

Tunbridge Wells - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Proposed Allocation Sites within the High Weald AONB



6.10: Sandhurst

Revision B

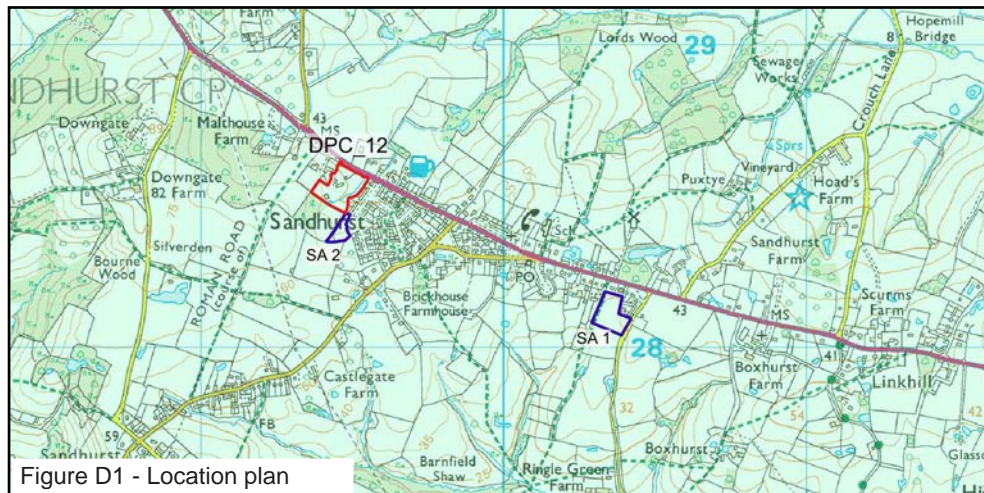
6.10 Sandhurst

6.10.1 Settlement Context

6.10.1.1 Sandhurst is a small village located on the A268, approximately 18km north of Hastings and approximately 23km to the south-east of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The village is strung out along the A268 and largely comprises residential development, with some infill development between the A268 and Bodiham Road, to the south-west of the village. The nearest larger village is Hawkhurst, located approximately 4km to the north-west.

6.10.1.2 The village is located on a low ridge, followed by the line of the A268, with a series of incised valleys to the north and south. Ponds and streams are common landscape features, as are copses of woodland. The landscape displays the typical undulating landform of the High Weald. A series of low hill form high points to the west of the village.

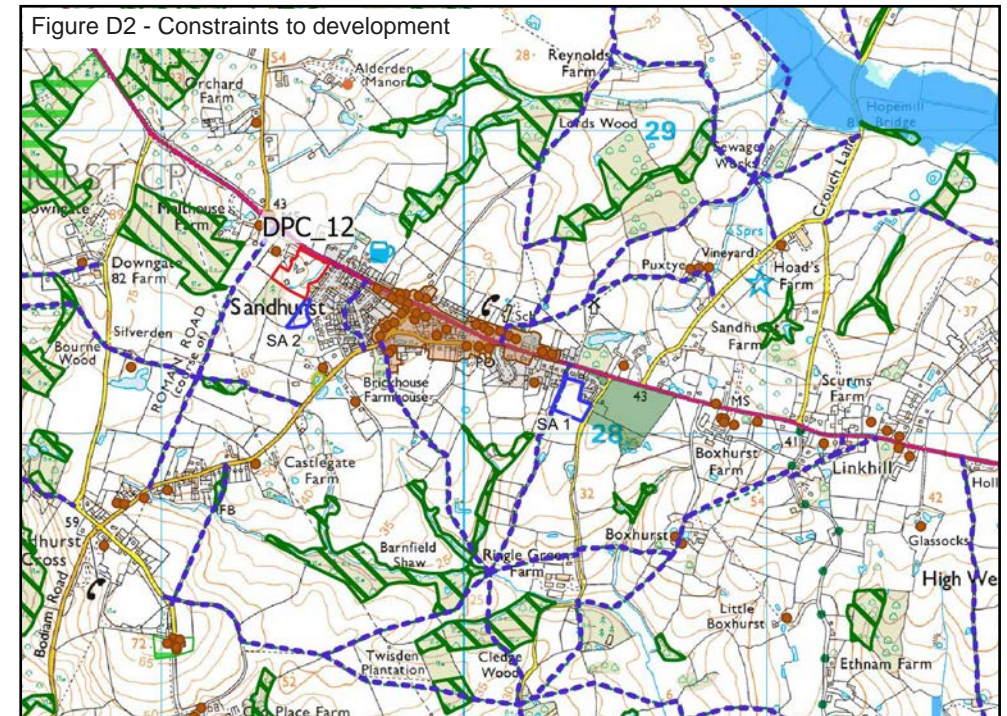
6.10.1.3 Sandhurst lies within the High Weald AONB and the centre of the village is designated as a Conservation Area, which contains numerous listed buildings. Further listed buildings, often representing historic farmsteads, are scattered throughout the surrounding rural landscape. The countryside surrounding the settlements contains many woodland copses, the majority of which are designated Ancient Woodland. Downgate Wood and Holman's Wood, located to the west of the site are designated Local Wildlife sites. Sandhurst playing fields, located at the eastern end of the village, to the east of Marsh Quarter Lane are designated as Local greenspace. The village is well served by public rights of way.



Sandhurst site considered:

DPC 12 - Sharps Hill Farm

See Figure D1 for site location. The High Weald AONB is shown as a green wash.



KEY

- | | |
|---|--|
| Study Sites | Conservation areas (EN7) |
| Other draft allocation | ● Grade I Listed Building |
| SSSI | ● Grade II* Listed Building |
| Ancient woodlands | ● Grade II Listed Building |
| Local Wildlife Site | — Byway Open to All Traffic |
| Open Access Land | — Public Bridleway |
| Local greenspace (EN17) | --- Public Footpath |
| | ●●● Restricted Byway |

6.10.2 Settlement Evolution

6.10.2.1 Sandhurst has a historic core located along the A268, a key trading route, with the parish church set apart from the village at Sandhurst Cross. The village boasts a number of historic buildings, and the re-built Sandhurst Windmill is a local landmark. Figures D3 - D6 illustrate how ribbon development has gradually increased along the A268, with more recent infill, particularly between the A268 and Bodiham Road. Site DPC 12 is depicted as small field, located outside the village within the 1871 historic map. In the 20th century, the land was built upon and the village expanded westwards. The site now lies adjacent to the western edge of the settlement boundary.

Figure D3 - OS Map 1871-1878

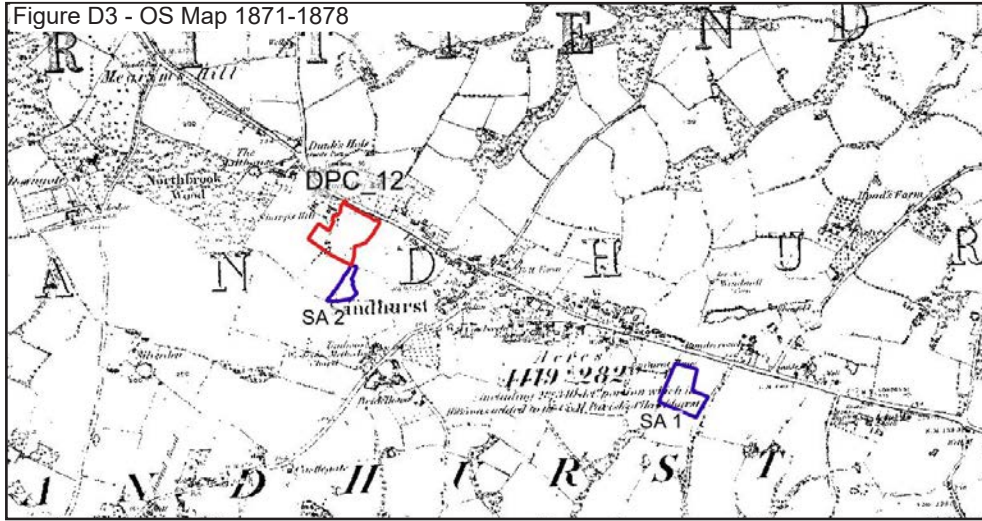


Figure D5 - OS Map 1908-1911

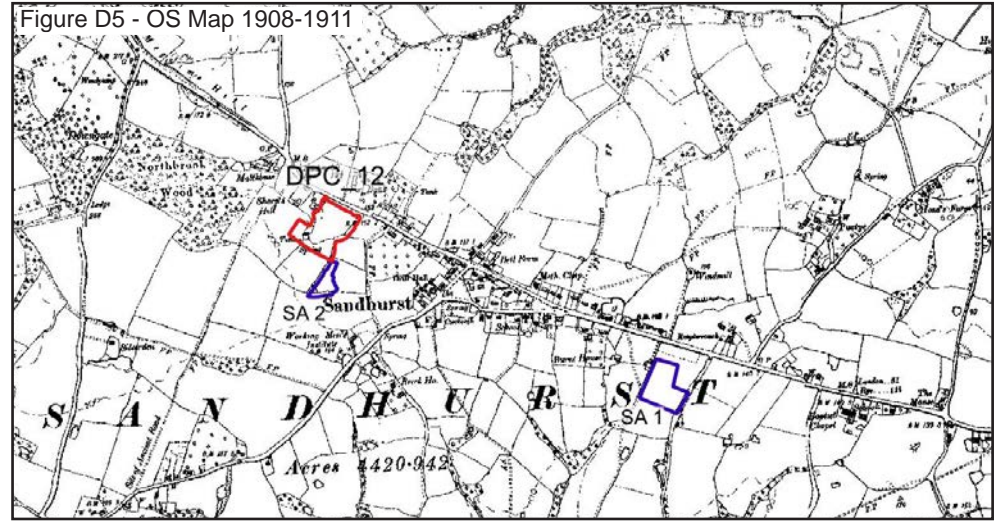


Figure D4 - OS Map 1897-1900

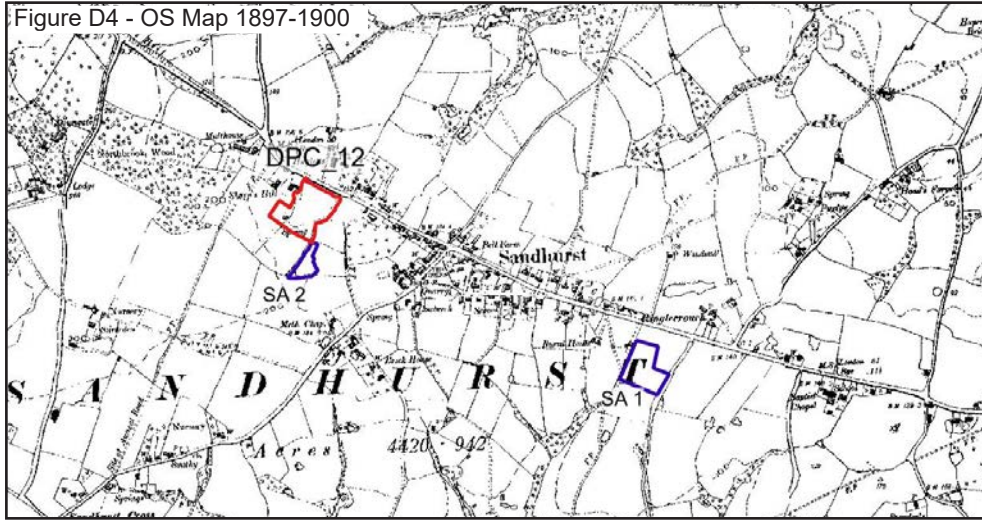
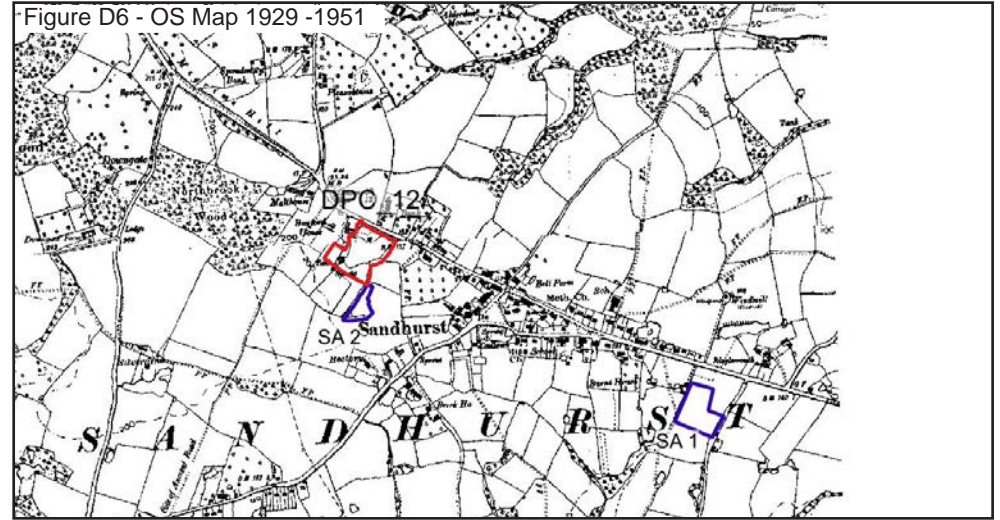


Figure D6 - OS Map 1929-1951

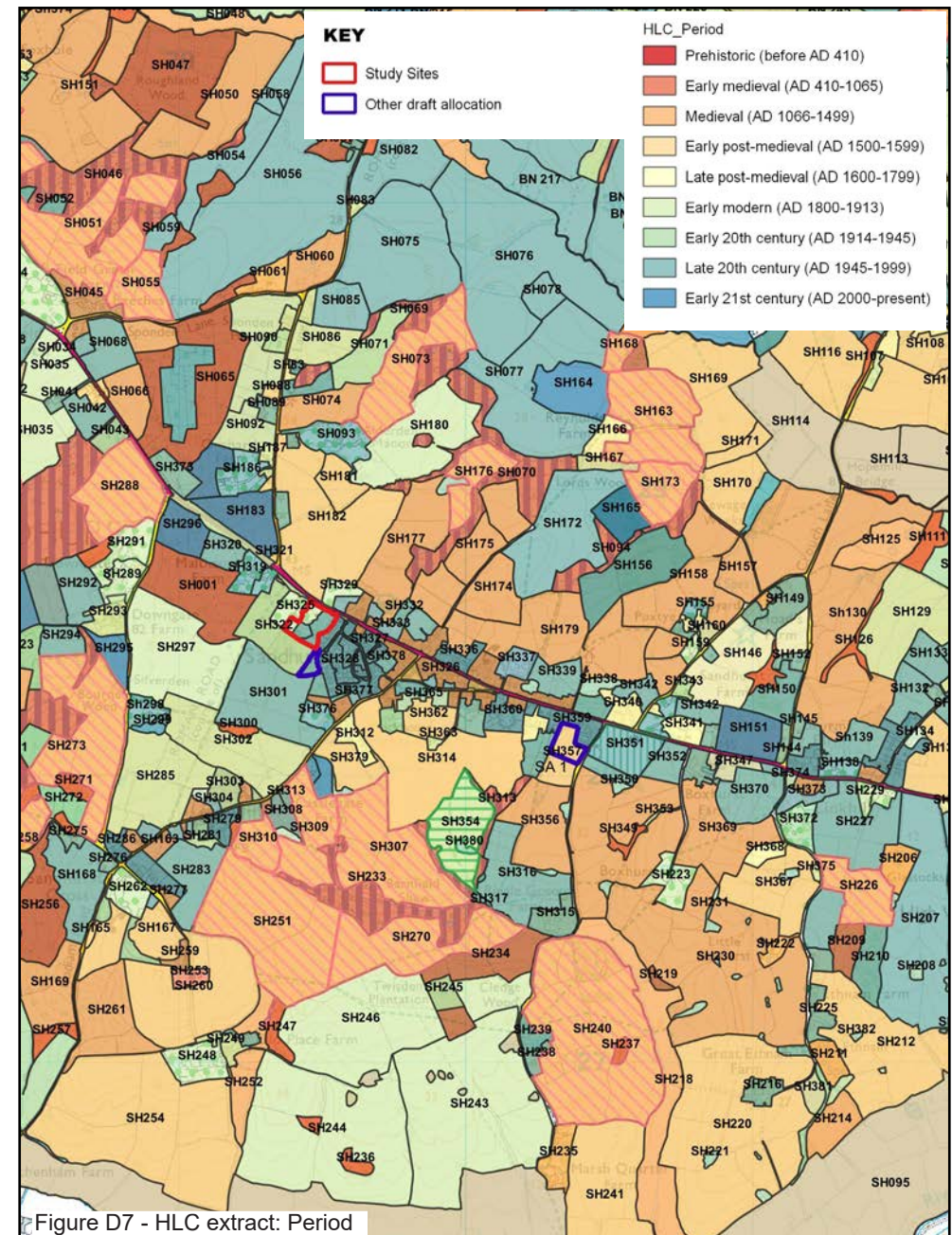


6.10.3 Historic Landscape Character

6.10.3.1 The Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation was updated for Tunbridge Wells Borough in 2017. Extracts from the study, relevant to the Sandhurst allocation site, are shown on the table below.

6.10.3.2 This data has been used to gauge the historic context of the landscape within the study area, which has then been tested through field work in order to analyse which elements are reflected in the current landscape setting.

Site	HLC ID	Type	Period	Additional information
DPC_12	SH323	Regenerated secondary woodland	Late 20th century	Large wavy bounded fields with ponds
	SH324	Regenerated secondary woodland	Late 20th century	Large wavy bounded fields with ponds
	SH325	Large landscaped gardens	Early modern	Post-1801 settlement (general)



6.10.4 Landscape Character

6.10.4.1 Sandhurst sits within the Wooded Farmland Character Type identified within the Tunbridge Wells Borough Landscape Character Assessment SPD (LUC December 2017). The Character Type is described as:

'Extremely varied and complex landscape. Distinct, high ridges with weathered sandstone outcrops intersected by ravine woodland, beech and holly hedges and sunken lanes. These contrast with unimproved pasture and common land. Other characteristics include rolling upland areas, incised by valleys, with small settlements and pastures hidden within a framework of deciduous, ghyll and shaw woodlands.'

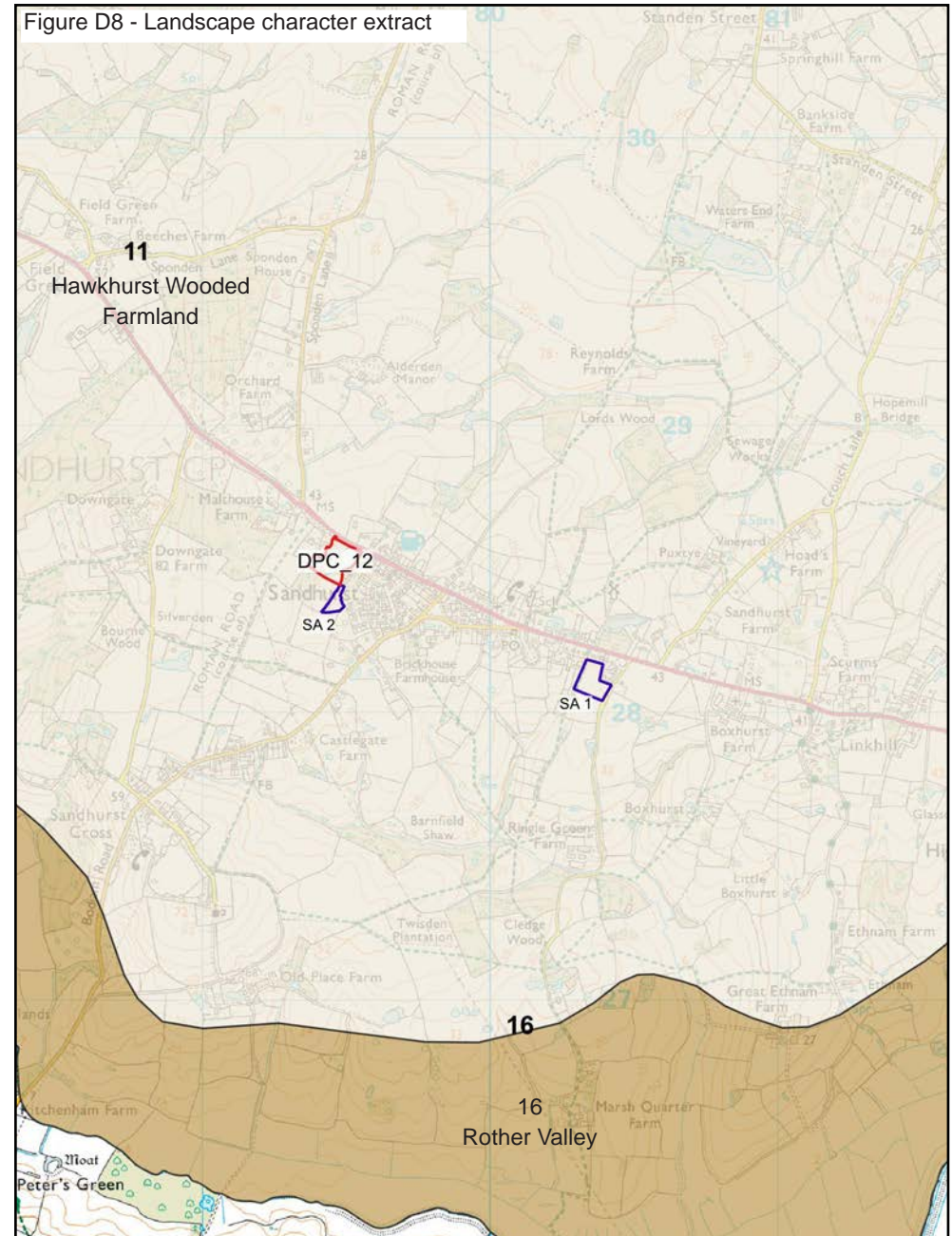
6.10.4.2 The study site is located within the 'Hawkhurst Wooded Farmland' Character Area. Key characteristics of the Character Area include:

- 1) Strong upland ridge of Tunbridge Wells Sand dropping to valleys to the north and south incised by deep narrow tributary valleys that join the Hexden Channel and Kent Ditch and ultimately flow to the River Rother.
- 2) Mixed agricultural landscape of small-scale pasture and medium-large scale arable fields, with larger rolling arable slopes to the valleys and occasional fields of orchards and hops.
- 3) Wooded character arising from thick linear ancient ghyll woodlands, shaws, hedgerow trees and overgrown hedgerows.
- 4) Numerous rural lanes following a pattern of ancient routeways crossing north-south through the area and joining with the main east-west routeway following the ridgeline.
- 5) Ridgetop settlements, dominated by brick and weatherboarded buildings. An occasional windmill or church tower provides distinctive landmarks in mid-distant views. Small farmsteads line the minor ridges separating the ghyll valleys.
- 6) A peaceful rural ambience with dark skies away from the main settlement of Hawkhurst.

6.10.4.3 'Valued features and qualities' that are unique to the character area, relevant to the study sites and sit outside of the special qualities noted within the AONB Management Plan include:

- 6) Sense of tranquillity and dark skies across much of the area, as a result of a lack of modern intrusion, with settlement contained within the topographical and wooded framework.
- 7) The distinctive character of the ridgetop villages and the distinctive landmark features.'

Figure D8 - Landscape character extract



6.10.5 AONB Landscape Character

6.10.5.1 The High Weald AONB Management Plan contains a 'Statement of Significance' which defines the qualities that make the High Weald special at a national level. This statement sets out 5 key 'character components' that contribute to the unique natural beauty of the area and make the High Weald distinctive. For each of these components the High Weald Management Plan lists out key characteristics, issues and objectives. This information has been used within this report to analyse the potential effects of development on the High Weald AONB.

6.10.5.2 The five defining components of character defined for the High Weald include:

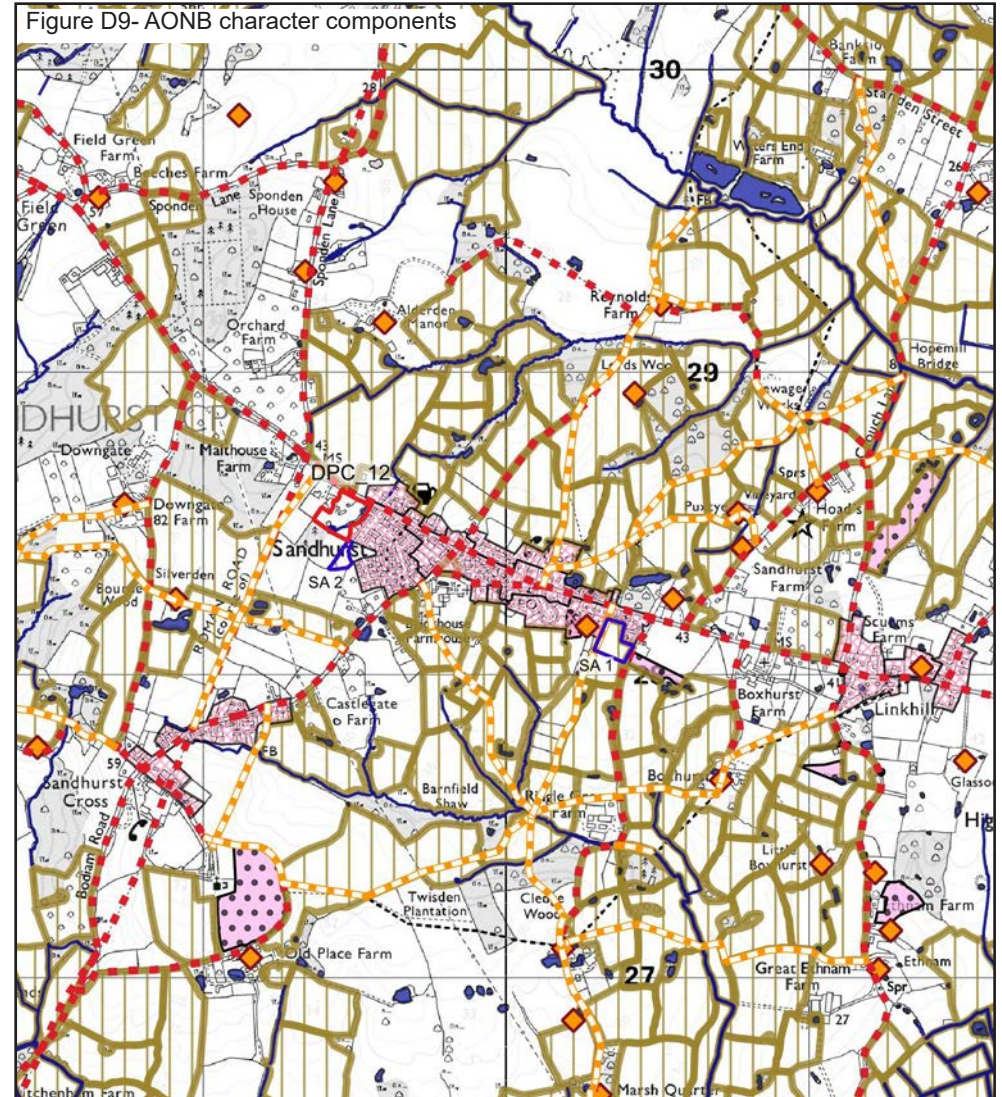
1. Geology, landform and water systems – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams.
2. Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
3. Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).
4. Woodland – abundance of Ancient Woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings.
5. Field and Heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys.

6.10.5.3 The characteristic components for this study area have been mapped within figure D9. The Ancient woodland has not been included as this information has been identified on figure D2 and discussed within section 6.10.1.

KEY

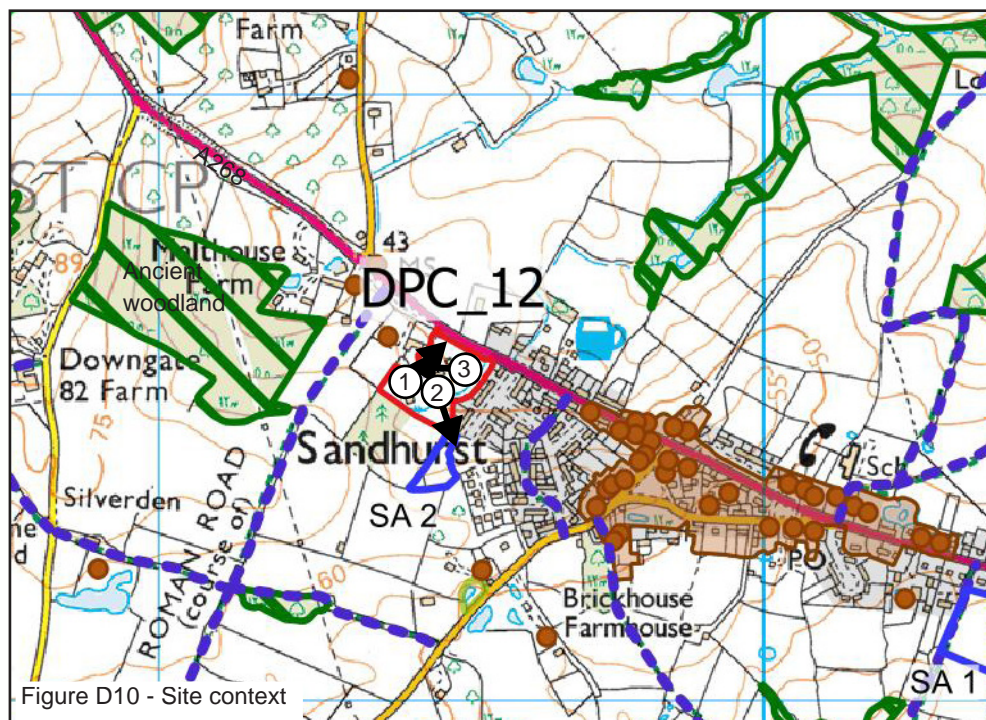
 Study sites	◆ Settlement
 Other draft allocation	 Historic farmsteads (S2)
 High Weald AONB boundary	 Historic settlement extent c.1860 (S2)
	Historic routeways
Geology, landform, water systems & climate	 PROW (R1)
 Water - ponds, reservoir, etc (G1)	 Roads (R1)
 Watercourses (G1)	Field and heath
 Sandstone outcrops (G2)	 Historic field boundary
	 Heathland
	 Known wildflower meadows

Figure D9- AONB character components



Site : DPC 12 - Sharps Hill Farm;

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Site location and context:

The site is located on the western edge of Sandhurst, to the south of the A268 Queen Street and west of Stream Pit Lane. A line of bungalows is located on Stream Pit Lane, with gardens adjacent to the eastern boundary of the site. Two detached properties are located to the north-west of the site, both are detached and surrounded by extensive gardens. The southern boundary abuts a field in pasture.

The site consists of a detached house and stable block, with small paddocks to the south and east. A domestic garden is located to the north-west of the property. The northern and eastern boundaries are formed by mature tree belts and a stream runs the eastern side of the site, within the tree belt. A pond is located in the north-eastern corner of the site. The paddocks are subdivided by post and rail fencing and are overgrown with bramble and ruderal vegetation. Several individual trees are located within the paddocks. The site is enclosed to the west by evergreen conifer hedges.

Designations and development considerations:

The site lies within the AONB. The furthest of the two dwellings to the north-west of the site is listed. Sandhurst Conservation Area is located to the south-east, but is separated from the site by the western part of the village. Footpaths are located to the north and south of the site, but are separated from the site by private gardens and fields in pasture. The site does not contribute to the locally valued features and qualities recorded within the district Landscape Character Assessment.



Photograph 1: View north from the centre of the south-western paddock.

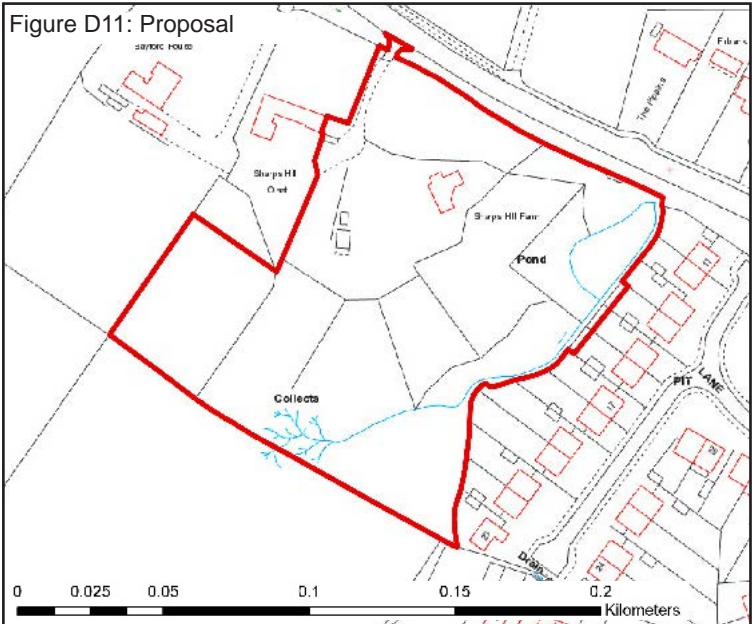


Photograph 2: View of the eastern tree belt.



Photograph 3: Looking south-west across the site from the north-eastern paddock.

Landscape baseline and key features	Visual baseline and key viewpoints	Perceptual and experiential qualities	Representativeness of AONB Qualities (with reference to the relevant character components and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan)
<p>The site is, in part, typical of the 'Hawkhurst Wooded Farmland' Character Area. It consists of small fields in pasture on a sloping topography, which are contained by Tree belts. Adjacent settlement is located at the top of a low ridge. The remainder of the site is more consistent with adjacent settlement and includes a stable block and area of hardstanding. The wetland area to the east of the site is more naturalistic in character than the remainder of the site.</p> <p>Although the site is located adjacent to the western settlement edge, the eastern tree belt provides a soft edge to the settlement, such that the site has little influence from the adjacent village. The road to the north is audible but not visible.</p> <p>The character of the site is rural but is strongly associated with the existing dwelling and is distinguishable from the adjacent countryside to the south. The southern paddock forms a transition to the agricultural landscape to the south.</p> <p>Key landscape features within the site (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intact trees belt and stream on the eastern edge of the site; • Tree belt on the northern site boundary; • Pond to the north-east of the site; • Individual mature trees; • Fields in pasture; and • Conifer hedges and formal garden to the north-west of the site. <p>Landscape features within the site are generally intact, however there are opportunities to improve the southern hedgerow. The condition of the paddocks, stable block and hardstanding are in decline.</p> <p>There is no public access within the site.</p>	<p>The site is well contained from public viewpoints, with no open views available into the site.</p> <p>There are open views of the northern site boundary vegetation from the A268, Queen Street to the north. There may be winter glimpses into the site from the stretch of road that lies adjacent to the site boundary.</p> <p>There are glimpsed views into the site from Stream Pit Lane. Views are of the existing bungalows of the lane, with the eastern tree belt of the site visible through gaps between the dwellings and over the rooftops.</p> <p>There are glimpses of trees tops within the south-western part of the site, from the footpath located at a local high point to the south-west of the site. The listed dwelling to the north-west of the site is visible from this viewpoint location.</p> <p>There are private views of the site from local properties including open and partial views from the first floor windows of the detached dwellings to the north-west of the site. There are open views of the eastern boundary trees and vegetation from the bungalows on Stream Pit Lane.</p> <p>Visual receptors (public views) to be considered (ordered from higher to lower sensitivity) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkers and motorists using the A268; • Walkers on the footpath to the south-west of the site; and • Pedestrians and motorists on Stream Pit Lane; 	<p>The site is a small scale and intimate landscape and has strong associations with the dwelling located within it and to either side. The south-western field has some relationship with the agricultural landscape to the south.</p> <p>The paddocks are unkempt and are overrun with bramble and ruderal vegetation. The domestic garden to the north-west is well tended.</p> <p>The stream, pond and associated tree belt within the western part of the site have an intimate and rural character. They are naturalistic and difficult to access.</p> <p>The site contains boundary features (including garden boundaries and Leylandii hedges) that are more domestic in character than the rural landscape to the south of the site.</p> <p>The individual trees within the site add to the overall feeling of containment, texture and intimacy. The site is pleasant, although the unmanaged state of the paddocks is less attractive.</p> <p>There are no known associations with people, places, events, art or literature.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: The site contains a small stream and a pond, set within a narrow valley. The remainder of the site is gently sloping.</p> <p>Settlement: The site is located to the west of the current village edge, however the tree belt at the eastern boundary creates a soft edge to the existing settlement. Development of the site would be partly consistent with the existing settlement pattern.</p> <p>Routeways: The footpaths to the west and south of the site and the A268 are mapped as historic routeways. Of these routeways, the site only contributes to the A268, as it is physically and visually separated from the other routeways.</p> <p>Woodland: The site does not contain any Ancient Woodland, however there are tree belts to the north and east of the site, which contribute to woodland connectivity.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The site consists of small paddocks, which are no longer grazed and are currently unmanaged. They do not contribute to the wider agricultural landscape and are not mapped as having historic field boundaries (see figure D9).</p> <p>Other qualities: The site does not contribute to the valued views recorded within the borough Landscape Character Assessment.</p> <p>Summary: The site is small scale and enclosed from the surrounding landscape. It has associations with the existing dwelling and forms part of a transitional landscape between the existing edge of Sandhurst and the wider rural landscape. The tree belts to the north and east of the site contribute to local landscape character. The paddocks are un-managed and their condition is currently in decline.</p>



KEY

- Existing GI retained
- Proposed public open space
- Proposed landscape buffer
- Existing / proposed parkland / woodland
- Proposed landscape feature / connection

Description of proposed development:

This site was not considered as part of the regulation 18 draft local plan. In order to test the development potential of the site a baseline proposal has been agreed with the council, which includes: a residential development for up to 30 dwellings.

Proposed mitigation measures:

Mitigation measures proposed within this study
A reduction of the number of proposed houses within the allocation;
Retention and protection of the northern and eastern tree belts, along with the eastern watercourse and pond;
Retention and protection of boundary features;
Where possible, retain internal trees (as indicated on Figure D12).
Promote a soft edge to the south of the settlement.
Proposed layout to respond positively to the existing settlement pattern of the village.

Landscape and recreational opportunities:

There are opportunities to improve the quality and age structure of the tree belts to the north and east of the site, and to introduce a tree belt along the southern boundary. Improvements to the northern tree belt would be beneficial for the mapped routeway that follows the A268.

The trees around the pond could be managed to allow more light to the pond. The potential to allow public access to the pond could be explored. Reintroduction of native hedgerows would be beneficial to local character and wildlife.

Potential Landscape effects (Assuming no mitigation)	Potential effects on Visibility (Assuming no mitigation)	Assessment of effects against the landscape character components of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (assuming no mitigation)	Potential to avoid or reduce adverse effects (the strategic Green Infrastructure plan for the site and the text on mitigation measures opposite, set out the proposed mitigation for the site)
<p>The quantum of development proposed within the draft allocation is likely to give rise to adverse effects on landscape and settlement character as it would create a relatively high density development on a settlement edge currently comprising low density housing set within extensive gardens.</p> <p>If the enclosed nature of the site is maintained, potential development within the site would have limited effects on the 'Hawkhurst Wooded Farmland' Character Area.</p> <p>Within the site the change in character would be pronounced; with small paddocks and tree belts being replaced by development and open space.</p> <p>If no mitigation planting is assumed, development within the south-western part of the site may impact the setting to the listed building, located to the north-west of the site.</p> <p>There is the potential for significant feature loss as a result of the proposed development and creation of the site access. Removal of trees along the A268 to improve the existing access is likely to harm the character of the road, which is mapped as a historic routeway.</p> <p>The effects on recreation are likely to be limited.</p>	<p>Providing that the boundary tree belts can be retained, the site would remain contained from public viewpoints, with no open views available into the site.</p> <p>There would be open views of the proposed site access from the A268, Queen Street. If the proposed development leads to tree loss along the northern boundary, there are likely to be open views of the proposed development from this road. The change to the view may be significant if the development is not sensitively designed.</p> <p>There would be glimpsed and partial views of the proposed dwellings within the site from Stream Pit Lane. The visibility of the proposals will depend upon the extent to which the existing tree belt (and associated understorey) is retained and enhanced.</p> <p>There would be glimpses of rooftops (particularly within the south-western part of the site), from the footpath located at a local high point to the south-west of the site. The view already contains housing, and the magnitude of change within the view would depend on the density of housing and feature loss / retention within the site. A dense development with no internal trees, would be noticeable from this viewpoint location.</p> <p>There would be private views of the proposed development from local properties including open and partial views from the first floor windows of the detached dwellings to the north-west of the site (one of these is listed). Proposed housing within the south-western part of the site would be visible from these dwellings. The remainder of the site is more contained.</p> <p>There would be views of the proposed dwellings within the site from the bungalows on Stream Pit Lane. These views are likely to be restricted to glimpses, if the existing tree belt is retained.</p>	<p>Geology, landform, water systems and climate: There is the potential for the proposed development to adversely affect the water features within the site</p> <p>Settlement: Development of this quantum within the site is likely to adversely affect the settlement pattern of Sandhurst. The perceived density of the proposals should reflect the site's edge of settlement location.</p> <p>Routeways: The proposals may have some adverse effects on the routeway to the north of the site, particularly if the northern tree belt is removed / reduced as part of the proposed development. This would adversely affect the sylvan character of the road and the approach into the village.</p> <p>Woodland: The proposed allocation would not result in the loss of Ancient Woodland, however there is the potential for tree loss, including loss of tree belts which currently contribute to woodland connectivity.</p> <p>Field and Heath: The proposals involve the loss of pony paddocks, which are not currently in agricultural use. The paddocks are not part of the mapped historic field pattern; however they do contribute to the transition between the village and the wider rural landscape.</p> <p>Other qualities: Development within the site has the potential to adversely affect settlement pattern and harm the existing character of the site, particularly if extensive feature loss is involved.</p>	<p>A reduction in the quantum of housing proposed would allow for a development that is more in keeping with the existing edge of Sandhurst. It would allow the proposed dwellings to respond positively to the existing patterns of development.</p> <p>Retention of the existing tree belts and water features would protect the highest quality landscape features on the site and would contain views of the proposals, which would minimise the adverse effects on the wider landscape. Additional hedgerow and tree planting to the south of the site would increase characteristic features and provide additional screening.</p> <p>There are opportunities to retain young, but good quality trees within the site, which would provide an immediate landscape structure and would soften views of the site from the footpath to the south-west.</p> <p>Avoidance of high density development within the south-western part of the site and careful design of any proposed dwellings within this location would protect the wider setting of the listed building located to the north-west of the site.</p> <p>The retention of existing features would be possible within the retained open space and there are opportunities to enhance these features with improved management.</p> <p>These measures would substantially reduce the potential effects of the proposals on the receiving landscape; however the design and layout of the proposed buildings will be critical for the acceptability of the scheme.</p>

Conclusions:

The site forms a transitional landscape of small paddocks, located on the northern edge of Sandhurst. There are existing dwellings to the north of the site and buildings (including one dwelling) within the site, which lower the susceptibility of the site to development, particularly in the area currently occupied by buildings and formal gardens.

The site is well contained by existing tree belts, which form locally important landscape features and provide a soft edge to the village. If retained, these tree belts would screen the proposals from the majority of public views, however the loss of these features would be detrimental to landscape character and local views.

The scale of development proposed for the site is at odds with the settlement edge location and the pattern of development within the site and to the north, which is currently low density. If developed the perception of low density settlement should be maintained, particularly to the south-east of the site.

If development is to be brought forward within the site, it is recommended that the number of dwellings proposed should be reduced by around 50% (dependent on design). The design and layout of the proposed buildings will be critical for the acceptability of the scheme. This includes the design of the site access, which should avoid the loss of existing trees and maintain the existing depth and level of tree cover as a minimum. The design of the south-western part of the site should be considerate of the detached dwellings to the north-west.

There are opportunities to improve the condition of existing features within the site and to increase the connectivity of hedgerows and / tree cover, particularly at the southern boundary.

Policy recommendations for the Regulation 19 version of the Draft Local Plan include:

- Reduce the proposed allocation within the site.
- Include wording to protect the features and land identified within Figure D12.
- Specify that any trees removed as part of the vehicular access should be replaced along the northern site boundary.
- Ensure that the setting of the nearby listed building is considered within any proposed scheme.
- Set out the expectation for a design that responds positively to existing settlement pattern and the well treed character of the site.

6.10.6 Cumulative effects of development proposed at Sandhurst

- 6.10.6.1 Three sites have been put forward as allocations for development within Sandhurst. Site DPC 12 has been discussed within this study, whereas the remaining sites (identified in blue in Figure D13) fall outside the scope of this assessment. All three sites include relatively low numbers of proposed dwellings.
- 6.10.6.2 Site SA 1 is located at the eastern end of Sandhurst. The development of this allocation is unlikely to give rise to cumulative landscape or visual effects when assessed with the other two proposed allocations.
- 6.10.6.3 Site SA2 and DPC 12 are located in close proximity, on the western edge of the village. Despite this, the visual receptor groups with views of both sites are limited. The sites are both contained by mature tree belts, which if retained, would prevent cumulative visual effects and would reduce the potential for adverse landscape effects on the character of the wider rural landscape. The design of each proposal would be an important consideration as there is the potential for cumulative effects on landscape features across the two sites.
- 6.10.6.4 There are unlikely to be cumulative effects between the proposed allocation sites at Sandhurst and other development proposed within the AONB.
- 6.10.6.5 The likelihood of potential cumulative effects on the landscape and character of the High Weald AONB could be reduced by:
- Reduction in the volume of development proposed within draft allocation DPC 12;
 - Sensitive location of development within each site, following the recommendations set out for each site within the site specific policies and within this report;
 - Retention of key landscape features; and
 - Maximisation of mitigation measures and enhancements proposed within each site.

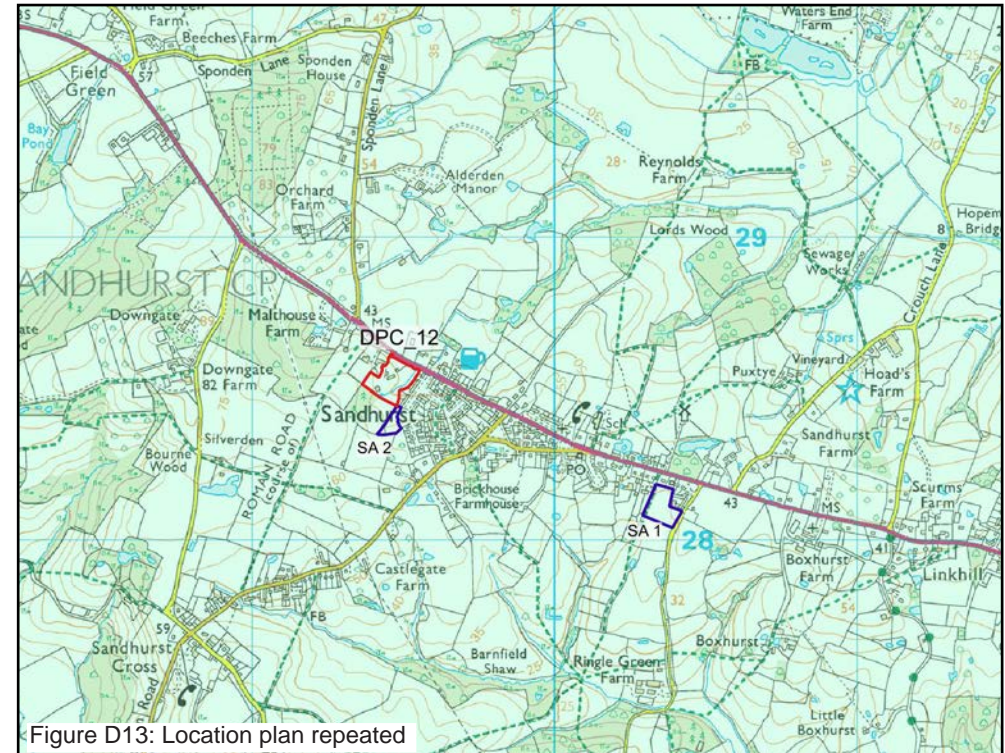


Figure D13: Location plan repeated

6.10.7 Summary and conclusions

- 6.10.7.1 The quantum of development initially assessed for the site is likely to give rise to adverse effects on the settlement pattern of Sandhurst and consequently the AONB. It is likely that a sensitively designed scheme with reduced numbers and retained features to the north and east, would reduce the predicted adverse effects. If the site is put forward as an allocation within the regulation 19 draft plan, it should set out the expectation for a design that responds positively to its location on the edge of settlement and the existing, well treed character of the site.