the SULV providing strong pedestrian links into and through the space. The areas of woodland provide a strong sense of enclosure as well as a wooded backdrop to the surrounding housing and playing fields.

4.15 A further proposed addition is to extend the SULV from the western lake edge, to Beech Lane and slightly beyond to include the triangular informal amenity space between Beech Lane and Radstock Lane. These areas are well vegetated and there are strong visual and physical links to the current SULV, thereby providing a natural extension.

Joel Park

4.16 The Joel Park SULV is located just outside of Wokingham Town Centre. The SULV consists of two areas of land bisected by Reading Road. The part of the SULV located to the south of Reading Road takes in the grounds of St Paul's Parish Church. This is the smaller part of the SULV and is bounded to the south-west by the railway line. The other larger part of the SULV is Joel Park itself, which is located to the north of Reading Road. Joel Park is sited to the west of Holt Lane and The Holt School, to the south of Jubilee Avenue and to the east of the residential roads of Larch Avenue and Copse Drive. The well treed and wooded characteristics of this SULV are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Wokingham when driving through it, or a sense of seclusion whilst walking within it, which is unusual to find so close to the town centre. Overall the vegetation is important in terms of a wooded horizon, providing a backdrop to the suburban edges of Wokingham in views from the north, as well as contributing to the verdant character of this part of Wokingham. Holt Copse is a valuable landscape and ecological resource with some semi-rural landscape characteristics.

4.17 The boundary of the existing SULV remains appropriate; encapsulating both areas of urban landscape value to the north and south of Reading Road, as per the original SULV designation. Unlike the other existing SULVs, the land within and adjacent to the SULV has not been subject to change through development or considered to merit inclusion within the SULV and hence, it is not proposed to amend the boundary of the Joel Park SULV at this time.

5. Results

5.1 Following a detailed re-assessment of the four existing SULVs, it is recommended that they all be re-designated as SULVs within the Local Plan Update. All of the sites are considered to successfully meet the SULV criteria, providing an important local landscape resource, providing significant landscape and ecological features of value within an urban setting.

Designation of new SULVs

5.2 This was also an opportunity to consider whether any other areas of land would qualify for SULV designation. As described above, Woosehill Meadows and Cantley Park were identified for assessment through a combination of:

- Reviewing existing settlement boundaries (the Draft Local Plan Update proposes to amend the settlement boundary in North Wokingham meaning that Cantley Park would be included within the settlement boundary where previously it has not been),
- Local knowledge and suggestions from other borough council officers
- A review of larger open spaces within the settlement boundary to consider their benefits to the local community in terms of recreation, well-being, ecological, visual amenity and environmental benefits.

Woosehill Meadows

5.3 It is recommended that the area described as Woosehill Meadows in Appendix 2 is designated as a new SULV in the Local Plan. This area of land includes part of the Emm Brook which runs north-south from the Woosehill Spine Road/Reading Road round-about in the north to Barkham Road to the south. It also includes a narrow stretch of open land that runs in an east-west direction to the south of Jubilee Way, up to and including Heron Park Playground. The area/site is an important landscape resource, with the Emm Brook, its shallow valley, surrounding parkland character and associated vegetation being significant landscape features of value within an urban setting. It is a very well-used and valued site for informal recreation. The mature tree groups within the site greatly enhance the character of the area and provide a characteristic wooded backdrop when viewed from the surrounding residential areas. Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource with a strong sense of place in an urban area and meets all of the SULV criteria as set out above.

Cantley Park

5.4 It is recommended that the area described as Cantley Park in Appendix 2 be designated as a new SULV in the Local Plan. This area of land includes all of Cantley Park, in North Wokingham, including Cantley House and the recreation ground. The site lies to the east of Milton Road and Twyford Road, to the south and west of Bell Foundry Lane. To the east of the site lies a dense residential area. The area of land is considered to be an important landscape resource within Wokingham. It provides parkland type planting and character with significant landscape features including many large, dominant specimen trees within an urban setting. It is a very well-used and valued site for informal and formal recreation, with good pedestrian and cycle links to residential areas and other services and facilities. The mature trees within the site and on the site boundaries greatly enhance the character of this proposed SULV and provide the characteristic wooded backdrop in views across into the site from the surrounding residential areas and roads. Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource, with a strong sense of place in an urban area and meets all of the SULV criteria as set out above.

Other areas considered

5.5 Chalfont Park in Earley and the adjacent area of scrubland, and Woodford Park in Woodley, were also considered in the assessment process. These sites comprise relatively small areas of land when compared with the others described above and they do not possess the range or variety of open spaces or habitats found at the other sites. They were not therefore considered to meet the SULV criteria at this time.

5.6 Given the new urban public open space within the Arborfield SDL is still being constructed, it was not considered that a SULV assessment was appropriate for this area at this time, on the grounds of prematurity.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The four existing Sites of Urban Landscape Value (Joel Park, Bulmershe, South Lake and Maiden Erlegh Lake) have been re-assessed against the SULV criteria and it is recommended that they be re-designated as SULVs in the Local Plan Update (Policy NE7).

6.2 Two additional areas of land (Cantley Park and Woosehill Meadows) have been found to be meet the SULV criteria and it is recommended that they be formally designated as SULVs in the Local Plan Update

(Policy NE7). A map showing all the existing SULVs and proposed changes to their boundaries, as well as the two proposed SULVs can be found in Appendix 3.

- 6.3 It is accepted that landscape, especially in urban areas, changes over time and it is therefore anticipated that further assessment of the Borough's SULVs and any potential additional SULVs may be required at a future date, following the adoption of the Local Plan Update.

Appendix 1: SULV pro-forma template

SITE NAME			
Site Ref:	Officers:	Date:	Existing/Proposed SULV?
Existing Land Uses			
Landscape Value			
Visual Assessment			
Landscape Character			
Landscape Quality			
Sense of Place			
Recreational Value			
Inc. Physical and Mental wellbeing			
Wildlife / Ecological Value			
Environmental Value			
General paragraph on climate change and the importance of green spaces			
Access			
Recommendation / Justification for Boundary Changes			
Recommendation to Designate Area as a SULV			
Landscape Summary and Conclusion			

Appendix 2: SULV pro-formas and maps

1. Bulmershe, Woodley
2. Cantley Park, Wokingham
3. Joel Park, Wokingham
4. Maiden Erlegh Lake, Earley
5. South Lake, Woodley
6. Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham

BULMERSHE (WOODLAND AND SURROUNDS)

Site Ref:
Wdly002

Officers:
CB

Date:
November 2019

Existing SULV: ✓
Retain as SULV: ✓

Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the SULV:

Allotments can be found at the northern and southern ends of the SULV. Woodlands Avenue passes across the centre of the site with High Wood and a sports ground to the south of the road, and playing fields, open space (including trees and scrubland) and the grounds of Addington School (in the central part), north of the road. Residential gardens make up a section of the north western boundary.

Adjacent Land Uses:

The majority of the SULV is surrounded by residential properties including the new development recently constructed on the former Reading University Campus site off Woodlands Avenue. The A329M forms the southern boundary, with Addington School, Bulmershe School and Leisure Centre, and Highwood Primary School located to the east of the SULV.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of SULV

Longer views are gained across the SULV and Bulmershe playing fields from Woodlands Avenue where it crosses through the site as this area is relatively open. However these views are framed by trees within the rear gardens of properties on Pitts Lane to the north west, with woodland to the north and south providing wooded horizons which is an important characteristic of this SULV. The wooded horizon in a number of locations also acts to limit views of residential properties outside the SULV. This is not so evident if looking to the east out of the SULV from the playing fields and open space in the centre, as there is limited vegetation along the eastern boundary which is dominated by the various school buildings, 'Goals Reading' Soccer Centre and residential properties which can clearly be seen. Roadside tree planting helps mitigate views in this direction when travelling along Woodlands Avenue.

Views are only foreshortened either when within High Wood or using the footpath or bridleway adjacent to each of the allotments north and south of the SULV, owing to the surrounding vegetation cover.

Visibility of SULV from surrounding area

Due to the general flat topography of the site, views into the SULV from the surrounding area are limited by those dwellings or school buildings that are located close to the boundary of the site. The trees within High Wood are visible beyond the SULV boundary through breaks in the adjacent housing.

There are no views from the A3290 to the south of the SULV as the dual carriageway is in cutting, however the houses to the south of the A3290 are sited on higher ground than the road and therefore benefit from view across towards the SULV with the trees providing a wooded horizon.

Landscape Character

This SULV contains a diverse range of habitats and uses, consisting of woodland, wild areas, informal open space, managed allotments and playing fields; the combination of which provides a significant open and undeveloped space between the settlements of Woodley and Earley.

The topography is relatively flat and views are limited in and out of the SULV by the wooded horizon both north and south, or buildings east and west. The character is greatly enhanced by the trees within the landscape which dominate views particularly to south, with High Wood acting as a visual link for all areas of the SULV.

Although public access is limited to the woodland of High Wood and Bulmershe public open space north of Woodlands Avenue, there is a perception that the public can wander through the majority of the area.

Landscape Quality

Overall the landscape quality of this site is Moderate. Quality is affected by the urbanizing influences of the playing fields, pylons and low voltage lines which cross this part of the SULV. The relatively recent construction of Goals Reading Soccer Centre and the New Addington School has also had a detrimental effect on landscape quality of the SULV by increasing elements of built development along the eastern boundary with little remediation planting. Other areas of weakness are Woodlands Avenue which cuts across the site, and the pinch point of the SULV along the Woodlands Avenue where recent housing development has occurred. New housing has also recently been constructed to the rear of Pitts Lane. However due to the low density nature of this development, the SULV still retains much of its character on these boundaries.

High Wood and its associated habitats is a high quality landscape which is relatively intact and contributes to the overall quality of the site.

Sense of Place

There is a strong sense of place in the southern part of the SULV due to the visual and physical dominance of High Wood which has good informal and formal access.

The wooded horizons visible across the open parts of the site are also an important characteristic of the SULV and provide a strong sense of place. The trees in and around the site provide a unifying visual feature despite the variety of landscapes.

Recreational Value

There are a number of playing fields associated with the school grounds and Reading University with the Goals Reading Soccer Centre just outside the eastern boundary of the SULV.

High Wood is the largest recreation area with public access and contains a number of informal paths within the woodland. The smaller open space of Bulmershe Park, between the playing fields and public right of way (Wood 11) has natural areas of woodland regeneration with larger specimen trees and informal grassland.

It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people's mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.

Wildlife / Ecological Value

High Wood is a Local Nature Reserve and a Local Wildlife Site which are of local and County importance. There is a mix of woodland, trees, grasslands scrub, and a small area of heath, with parts of the unmanaged allotment areas to the south of High Wood re-colonised by woodland scrub.

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

Woodlands Avenue runs through the centre of the site. Minor residential roads run adjacent to or close to parts of the eastern and western boundaries.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

There are good bus links on adjacent roads with bus stops at either end of Woodlands Avenue. Earley Station is accessed via a footbridge over the A3290, 200m from the south east corner of the SULV.

Public rights of Way

Bridleway (WOOD BR 5) runs along the eastern boundary of the SULV from Woodlands Avenue to Earley station in the south. Footpath (WOOD FP 1) cuts across the SULV south of the northern allotments between Pitts Lane and Gray's Crescent. There is a good network of informal paths within High Wood and links to the South Lake SULV.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads, but limited within the parts of the SULV.

Recommendation / Justification for Boundary Changes

The boundaries of the SULV have been reviewed as part of the assessment. It was considered that some minor boundary refinements should be made to the SULV to remove a small area of land which has been the subject of a recent housing development to the rear of Pitts Lane and therefore no longer meets the SULV criteria. However it should be noted that the landscape buffer, containing significant boundary vegetation that forms part of the development site, is proposed to be retained with the SULV.

Other boundary amendments have been made around the new housing development on the former University Campus site, so that it responds to the development as built. The SULV has also been extended to include the amenity space with tree planting adjacent to High Tree Drive and the triangular area of scrubby woodland at the end of Nightingale Road. A

refinement to the eastern boundary also has been made to include the bridleway up to Kingfisher Drive.

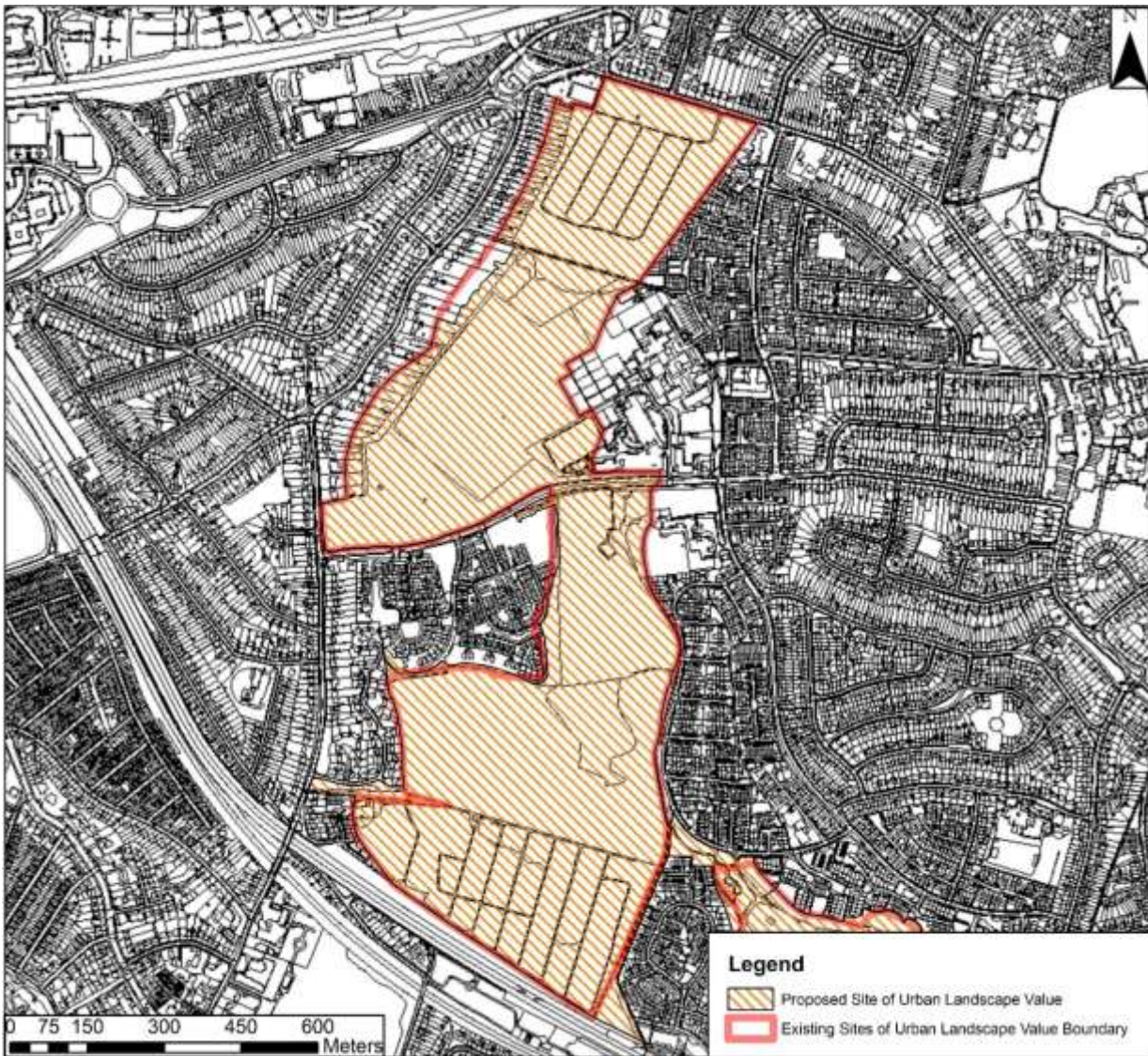
Landscape Summary and Conclusion

This SULV is considered an important landscape resource between the settlements of Earley and Woodley, with High Wood being a significant landscape feature, both in terms of mature woodland and ecological habitats.

The strong tree screen on the site boundaries, tree groups within the site and the woodland greatly enhances the character of the SULV and provides the characteristic wooded horizon in views across the open areas of the site or in views into the SULV from the surrounding residential areas.

Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource with a strong sense of place in an urban area.

Bulmershe SULV



CANTLEY PARK, WOKINGHAM

Site Ref: Wkham 002	Officers: CB	Date: November 2019	Proposed New SULV: ✓
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Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the proposed SULV:

The proposed Cantley Park SULV is a mix of formal and informal recreation spaces. The southern half of the site mainly consists of informal amenity grassland with individual trees or groups of trees, and associated scrub scattered throughout. Tree belts and copses are found on the edges of the open space especially to the south, making this part of the site relatively enclosed. A tree belt and associated open space relating to the original parkland setting of Glebelands (Listed Building) contributes to the wider landscape setting of the area.

The central area contains a number of buildings and includes Cantley House Hotel, Wokingham Theatre and changing rooms associated with the sports pitches. Tennis courts, all weather pitches and areas of car parking make up areas of hard surfacing. The northern part of the open space is relatively open, comprising numerous sports pitches and an archery range. Several mature oaks are scattered across this space with further Oak trees lining Bell Foundry Road on the northern boundary.

Adjacent Land Uses:

The western boundary of the area is defined by Milton Road and Twyford Road with the Matthewsgreen new residential development beyond this (under construction). To the north and west is Bell Foundry Lane with another new residential development forming the settlement edge in the north. To the east are the sewage works and Ashridge Farmstead with established residential development south of Warren House Road. Although part of the Glebelands site is included the other half lies outside the proposed SULV boundary.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of the proposed SULV

In the southern part of the site views out of the area are limited by the vegetation and tree belts on the various boundaries including within Glebelands, as well as within the site itself. Views to the adjacent residential development are limited except if within the more formal amenity space to the east. There are number of individual trees and tree groups in the southern part of the site which generally restrict views of the buildings and tennis courts in the central area. The northern part of the open space consists mainly of sports pitches and is considerably more open with the existing roadside vegetation on Bell Foundry Road filtering view out towards the new development in the north and west.

Visibility of the proposed SULV from surrounding area

As much of the proposed SULV is surrounded by roads on the northern, western and partially the eastern boundaries, there are filtered views into the site through the roadside hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

Landscape Character

This proposed SULV will be in the revised settlement boundary of Wokingham settlement which has been amended to take account of new development associated with the North Wokingham SDL as part of the Local Plan update. This is a site of two halves with the area to the south having an informal parkland type character with large areas of rough grass, individual specimen trees, tree groups, copses and areas of mixed vegetation. Amenity spaces adjacent to the residential areas or Glebelands are maintained as mown grass. To the north are larger open areas used as playing fields, which provide a more formal character to the space.

There are a number of large mature and veteran trees throughout the site, providing a maturity to the landscape, offering a verdant setting to the surrounding urban area. Much of the area has open access either across managed amenity space or rough grass or via the formal and informal path network. This leaves very few areas feeling remote.

Landscape Quality

The landscape quality of this area is Moderate / High. Quality is only really affected by the visual and physical intrusion of the buildings and hardsurfacing within the centre of the site. However the site is very important locally as it provides a green lung within areas of extensive housing, and the parkland type character provides a strong contrast to the adjoining land uses. The tree groups and copses also provides a wooded horizon to Wokingham and contribute to the multi-layered views throughout the town.

Sense of Place

There is a strong sense of place throughout, due to the site’s parkland type planting and character, with many large, dominant specimen trees. The site has its own identity and is well used as an informal and formal recreational resource by local people. The mature trees provide a wooded backdrop to housing from various locations around the open space.

Recreational Value

Formal recreation uses in the form of a play area, tennis courts, all weather pitch and other grass pitches are clustered around the central area of the site close to the changing rooms. Along part of the western boundary a new cycleway has been constructed to link the new development in Matthewsgreen with Milton Road. A new proposed Greenway will pass though the southern part of Cantley Park providing stronger linkages to public open spaces throughout Wokingham.

It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people’s mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.

Wildlife / Ecological Value

There are a large number of mature, near-veteran and veteran trees found within the area.

No parts of the site are formally designated wildlife sites however the copses, informal grassland and scrub will support a large variety of birds, mammals and insects.

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

The A321, Milton Road / Twyford Road forms the western boundary to this area. Other more minor roads such as Bell Foundry Lane and residential roads run adjacent to the other boundaries.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

Buses stop on Milton Road and the nearby Matthewsgreen Road.

Wokingham Station is approximately 750m from the south eastern corner of Cantley Park.

Public rights of Way

A public footpath (WOK FP 9) runs from Glebelands Road in the south through the residential development and follows part of the eastern boundary of the site. A Greenways Route is proposed though the southern part of Cantley Park which will link this area to Joel Park in the south.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads and around the Theatre, Hotel and sports facilities within the site. The all-weather sports pitch and tennis courts have floodlighting.

Recommendation to designate area as a new SULV

Following the assessment of the site, it is considered that the area identified as Cantley Park is designated as a new SULV in the Draft Local Plan. Due to the new development associated with the North Wokingham SDL, the settlement boundary of Wokingham is proposed to be amended as part of the Local Plan Update, to include Cantley Park, which was originally outside of the settlement boundary. Cantley Park will therefore be located within an 'urban area'. It meets the SULV criteria as it contains a variety of spaces and land uses, has good public access across the majority of the area, allows informal and formal recreation, includes informal less managed areas which encourage wildlife and has a strong sense of place. Urban open spaces are becoming more important for residents' wellbeing and physical health, as well as delivering environmental benefits especially where in close proximity to new housing development.

The boundaries of the proposed SULV were considered as part of this assessment and it was decided to follow specific features on the ground such as fencelines, footpaths or roads where appropriate.

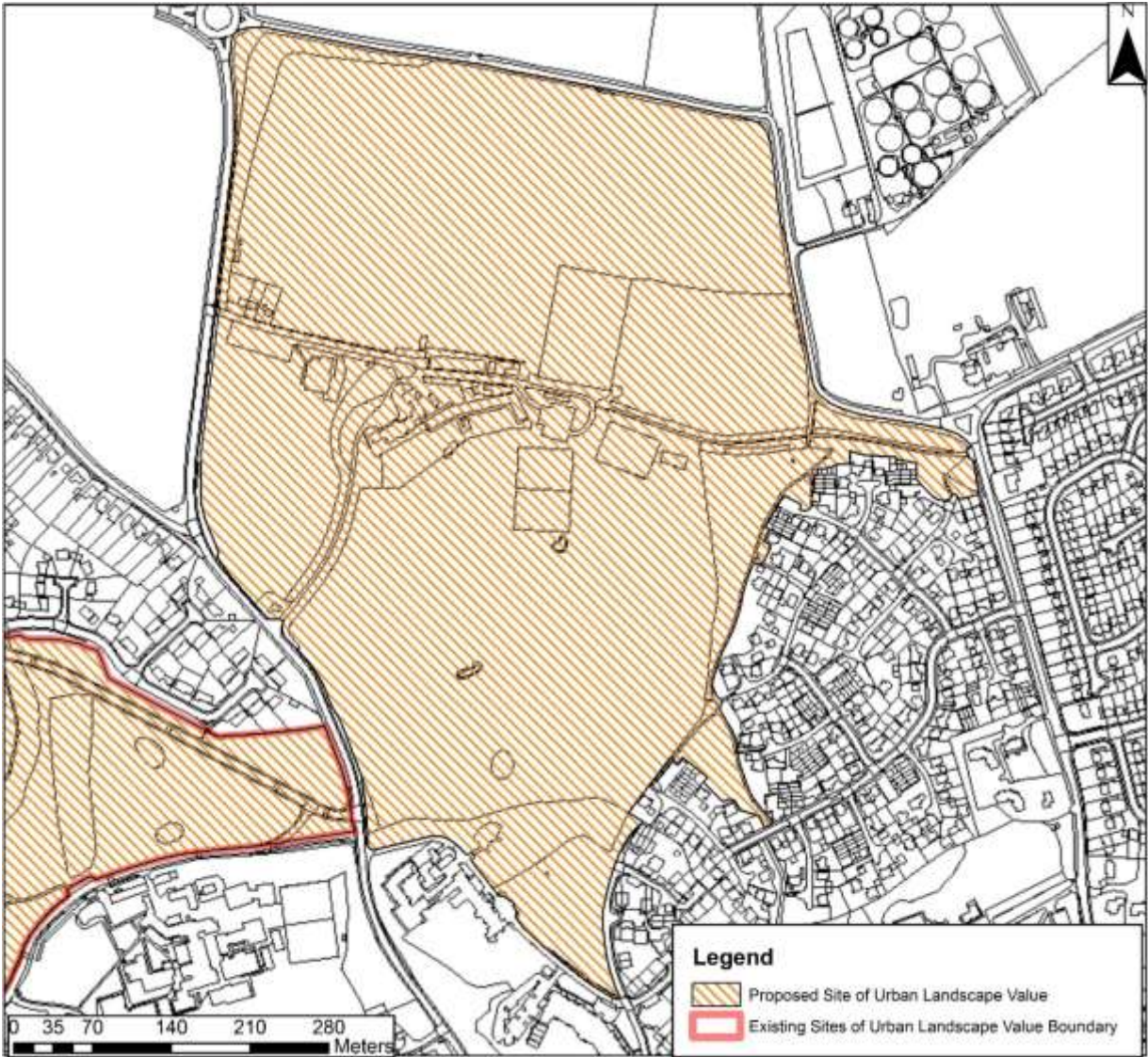
Landscape Summary and Conclusion

This site is considered an important landscape resource within Wokingham, which provides parkland type planting and character with many large, dominant specimen trees within an urban setting. It is a very well-used and valued site for informal and formal recreation, with good pedestrian and cycle links to other areas.

The mature trees within the site and on the site boundaries greatly enhance the character of this proposed SULV and provide the characteristic wooded backdrop in views into and across the site from the surrounding residential areas and roads.

Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource, with a strong sense of place in an urban area and it is recommended to be designated as a new SULV.

Cantley Park SULV



JOEL PARK, WOKINGHAM

Site Ref:
Wkham001

Officers:
CB

Date:
November 2019

Existing SULV: ✓
Retain as SULV: ✓

Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the SULV:

To the north of the Reading Road the SULV is made up of public open space consisting of woodland (Holt Copse) in the western half of the site with a play area within the woodland. The rest of the public open space comprises of amenity grassland with individual trees or groups of trees and associated scrub scattered throughout. Lines of trees form an avenue along Jubilee Avenue. The land within the SULV north of Jubilee Avenue consists of roadside copses and highway verge. The part of the SULV to the south of Reading Road includes St Paul's Church and graveyard, St Paul's Parish Rooms and car park. The south western boundary of the graveyard is well treed.

Adjacent Land Uses:

Residential development surrounds the northern and western boundaries adjacent to Holt Copse and associated amenity space, with Holt School forming the southern boundary to this area. As the SULV narrows to the east, Milton Road defines this boundary, with Cantley Park beyond.

St Paul's Church, graveyard and Parish Rooms are defined by the mainline railway to the south west, Wokingham Station car park abuts the southern corner of the SULV and Reading Road to the north east. A small number of residential dwellings are found to the south east.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of the SULV

Views out of the SULV are limited by the vegetation within the site especially when within the Holt Copse. There are some short views out of the SULV from within the open area, towards housing in Martins Drive however these are occasional glimpses through the trees or south towards Holt School. Longer views out of the site cannot be achieved as the woodland and other trees on the boundaries of the SULV provide wooded horizons in most directions. Slightly longer views can be gained out along Reading Road in either direction as the road is slightly elevated adjacent to St Paul's Church as it rises to cross the railway line, then falls away to the north west and south east. There are also longer views north from the Holt Lane adjacent to the school as again the ground here is slightly higher than the surrounding land.

Visibility of SULV from surrounding area

Much of the SULV is in an elevated position and there are views towards the site from the north outside the settlement of Wokingham. Views of the church spire and its "wooded" setting are particularly clear when travelling towards Wokingham from Bill Hill and where roads cross the A329(M). However this is now partially obscured by new development currently being built at Matthews Green. The trees within SULV provide a wooded horizon to the northern parts of Wokingham, which is a significant characteristic of this part of the town. Other longer distance views are limited by the surrounding settlement, although the church spire can be glimpsed on the horizon from various locations within Wokingham.

Landscape Character

This SULV consists of two distinct areas; Joel Park which is a mix of woodland and informal open space and the more formal landscape associated with St Paul's Church and related graveyard. These areas are separated by the A329 Reading Road. Joel Park and the well-treed adjacent highway verges create a wooded character giving a sense of seclusion in places where views to the adjacent residential areas are restricted. The informality of Joel Park almost could be considered semi-rural in character. St Paul's Church, graveyard and Parish Rooms are more urban in character due to the close proximity of Reading Road, associated traffic and town centre.

The sloping nature of the topography across Joel Park helps to provide some seclusion when within the site. The trees on the higher plateau dominate the landscape within the SULV and provide a wooded horizon in long views towards Wokingham from the north.

Landscape Quality

The landscape quality of this SULV is Moderate / High. Quality is only really affected by the visual and physical intrusion of the Reading Road (A329), however this is partially mitigated by the provision of mature roadside trees. St Paul's Church is a listed building set within a large plot and contributes to the open character of this part of the SULV which is significant especially as it is relatively close to Wokingham town centre. The grounds of St Paul's Church also contain a mix of more ornamental tree species providing a high quality setting to the church.

Joel Park has many noteworthy features including informal woodland and open amenity grassland with specimen trees which provide a significant contrast to the surrounding residential areas. The woodland also provides a wooded horizon to Wokingham and setting to the Church in long distance views from the north. In the wider townscape the trees contribute to the multi-layered views throughout the town.

Sense of Place

There is a strong sense of place throughout the SULV due to Holt Copse, associated adjacent open space with parkland type planting and the unique character of open land around St Paul's Church which is on higher ground. When combined, this conveys a unified sense of place within Wokingham and this is clearly noticeable when travelling out of Wokingham along Reading Road. All areas have good informal and formal access.

Holt Copse also contributes to the wider sense of place and wooded characteristics of Wokingham in long distance views from the north. The woodland and trees also provides a setting to Holt School and St Paul's Church. Much of the land within the SULV and Joel Park is sloping, falling steeply away from Holt Lane then more gently as it reaches Jubilee Avenue. Land to the north west falls toward the Emmbrook

Recreational Value

A formal play area and associated seating by the picnic area can be found within Holt Copse. Whereas the access within the woodland is more informal delineated by woodchip paths.

These areas provide ongoing opportunity for physical exercise for the community with strong footpath links to Cantley Park, which is adjacent to the eastern boundary, as well as the SANGs to the north, thus providing a greater area for the community to use. A new proposed Greenway will pass through Joel Park providing stronger linkages to public open spaces throughout Wokingham.

It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people's mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.

Wildlife / Ecological Value

Holt Copse is a Local Wildlife Site. The woodland and part of Joel Park are also designated as a Local Nature Reserve which are of local and County importance. These areas consist of ancient and semi-natural mixed deciduous woodland in an urban area and informal grassland.

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

The A321 abuts the eastern boundary of the SULV and the A329 runs through the southern part of the SULV adjacent to St Paul's Church. Minor residential roads run adjacent to the other boundaries of the SULV.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

Buses stop on A329 Reading Road opposite St Paul's Church.

Wokingham Station is approximately 350m from the south eastern corner of Joel Park.

Public rights of Way

A public footpath (WOK FP 6) links the residential area to the south of the railway across a footbridge and through the churchyard to Reading Road passing through this part of the SULV.

A Greenways Route is proposed though Joel Park to link with Cantley Park to the north and Woollahill green space to the south.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads, but limited within the site itself.

Recommendation / Justification for Boundary Changes

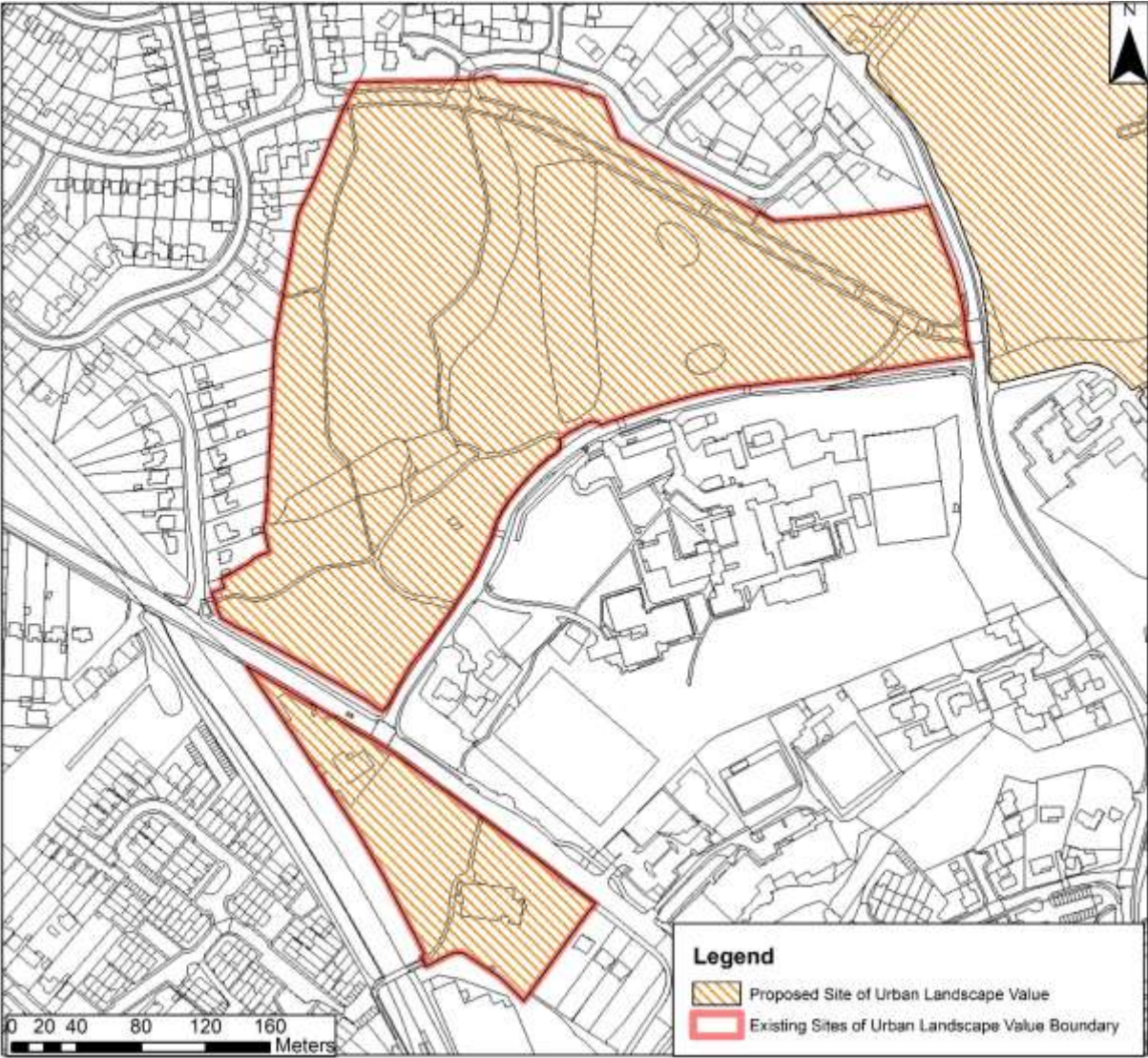
There are no proposed boundary changes to this existing SULV.

Landscape Summary and Conclusion

This site is considered to be an important landscape resource within Wokingham. Holt Copse is a valuable landscape and ecological resource with some semi-rural landscape characteristics.

The well treed and wooded characteristics of the SULV are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Wokingham when driving through it, or a sense of seclusion whilst walking within it, which is unusual to find so close to the town centre. Overall the vegetation is providing a wooded horizon and back drop to the suburban edges of Wokingham in views from the north, as well as contributing to the verdant character of this part of Wokingham. This is especially important given development at Elms Field has required the removal of a number of mature trees within the town centre. The church spire is a particular feature on the skyline which now competes with the new multi-storey car park at Carnival Pool.

Joel Park SULV



MAIDEN ERLEGH LAKE, EARLEY

Site Ref:
Erly 002

Officers:
CB

Date:
November 2019

Existing SULV:✓
Retain as SULV:✓

Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the SULV:

This SULV consists of public open space which includes Maiden Erlegh Lake, associated streams, various different types of woodland (Oak Wood, Old Pond Copse, Moor Copse and Old Lane Copse), with some areas of informal grassland between areas of woodland and on the lake fringes. Laurel Park recreation Ground and its associated pavilion and car park form the southern part of the proposed extension to the SULV and includes a formal children's play area close to the car park. A small area of woodland is included on the eastern edge of the SULV and forms part of residential gardens of dwellings fronting Silverdale Road.

Adjacent Land Uses:

The SULV is entirely surrounded by residential development and residential roads.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of SULV

Views out of the majority of the SULV are generally limited by the woodland surrounding the lake or the woodland in the eastern part of the SULV. In some locations there are some short views out of the SULV to the housing beyond however these are occasional glimpses through the trees or where the footpaths pass adjacent to the houses. Along the northern boundary of Maiden Erlegh Lake the footpath surrounding the lake runs adjacent to the residential road of Lakeside providing direct and open views to houses to the north.

The northern group of playing pitches are set at a lower level than the adjacent land and so are therefore visually enclosed by trees and woodland. The southern area of pitches have an open boundary to the south adjacent to Rushey Way and therefore longer views are gained out across Lower Earley.

Visibility of SULV from surrounding area

There are short distance views into the SULV from surrounding residential roads where the road runs parallel to the edges of the site, such as at Lakeside and Instow Road, however these views are partially restricted by woodland or tree groups.

Where the residential areas to the north of the SULV are on slightly higher ground there are some medium distance views to the SULV along these roads especially where the road runs in a north – south direction, for example along Andrew's Road and Crawford Close. The views gained from these locations are of the woodland within the SULV. In other areas the woodland forms a wooded backdrop to the houses on the skyline.

Views from the south are gained from Rushey Way across Laurel Park Recreation Ground to the woodlands of Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse where the trees provide a wooded skyline.

Landscape Character

This SULV is within the residential settlement of Earley and consists of a lake within a wooded setting as well as the more formal open areas of playing fields. The extensive woodland is visually significant locally and provides a wooded backdrop to the surrounding properties and playing fields. Although the SULV is surrounded by the urban settlement of Earley, only a few parts of the site are visually influenced by the adjacent land use where residential roads are immediately bordering the site. The large expanse of Maiden Erlegh Lake provides a tranquil setting for the western part of the SULV.

The Ancient and Semi-Natural woodlands of Oak Wood, Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse, which include a number of large veteran trees, provides a maturity to the landscape with the trees providing a wooded setting to the surrounding urban area. Within the woodland, access to some areas of the SULV is restricted for ecological reasons leaving these parts feeling very unspoiled and naturalistic, providing a strong sense of isolation and tranquility.

Landscape Quality

The landscape quality of this SULV is High due to the well-preserved naturalistic character of the majority of the area provided by the lake and the mature woodlands. The site is very important locally, not only as it provides a green lung within areas of extensive housing but also in its role providing significant ecological habitats. The lake and extensive woodland within the site offers a strong contrast to the adjoining residential areas and playing fields. Although there are some views of housing from the SULV these do not affect the quality of the landscape within the site.

Sense of Place

There is a strong sense of place throughout the SULV due to Maiden Erlegh Lake and the surrounding woodlands being significant landscape features within a large area of housing. This is a unique landscape within the urban area of Earley which is enclosed by trees, providing a secluded and naturalistic feel to the SULV. It has its own identity and is well used as an informal and formal recreational resource by local people.

The areas of woodland provide a wooded backdrop to housing when viewed from the north and south of the SULV and when combined with other significant trees within Earley, parts of the residential area acquire a verdant character.

Housing to the north and west of Maiden Erlegh Lake rises gradually away from the SULV with the land gradually falling towards the south and east. There is however a fairly steep embankment to the south of Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse down to the adjacent playing fields, where the playing fields were originally leveled. Other old earthworks are evident within Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse.

Recreational Value

Formal play equipment is provided adjacent to car park with playing pitches (football) in two separate areas to the east and south east of the pavilion. Surfaced paths and seating around the lake are provided with a few formal paths running through limited parts of the woodland.

There is an informal grassed space surrounded by trees to the south of play area. Informal paths are provided within the woodlands, however attempts have been made to restrict access in the woodlands for ecological reasons. Information boards are located occasionally around the lake and throughout the woodland, providing information on the wildlife within the area.

It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people's mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.

Wildlife / Ecological Value

Significant areas of woodland within the site are designated as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland in an urban area consisting of lowland mixed deciduous woodland and wet woodland and include Oak Wood, Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse. Moor Copse which extends into adjacent residential gardens is also protected by a TPO (862/1997). Scattered within the woodlands listed above and the adjacent Moor Lane Copse are a large number of veteran trees.

The woodlands, lake, lake margins and stream running through the woodland are designated as a Local Nature Reserve which is of local and County importance, The woodland areas to the south and east of the lake are designated as a Local Wildlife Site.

Outside these areas there are other areas of informal grassland and scrub which will also support a large variety of birds, mammals and insects.

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

The SULV can be accessed from many minor residential roads that run throughout the housing adjacent to the boundaries of the SULV. Beech Lane and Rushey Way border part of the SULV to the west and south respectively.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

Buses stop on Beech Lane to west of the SULV as well as on Rushey way. Earley Station is approximately 750m north of the SULV.

Public rights of Way

Two PRoW link the western side of Maiden Erlegh Lake and Beech Lane from Instow Road in the south (EARL FP 10) and Lakeside to the north (EARL FP 5). There are also a number of informal footpaths into the SULV from the adjacent housing areas especially in a north / south direction.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads, but limited within the site itself.

Recommendation / Justification for Boundary Changes

The boundaries of the SULV have been reviewed as part of the assessment. It was considered that a minor boundary refinement should be made to the SULV to follow specific features on the ground such as fencelines, footpaths or roads. This modification has been made to include the general amenity space along part of the northern boundary of the existing designation adjacent to the residential development in Lakeside.

It is also recommended that several main boundary changes are made to the SULV. The first is the inclusion of Laurel Park Recreation Ground and associated formal play area to the west of the pitches. Although these areas are more open in character than the woodlands surrounding the lake, they form an integral part of the wider public open space and represent an important recreational resource for local people. Paved footpaths cross these spaces into the more wooded parts of the SULV providing strong pedestrian links into and through the space. The areas of woodland provide a strong sense of enclosure as well as a wooded backdrop to the surrounding housing and playing fields.

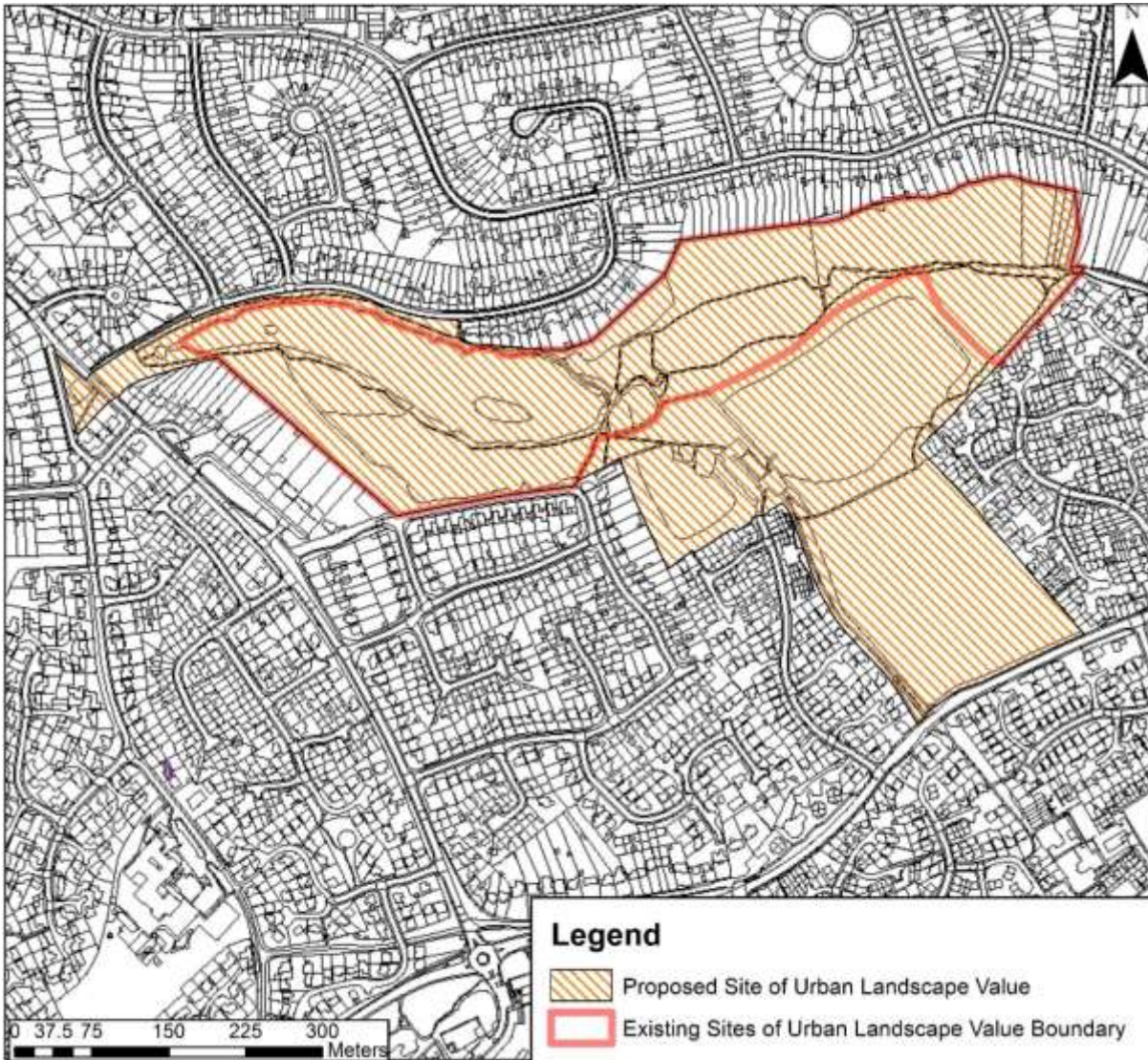
The second proposed addition is to extend the SULV from the western lake edge, to Beech Lane and slightly beyond to include the triangular informal amenity space between Beech Lane and Radstock Lane. These areas are well vegetated and there are strong visual and physical links to the current SULV, thereby providing a natural extension.

Landscape Summary and Conclusion

This site is considered an important local landscape resource, with Maiden Erlegh Lake, associated woodlands and open spaces being significant landscape and ecological features of value within an urban setting.

The well treed characteristics of the SULV are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Earley, giving a feeling of seclusion whilst within it, which is unusual in such a built up location. It is a well-used and valued site, important for informal recreation. The woodland and other vegetation is important in terms of providing a wooded back drop to the urban development of substantial parts of Earley.

Maiden Erlegh Lake SULV



SOUTH LAKE, WOODLEY

Site Ref: Wdly001	Officers: CB	Date: November 2019	Existing SULV:✓ Retain as SULV:✓
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Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the SULV:

This public open space consists mainly of a large informal lake within the centre of the site constrained by an embankment to the south east, with a separate smaller pond at the western end. A mix of deciduous and evergreen trees and woodland border the lake on all sides, interspaced with a parkland type character where the landscape is more open. A play area and a more formal area of open space is located in the narrow part of the SULV to the north west, adjacent to Kingfisher Drive.

Adjacent Land Uses:

The whole of the SULV is surrounded by residential development and associated parking. A Public House backs onto part of the northern boundary of the SULV towards the eastern end.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of the SULV:

Views out of the SULV are limited by the mature trees surrounding the lake, however there are some short views to the housing beyond and occasional glimpses through the trees, where the footpaths pass adjacent to the houses. Longer views can be gained of housing to the south from the embankment in the south eastern part of the SULV as the ground level is raised above the adjacent residential area.

Visibility of SULV from surrounding area:

Due to the generally flat topography of the site and surrounding area to the north, views into the SULV from the adjacent residential area are limited to those dwellings or roads that are located close to the boundary of the site. The trees surrounding South Lake are visible beyond the SULV boundary through breaks in the adjacent housing and above the rooflines.

There are slightly longer views towards the SULV from the south where the trees on the embankment of the lake are clearly visible over the tops of the housing.

Landscape Character
<p>This SULV mainly consists of South Lake with wooded margins providing a strong wooded character and backdrop to the adjacent residential areas. The mix of mature planting with native and ornamental tree species in association with the lake gives the area a parkland type character and provides an important landscape feature within an urban setting. The area is well used with footpaths surrounding the lake which are never very far from the adjacent dwellings, however views from the footpaths are often limited by intervening trees, providing some seclusion from the urban area in which it is located.</p>
Landscape Quality
<p>The landscape quality of this SULV is Moderate / High. The high numbers of people using of the site affects the quality only in terms of wear and tear. However the site is very important locally as it provides a green lung within areas of extensive housing and the lake and parkland type character provides a strong contrast to the adjoining uses.</p> <p>South Lake has many noteworthy features including the informal lake and woodland with specimen trees. It is valued because of the sense of seclusion felt when within parts of the SULV, combined with limited views out of the site.</p>
Sense of Place
<p>There is a strong sense of place throughout the SULV due to South Lake and the associated woodland being a significant landscape feature within a large area of housing. This is a unique landscape within the urban area of Woodley which is enclosed by trees providing a secluded feel to the SULV. The lake is in a slightly elevated position above an area of housing to the south east, with a steep embankment forming the boundary of the SULV supporting the lake edge in this location. It has its own identity, being well used as a recreational resource by local people, as all areas around the lake have good informal and formal access.</p> <p>The combined effect of trees on the embankment of the lake, other trees within the site and further significant trees around Woodley, including the woodland at High Wood, is that these provide a strong wooded backdrop to housing giving the wider area a verdant character.</p>

Recreational Value
<p>There are formal and informal paths and seating around the lake with a formal play area in the north western corner of the SULV.</p> <p>It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people's mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.</p>

Wildlife / Ecological Value
<p>South Lake is a Local Wildlife Site which is of local significance. It consists of areas of open water with several small islands, as well as marginal wetland on the lake edges. The site is managed so that there is public access to areas which cause the least potential damage. The site contains mature established planting (mainly tree cover) with natural regeneration and planting of mixed ages.</p>

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

The SULV can be accessed from many minor residential roads that run throughout the housing adjacent to the boundaries of the SULV.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

Buses stop on Fairwater Drive to the north of the SULV.

Earley Station is accessed via a footbridge over the A3290, 200m from the south western corner of the SULV.

Public rights of Way

A bridleway (Wood 5) passes on the western edge of the SULV in a north/south direction and a footpath (Wood 2) can be found close to the east of South Lake running parallel to Nightingale Road. There is also a good network of informal footpaths into the SULV from the adjacent housing area and connections with the Bulmershe SULV to the west.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads, but limited within the site itself.

Recommendation / Justification for Boundary Changes

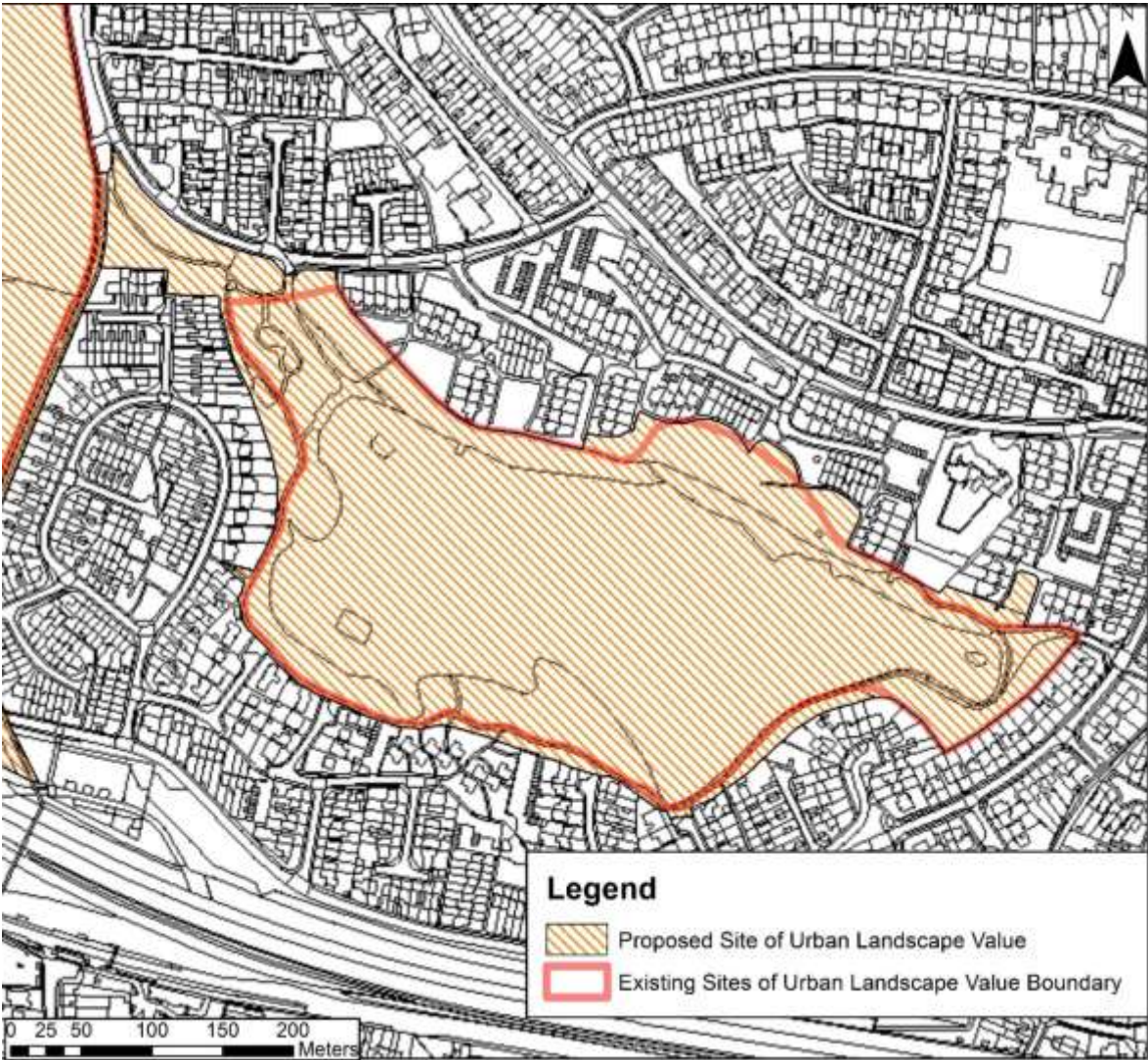
The boundaries of the SULV have been reviewed as part of the assessment. It was considered that some minor boundary refinements should be made to the SULV to follow specific features on the ground such as fencelines, footpaths or roads. This has increased the area of this SULV and now includes the general amenity spaces on the edges of the existing designation adjacent to the residential development, as these form an integral part of the wider open space.

It is also recommended that a boundary change is made in the north-western corner of the SULV to include the more formal open space and play area adjacent to Kingfisher Drive. This area extends the strong wooded character of the South Lake SULV and provides visual and physical links between this SULV and the adjacent Bulmershe SULV.

Landscape Summary and Conclusion

The well treed/wooded characteristics of the SULV and the lake are essential in providing a strong sense of place within Woodley, giving a feeling of seclusion whilst within it which is unusual within a large area of housing. It is an important landscape and ecological resource that is well used and valued for informal recreation. The surrounding vegetation is important in terms of providing a wooded backdrop to the urban development of Woodley and contributes to the verdant character of the wider area.

South Lake SULV



WOOSEHILL MEADOWS, WOKINGHAM

Site Ref: Wkham 003	Officers: CB	Date: November 2019	Proposed New SULV: ✓
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Existing Land Uses

Existing Land Uses within the proposed SULV:

Woosehill Meadows consists of public open space generally associated with Emmbrook river and the shallow valley on either side of the watercourse. Naturalistic planting (trees and shrubs) associated with the stream and flood attenuation basin is found throughout the site, with open areas of amenity grassland, individual trees and small copses. There are several formal children's play areas and a BMX track located within this space.

Adjacent Land Uses:

The open space is mainly surrounded by residential development and residential roads, as well as Woosehill spine road to the north. Morrisons supermarket, a doctor's surgery, Acorn Community Centre and Windmill Primary School form part of the western boundary of the area adjacent to the central portion. These larger buildings are visually prominent on the edge of the open space, especially as they are located on slightly higher ground.

Landscape Value

Visual Assessment

Extent of views out of the proposed SULV

Due to the shape of the site, which is quite narrow in places, there are often short views out of the open space to the housing beyond, although many of these are glimpses through the boundary vegetation, or where the footpaths pass adjacent to the backs of properties. In some locations views are completely restricted by vegetation, making these areas of the proposed SULV feel relatively secluded. Where the site is more open, longer views are gained within the open space. When looking towards the western edge of the site, the community building, school, and Morrisons supermarket are visually dominant from this viewpoint, due to the lack of boundary planting.

Visibility of the proposed SULV from surrounding area

There are short distance views into the site from surrounding residential roads where the roads either run adjacent to the edges of the site, or where residential roads cross narrow parts of the open space, such as at Meadow Road and Heron Road.

The surrounding built form itself restricts many of the views from outside, into the site especially as the Emmbrook and shallow valley is at a lower level than the majority of the surrounding urban area. However glimpses are gained from the many pedestrian accesses into the site when walking towards the area, and in other locations the copses and tree cover forms a wooded backdrop to the houses on the skyline.

Landscape Character

This proposed SULV is within the residential settlement of Woosehill within Wokingham and consist of a shallow valley either side of the Emmbrook. Much of this area has an informal parkland type character with large areas of mown grass, individual specimen trees, tree groups, copses and areas of mixed vegetation. The mix of mature planting within the shallow valley provides an important landscape feature within this urban setting.

There are a number of large mature and veteran trees, providing a maturity to the landscape, offering a verdant setting to the surrounding urban area. Much of the area has open access either across managed amenity grass or via the formal and informal path network, leaving very few areas feeling remote. There are small pockets of spaces that are less managed offering a more naturalistic character.

Landscape Quality

The landscape quality of this area is Moderate / High. The high usage of the site and open boundaries to the west only partially affects the quality of the site. However the site is very important locally as it provides a green lung within areas of extensive housing, and the riparian and parkland type character provides a strong contrast to the adjoining land uses.

Sense of Place

There is a strong sense of place throughout, as the Emmbrook valley, its parkland type character and associated vegetation are significant landscape features within the wider housing development of Woosehill. The site has its own identity and is well used as an informal and formal recreational resource by local people. The mature trees provide a wooded backdrop to housing from various locations around the open space.

Recreational Value

Formal play equipment is provided in several locations throughout the site, including a BMX track south of Morrisons adjacent to the western edge. There are a mix of surfaced and informal paths throughout the site allowing access to many parts of the area. The Emmbrook flowing through the centre, in a north-south direction, is an additional informal recreational resource.

It has been long understood that access to green open spaces within an urban area has a long lasting positive impact on people’s mental wellbeing. Providing a space that has a diverse range of trees, plants and wildlife, allowing those connections to wildlife to be made and by making these areas welcome and inclusive reduces stress and improves overall health.

Wildlife / Ecological Value

There are a large number of mature, near-veteran and veteran trees found within the area, mainly adjacent to the Emmbrook or Smiths Walk, and the majority are included and protected by several linear TPOs (12/1973).

No parts of the proposed SULV are formally designated wildlife sites however the stream, informal grassland and scrub will support a large variety of birds, mammals and insects.

Environmental Value

Urban green spaces especially with trees have multiple environmental benefits and can mitigate against the effects of climate change.

One particular benefit is the role trees have in absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating greenhouse gasses. Urban trees and shrubs also improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants from the air including Sulphur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Lead. Trees and green spaces can regulate a number of climatic effects such as urban temperatures caused by the urban heat island effect by providing shade and cooling through the process of evapotranspiration. Moderation of local climate will reduce the need for mechanical cooling in buildings during the summer months. Another benefit trees have is the ability of trees to intercept, store and filter surface water runoff during periods of heavy rainfall reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality.

Access

Approx. Distance to A or B Road Access

The proposed SULV can be accessed from many minor residential roads that run throughout the housing adjacent to the boundaries of the area, with Woosehill bordering the northern part of the site.

Approx. Distance to Nearest Bus Stop / Train Station

Buses stop on Woosehill to the north and Wokingham Station is approximately 750m east of the area.

Public rights of Way

Smiths Walk is designated as a restricted byway (WOKI RB 32) which passes through part of the site and links Woosehill to Woosehill Lane in the south. There is also a good network of informal footpaths into and through the open space from the adjacent housing area with pedestrian connections to Fox Hill and Round Hill woodlands to the west.

A Greenways Route is proposed through this area to link Fox Hill in the west with Joel Park and Cantley Park in the north east.

Safety

Existence of street lighting alongside roads, but limited to main pedestrian routes though the site, such as Smiths Walk.

Recommendation to Designate Area as a New SULV

Following the assessment of the site, it is considered that the area identified as Woosehill Meadows is included as a new SULV as part of the Draft Local Plan. It meets the SULV criteria, containing a variety of spaces and land uses, has good public access across the majority of the site, allows for informal and formal recreation, includes informal less managed areas which encourage wildlife and has a strong sense of place. Urban open spaces are becoming more important for residents' wellbeing and physical health, as well as delivering environmental benefits.

The boundaries of the proposed SULV were considered as part of this assessment and it was decided to follow specific features on the ground such as fencelines, footpaths or roads.

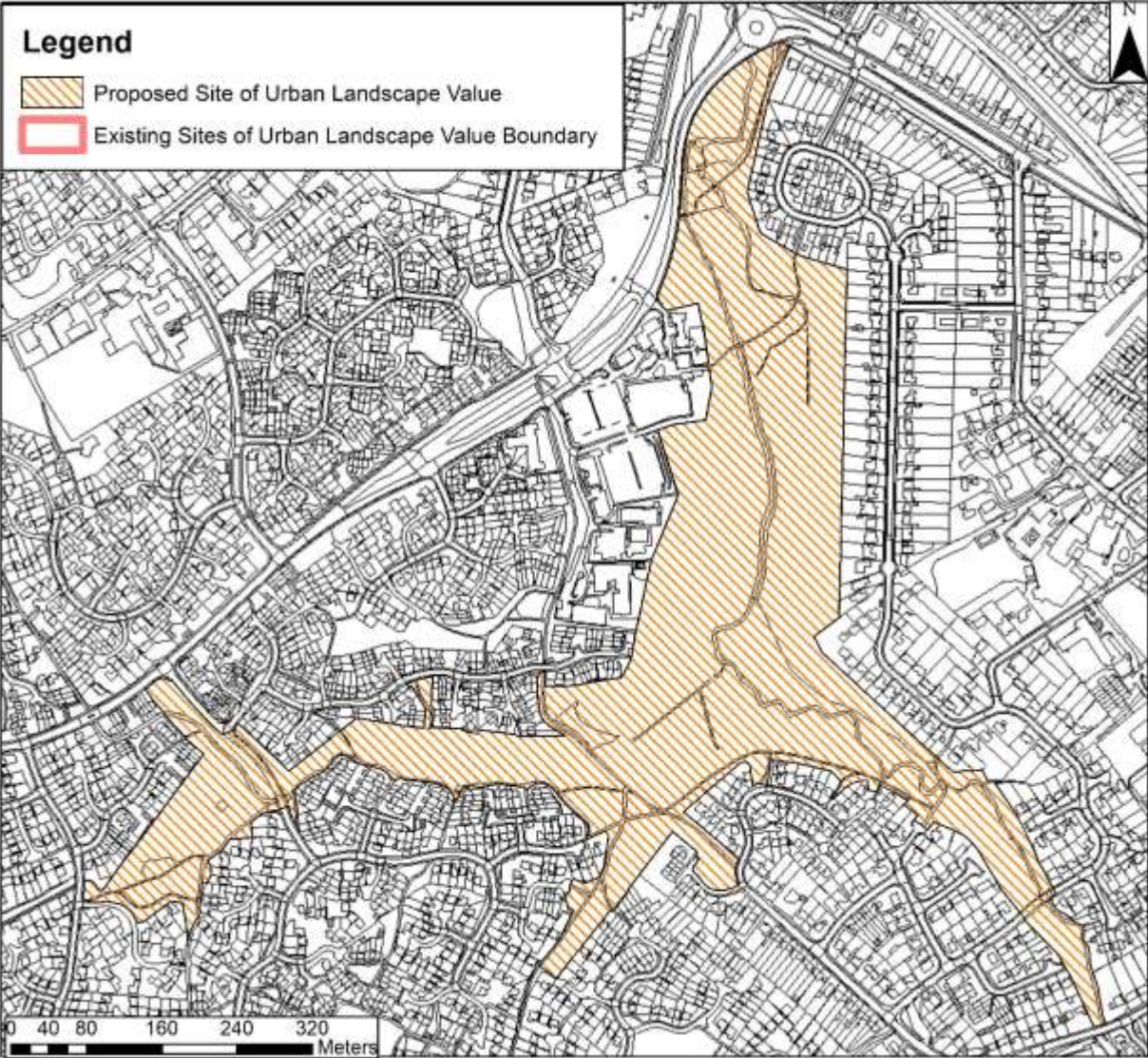
Landscape Summary and Conclusion

This site is considered an important landscape resource, with the Emmbrook, its shallow valley, surrounding parkland character and associated vegetation being significant landscape features of value within an urban setting. It is a very well-used and valued site for informal recreation.

The mature tree groups within the site greatly enhance the character of the area and provide the characteristic wooded backdrop when viewed from the surrounding residential areas.

Overall the site provides a significant landscape resource with a strong sense of place in an urban area and it is recommended to be designated as a new SULV within the Local Plan Update.

Woosehill Meadows SULV



Appendix 3: Map of existing SULVs and boundary changes, plus two proposed new SULVs

