

CANDIDATE SITE CS/0113, 0114 AND 0115- LAND AT CASTLE OAK, USK, MONMOUTHSHIRE

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

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- Land at Castle Oak,
Usk, Monmouthshire
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REPORT

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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	LEGISLATION AND POLICY CONTEXT	3
3	BASELINE CONDITIONS	8
4	OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS	18
5	LANDSCAPE MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT	20
6	CONCLUSIONS	21

Figures

Fig. 1	Site Location and Context Plan
Fig. 2	Opportunities and Constraints
Fig. 3	Potential Development Areas
Fig. 4	Photo Views 1 –22
Fig. 5	Photo Views A, B and C

Appendices

Appendix A: Extract from Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Update (October 2020);

Appendix B: LANDMAP Evaluation of Aspect Areas (within local Landscape Character Area U02).

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by RPS on behalf of Johnsey Estates UK Limited with respect to land in its ownership to the north of Castle Oak, Monmouthshire. Monmouthshire Council is presently reviewing the Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP) 2011-2021, which is to be replaced in due course by the Local Development Plan (LDP) 2018-2033. Johnsey Estates is seeking the allocation of the subject site within the LDP for residential purposes, and the site has been previously registered as Candidate Site CS/0033W (Areas A, B and C) and CS/0033E (Area D) as part of the adopted LDP 2011-2021.
- 1.2 As part of the LDP review process, an updated Landscape Sensitivity Study has been completed on behalf of Monmouthshire County Council (as updated October 2020), within which the Candidate Site references have been amended to CS/0115 (Areas A, B and C) and CS/0113 (Area D), with the addition of CS/0114 (Area E) added as part of the replacement LDP process. This Landscape Appraisal has been prepared in the context of these representations and assesses the suitability of the sites, in landscape and visual terms, for residential development.
- 1.3 The Adopted LDP remains in place until the replacement Local Development Plan is formally adopted. The Candidate Site lies immediately to the north of and abuts the settlement boundary of Usk.

Landscape Assessment

- 1.4 The purpose of the report has been to consider the characteristics of the Candidate Sites using published data contained within the Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity Update Study (October 2020) and LANDMAP that have led to this designation, and the potential effects that proposed development would have upon such characteristics. This is achieved by describing and evaluating the existing landscape and visual features and conditions that prevail at the Candidate Site, and considers the opportunities and constraints, and as such the suitability of the land for housing and associated infrastructure.
- 1.5 The landscape and visual appraisal is an analysis of the physical and perceptual attributes of an area. The landscape appraisal of the site relates to the effect of development on the landscape resource, whereas the visual appraisal is concerned with the effect on visual amenity.
- 1.6 The landscape and visual appraisal has been conducted by a Chartered Landscape Architect in accordance with the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment: Third Edition (GLVIA3). This has included a desk study of published information, followed by a site visit on 18th August 2021 to verify and confirm desk study data and evaluation of the visual setting and attributes of the Candidate Site.
- 1.7 In preparing this appraisal, reference has been made to the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan 2011 - 2021 (adopted on the 27th February 2014); Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), and other relevant documents.
- 1.8 The location of the Sites are shown on Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan.

2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

- 2.1 The following section identifies the national and local planning policies of relevance to landscape and visual matters, which have informed the existing baseline of the Candidate Site and surrounding landscape and informed the subsequent landscape and visual appraisal of the proposed development. The aims of the various policies, at national, county and local level, are summarised below.

Planning Policy Guidance

Planning Policy Context

- 2.2 As part of establishing the existing baseline environment, this appraisal has considered relevant planning policies in the currently adopted Local Development Plan (Table 2.1). Other documents, of material consideration, are reviewed in paragraphs 2.4 to 2.12.

Local Development Plan

- 2.3 The Development Plan for the Candidate Site comprises the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan 2011 - 2021 (adopted on the 27th February 2014). Relevant policies to the proposed development within the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan are described below.

Monmouthshire Local Development Plan

- 2.4 The Monmouthshire Local Development Plan was adopted on the 27th February 2014 and sets out the overall planning strategy for the Council from 2011-2021. Completed in accordance with National Planning Policy and Guidance. *'The LDP sets out the Council's vision and objectives for the development and use of land in Monmouthshire, together with the policies and proposals to implement them over a 10-year period to 2021. The plan area excludes that part of the County contained within the Brecon Beacons National Park'.*

Table 2.1 Monmouthshire Local Development Plan Policies

Plan Policy	Details
Strategic Planning Policies	
Policy S1: Spatial Distribution of New Residential Development	<i>The main focus for new housing development is within or adjoining the Main Towns of:</i> • Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. <i>...The Rural Secondary Settlements are Usk, Raglan, Penperlleni and Llanfoist. A small amount of new housing development is directed to the Rural Secondary Settlements of Usk, Raglan and Penperlleni...</i>
Policy S13: Landscape, Green Infrastructure and the Natural Environment	<i>Development proposals must:</i> <i>1. Maintain the character and quality of the landscape by:</i> <i>(i) identifying, protecting and, where appropriate, enhancing the distinctive landscape and historical, cultural, ecological and geological heritage, including natural and man-made elements associated with existing landscape character;</i> <i>(ii) protecting areas subject to international and national landscape designations;</i> <i>(iii) preserving local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting;</i>

Plan Policy	Details
	(iv) respecting and conserving specific landscape features, such as hedges, trees and ponds; (v) protecting existing key landscape views and vistas. 2. Maintain, protect and enhance the integrity and connectivity of Monmouthshire's green infrastructure network. 3. Protect, positively manage and enhance biodiversity and geological interests, including designated and non-designated sites, and habitats and species of importance and the ecological connectivity between them. 4. Seek to integrate landscape elements, green infrastructure, biodiversity features and ecological connectivity features, to create multifunctional, interconnected spaces that offer opportunities for recreation and healthy activities such as walking and cycling.
Policy S17: Place Making and Design	Development shall contribute to creating high quality, attractive and sustainable places. All development proposals must include and promote high quality, sustainable inclusive design which respects local distinctiveness, respects the character of the site and its surrounding in order to protect and enhance the natural, historic and built environments and to create attractive, safe and accessible places.
Development Management Policies	
Policy DES1: General Design Considerations	All development should be of a high quality sustainable design and respect the local character and distinctiveness of Monmouthshire's built, historic and natural environment. Development proposals will be required to: a) ensure a safe, secure, pleasant and convenient environment that is accessible to all members of the community, supports the principles of community safety and encourages walking and cycling; b) contribute towards sense of place whilst ensuring that the amount of development and its intensity is compatible with existing uses; c) respect the existing form, scale, siting, massing, materials and layout of its setting and any neighbouring quality buildings; d) maintain reasonable levels of privacy and amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties, where applicable; e) respect built and natural views and panoramas where they include historical features and / or attractive or distinctive built environment or landscape; f) use building techniques, decoration, styles and lighting to enhance the appearance of the proposal having regard to texture, colour, pattern, durability and craftsmanship in the use of materials; g) incorporate and, where possible enhance existing features that are of historical, visual or nature conservation value and use the vernacular tradition where appropriate; h) include landscape proposals for new buildings and land uses in order that they integrate into their surroundings, taking into account the appearance of the existing landscape and its intrinsic character, as defined through the LANDMAP process. Landscaping should take into account, and where appropriate retain, existing trees and hedgerows; i) make the most efficient use of land compatible with the above criteria, including that the minimum net density of residential development should be 30 dwellings per hectare, subject to criterion l) below ; j) achieve a climate responsive and resource efficient design. Consideration should be given to location, orientation, density, layout, built form and landscaping and to energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy, including materials and technology; k) foster inclusive design;

Plan Policy	Details
	<i>l) ensure that existing residential areas characterised by high standards of privacy and spaciousness are protected from overdevelopment and insensitive or inappropriate infilling.</i>
Policy LC3: Brecon Beacons National Park	<i>Development in the vicinity of the Brecon Beacons National Park will only be permitted where it would:</i> <i>a) preserve or enhance the landscape setting, as defined through the LANDMAP process;</i> <i>b) have no serious adverse effect on significant views into and out of the National Park.</i> <i>Development that would cause unacceptable harm to the qualities that justify the designation of the Brecon Beacons National Park or its setting will not be permitted.</i>
Policy LC5: Protection and Enhancement of Landscape Character	<i>Development proposals that would impact upon landscape character, as defined by LANDMAP Landscape Character Assessment, must demonstrate through a landscape assessment how landscape character has influenced their design, scale, nature and site selection.</i> <i>Development will be permitted provided it would not have an unacceptable adverse effect on the special character or quality of Monmouthshire's landscape in terms of its visual, historic, geological, ecological or cultural aspects by:</i> <i>a) Causing significant visual intrusion;</i> <i>b) Causing significant adverse change in the character of the built or natural landscape;</i> <i>c) Being insensitively and unsympathetically sited within the landscape;</i> <i>d) Introducing or intensifying a use which is incompatible with its location;</i> <i>e) Failing to harmonise with, or enhance the landform and landscape; and /or</i> <i>f) Losing or failing to incorporate important traditional features, patterns, structures and layout of settlements and landscapes of both the built and natural environment.</i> <i>Particular emphasis will be given to those landscapes identified through the LANDMAP Landscape Character Assessment as being of high and outstanding quality because of a certain landscape quality or combination of qualities.</i>
Policy GI1: Green Infrastructure	<i>Development proposals will be expected to maintain, protect and enhance Monmouthshire's diverse green infrastructure network by:</i> <i>a) Ensuring that individual green assets are retained wherever possible and integrated into new development. Where loss of green infrastructure is unavoidable in order to secure sustainable development appropriate mitigation and/or compensation of the lost assets will be required;</i> <i>b) Incorporating new and /or enhanced green infrastructure of an appropriate type, standard and size. Where on-site provision of green infrastructure is not possible, contributions will be sought to make appropriate provision for green infrastructure off-site.</i>
Policy NE1: Nature Conservation and Development	<i>Development proposals that would have a significant adverse effect on a locally designated site of biodiversity and / or geological importance, or a site that satisfies the relevant designation criteria, or on the continued viability of priority habitats and species, as identified in the UK or Local Biodiversity Action Plans or Section 42 list of species and habitats of importance for conservation of biological diversity in Wales, will only be permitted where:</i> <i>a) the need for the development clearly outweighs the nature conservation or geological importance of the site; and</i> <i>b) it can be demonstrated that the development cannot reasonably be located elsewhere.</i> <i>Where development is permitted, it will be expected that any unavoidable harm is minimised by effective avoidance measures and</i>

Plan Policy	Details
	<i>mitigation. Where this is not feasible appropriate provision for compensatory habitats and features of equal or greater quality and quantity must be provided.</i> <i>Where nature conservation interests are likely to be disturbed or harmed by development proposals, applications must be accompanied by an ecological survey and assessment of the likely impact of the proposal on the species /habitats, and, where necessary, shall make appropriate provision for their safeguarding.</i> <i>Development proposals shall accord with nature conservation interests and will be expected to:</i> <i>i) Retain, and where appropriate enhance, existing semi-natural habitats, linear habitat features, other features of nature conservation interest and geological features and safeguard them during construction work;</i> <i>ii) Incorporate appropriate native vegetation in any landscaping or planting scheme, except where special requirements in terms of purpose or location may dictate otherwise;</i> <i>iii) Ensure the protection and enhancement of wildlife and landscape resources by appropriate building design, site layouts, landscaping techniques and choice of plant species;</i> <i>iv) Where appropriate, make provision for on-going maintenance of retained or created nature conservation interests.</i>

Site Allocation

- 2.5 The Candidate Sites themselves are not currently allocated however, as part of the current Monmouthshire Local Development Plan Review they have been submitted as Candidate Sites (Ref. CS/0113, 0114 and 0115).

Other Material Considerations

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11, 2021)

- 2.6 Edition 11 of the Planning Policy Wales (PPW) was published in February 2021 by the National Assembly for Wales, replacing all previous versions, as part of National Planning Policy and guidance.
- 2.7 The PPW sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government. The conservation and improvement of the natural heritage of Wales is one of its objectives noting the following (paragraph 6.02 and 6.03):

“The special and unique characteristics and intrinsic qualities of the natural and built environment must be protected in their own right, for historic, scenic, aesthetic and nature conservation reasons. These features give places their unique identity and distinctiveness and provide for cultural experiences and healthy lifestyles.

As well as those characteristics regarded as special or unique there are other, environmental qualities of places which are ubiquitous. Environmental components of places, such as clean air, access to open spaces and water quality, are linked to the quality of the built and natural environment. The environmental components of places influence and shape health and wellbeing as well as playing a role in sustaining and creating places which are adaptable and resilient to change. Distinctive and Natural places must maintain or incorporate green infrastructure, recognising the wide-ranging role it can play, as key components of their natural and built fabric. Doing so will maximise health and well-being of communities and the environment.”.

- 2.8 It also attaches considerable importance to the benefits of good design stating (paragraph 3.10) that:

“In areas recognised for their particular landscape, townscape, cultural or historic character and value it can be appropriate to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness. In those areas, the impact of development on the existing character, the scale and siting of new development, and the use of appropriate building materials (including where possible sustainably produced materials from local sources), will be particularly important.”

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 5: Nature Conservation and Planning (2009)

- 2.9 TAN 5 provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. This guidance note should be read in conjunction with Planning Policy Wales Edition 11, in particular with Chapter 6: Distinctive and Natural Places, which considers matters including landscaping (Page 133).

Summary of Planning Policy

- 2.10 The Monmouthshire Local Development Plan incorporates strategies to conserve and enhance (where possible) the important features, elements and characteristics of the rural landscape by avoiding visually intrusive development and promoting good quality design which incorporates appropriate green infrastructure.
- 2.11 The Candidate Site, although not allocated within the currently adopted Monmouthshire LDP, has been submitted as a Candidate Site as part of the Replacement of the LDP.
- 2.12 The PPW sets out overarching aims to ensure development is appropriately located, well designed and sustainable. In summary, the policies set out to improve the overall quality of an area, establish a strong sense of place and create an attractive and comfortable location, responding to local character.

3 BASELINE CONDITIONS

Landscape and Visual Baseline

Landscape Character

- 3.1 Landscape character areas and landscape character types can be defined at a variety of scales and a substantial amount of published information is available at the national, county and district scales. The principal published information comprises Natural Resources Wales (NRW) national landscape characterisation of Wales (NRW, 2014) and LANDMAP, an “*all-Wales Geographical Information System (GIS) based landscape resource...*” at a County / Regional level. At a local level, the principal published information is the Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity Update Study (October 2020).

National Landscape Character

- 3.2 At a national level, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has prepared a National Landscape Character Areas (NLCA) map for Wales (NRW, 2014) (Ref 7). This has divided the country into 48 broad scale character areas, the descriptions of which highlight what distinguishes one landscape from another with reference to distinct natural, cultural and perceptual characteristics within each region. The Candidate Site falls entirely within NLCA '31: Central Monmouthshire' (Canolbarth Mynwy). (Ref. Figure 5)
- 3.3 NLCA 31 is described as a *'gently undulating lowland landscape of hills, valleys and floodplains. It is in great contrast to adjacent upland landscapes that rise to the west. Fault-aligned vales and glacial deposits give rise to the fertile alluvial deposits that are key to the prosperity of this rural, farmed area. The River Usk drains much of the south and west. The Monnow and Trothy drain the north. Country lanes with high hedges link villages and hamlets that have a distinctive vernacular style in Old Red Sandstone and whitewashed cottages with slate roofs. In open country, whitewashed farmhouses stand out against the green backdrop of pastured fields and woodlands.'* (NCLA31: Summary Description, NRW 2014).
- 3.4 The key characteristics of NCLA31 are summarised below.
- *An area of gently rolling hills, intervening valleys and the Usk flood plain.*
 - *The Usk, the main watercourse, flows south from Abergavenny and eventually becomes tidal. Rivers Trothy and Monnow in the north feed into the Wye in the adjacent character area to the east. Their alignments are influenced by geological faults.*
 - *Hedge-bound fields are mainly given to sheep grazing and dairying, with areas of arable farming on the fertile floodplain.*
 - *Woodlands and mixed plantations cover many slopes and hill tops in parts of the area.*
 - *Mixed habitats, notably mixed broadleaved woodlands containing a variety of rare tree species and are important habitats, as is the open water of the Llandegfedd Reservoir - a key site for overwintering birds.*
 - *Small nucleated hamlets and villages are scattered throughout the area, linked by a network of winding rural lanes. Medieval stone churches are characteristic of the villages.*
 - *The sheltered landscape has a peaceful rural character, with any significant modern intrusion confined to the road corridors of the A40 and A 449.*

Regional Landscape Character

- 3.5 LANDMAP is an “all-Wales Geographical Information System (GIS) based landscape resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated into a nationally consistent dataset” (CCW (now NRW), 2011). It is administered by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and comprises five spatially related datasets or aspect layers as follows:
- Geological Landscape: *“considers the physical, primarily geological, influences that have shaped the contemporary landscape and identifies those landscape qualities which are linked to the control or influence exerted by bedrock, surface processes, landforms and hydrology”;*
 - Landscape Habitats: *“Focuses on recording habitat features, characteristics and their spatial relationships within the context of the wider landscape”;*
 - Visual and Sensory Landscape: *“Maps landscape characteristics and qualities as perceived through our senses, primarily visually. The physical attributes of landform and land cover, their visible patterns and their interrelationship”;*
 - Historic Landscape: *“Landscape characteristics that depend on key historic land uses, patterns and features. Identifies only those classes of historic land uses, patterns and features that are prominent and contribute to the overall historic character of the present landscape.”; and*
 - Cultural Landscape: *“Describes the links between landscape and people, from the way in which cultural, or human activity shapes the landscape, to the way in which culture shapes the way we respond to landscape. Focus is on mapping the landscape where it has been, or is being, shaped by a particular cultural activity or process, or where it has been directly represented, depicted or described in art, literature or folklore.”*
- 3.6 For each dataset the landscape is divided into discrete geographical units referred to as aspect areas. Each is given a unique identification code and is accompanied by a dataset which includes both a description and evaluation of quality and value.
- 3.7 Whilst all LANDMAP Aspect Areas of the five aspect layers within the study area have been considered, for the purposes of this Landscape and Visual Appraisal the main focus will be on those Aspect Areas which would be directly affected by the proposed development. i.e. those that coincide within the Candidate Site itself. Further information for each of the aspect areas within the Usk Local Landscape Character Area (U02) is provided in Appendix B, as derived from the Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity Update Study Final Report (October 2020).

Local Landscape Character

- 3.8 The Candidate Site is located within the Monmouthshire County Council named Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) U02: Usk. As derived from the Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity Update Study (October 2020). This LLCA would be directly affected by any proposed development. To the west, beyond the B4598 Abergavenny Road, and to the south west, south and south east beyond the settlement of Usk, are the adjoining LLCAs of U01, U03, U04, U05, U06, U07 and U08. Parts of these adjoining LLCAs may experience an indirect perceptual effect, albeit that the existing development of Usk is between them and the Candidate Site, with the exception of the northernmost parts of LLCA U03. Key characteristics of LLCA U02 that are relevant to the Candidate Site are:
- *Steeply rising hill and valley sides up to the Gwehelog.*
 - *Medium-sized irregular pastoral fields with low-cut hedges and blocks of woodland such as Cockshoot Wood and forestry eg Park Wood.*
 - *Scattered farmsteads and rural dwellings and house at Beech Hill.*

- *The area forms the backcloth and positive approach to the settlement and valleys in views from the south, east and west and directly links with the castle.*
- *The isolated white dwelling at Little Castle Farm is a local landmark on the hillside.*
- *Housing estate development is encroaching on its lower slopes to the north and east.*
- *There is a listed building at Beech Hill.*
- *Cockshoot Wood and other woods are SINCs.*
- *Gently undulating slopes with small stream valleys.*

3.9 The landscape and visual sensitivity to housing, of LLCA U02, has been identified as High / Medium. Stating that *“The susceptibility of the area lies in its important role for Usk in providing an unspoilt, tranquil and rural backcloth of steep hills and valley sides of woods and pasture defined by the Usk to the west and the Olway Brook to the south. It links into Usk Castle contributing to its setting. The woods and pastures also provide a network of positive habitats which assist connectivity and there are pleasant public footpaths running through the area connecting the settlement with the wider landscape of the Gwehelog. The value of the area lies in its scenic qualities as rising hill and valley sides backcloth with woodland and pasture, the SINCs, the listed building at Beech Hill and the PROWs and regional cycle route through the area. LANDMAP value is outstanding for cultural landscapes and high for visual and sensory. The vast majority of the area is considered sensitive to housing development...”*.

3.10 When looking at the remaining Local Landscape Character Areas surrounding Usk (U01, 03, 04, 06, 07 and 08), as derived from the Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity Update Study (October 2020), as a whole have all been identified as High / Medium landscape and visual sensitivity to housing, with LLCA U05 identified as High. LLCA U02 is therefore comparable to and no more or less sensitive to the type of development proposed than other neighbouring and nearby LLCA's. However, it is considered that there are local variations within each of the LLCAs, depending on the location and proximity to the development edge of Usk and its perceived influence upon the LLCA. This is particularly apparent with parts of the Candidate Sites southernmost areas, which are located at the lowest and therefore least visible part of the characteristic rising slopes and immediately adjacent to the existing development edge of Usk, off Castle Oak and other minor roads within the newly completed Burrium Gate residential estate. This influence is less apparent within the northern and western parts of the Candidate Sites

Site Description

Location, Land Use and Development Context

3.11 The Candidate Sites lie to the north of and directly abut the northern edge of Usk, with access gained off Castle Oak and other minor roads via Monmouth Road. The Candidate Sites comprise five parcels of land that will be referred to as areas A, B, C, D and E, as shown on Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan.

3.12 The following section of the appraisal describes the broad setting and context of the local landscape, before focusing on the Candidate Sites themselves.

Topography and Landform

3.13 Landform to the north of Usk is heavily folded, forming a complex undulating landscape, typical of the Gwehelog Valleys, within LLCA U02.

3.14 In the immediate locality of the Candidate Sites, this includes a ridge to the west/northwest along which the Castle Farm drive/access road has been established, linking the farm with Cockshoot Wood and Lady Hill Wood to the north. A knoll forms the local high point of 110m AOD to the

northeast of Cockshoot Wood. A further ridge extends from this high point to the south/southeast, east of Little Castle Farm. The slopes of these ridges lead down to a spring and stream that emerges in Cockshoot Wood and flows south through Burrium Gate estate (see Drainage Features below), feeding into a tributary of the Olway Brook.

- 3.15 Therefore, the Candidate Sites lie on the slopes of the small valley or bowl created by the two ridges. Area A lies between approximately 30m AOD and 55m AOD; Area B rises from approximately 30m AOD to 52m AOD; Area C has a much gentler slope of approximately 32m AOD to 38m AOD; Area D lies between 20m AOD and 50m AOD; and Area E lies between approximately 30m AOD and 35m AOD. See Figure 1 for approximate contour levels.

Drainage Features

- 3.16 Usk lies on the eastern bank of the River Usk, to the north of its confluence with the Olway Brook. The River Usk follows a northwest to south east route, flowing in a southerly direction. Olway Brook is a tributary of the Usk and flows east to west, to the east of the town, before turning southward to join the Usk about 2km to the south of the town. Much of the historic part of the town and subsequent development to the south falls within the River Usk floodplain; a series of levees and flood walls protect the town from inundation.
- 3.17 A series of wells and springs occur in close proximity to the Candidate Site, with hedgerows/scrub and mature trees defining the route of the issuing streams; one such stream marks the boundary between Areas A and B, and another follows Little Castle Farm lane parallel to the eastern boundary of Area D.
- 3.18 A spring in Cockshoot Wood flows generally southward along the northeast boundary of Area C and then through the centre of the Burrium Gate site toward the Olway Brook. The Olway Brook lies to the south of Monmouth Road and a disused railway line; the Candidate Site forms part of the catchment for this stream.

Existing Landcover and Land Use

- 3.19 Cockshoot Wood forms a substantial woodland block abutting the north eastern boundary of Area C in combination with Lady Hill Wood to the north and Park Wood to the northeast. Other sizeable woodlands occur further to the north and east, generally cloaking the steeper slopes of the Gwehelog Valleys.
- 3.20 Areas A, B, C, D and E are characterised by rough grassland, which is poorly drained in places, as indicated by areas of sedge.
- 3.21 Land to the northwest of the Areas A, B, C and E is in agricultural use as horse pasture; Cockshoot Wood lies to the north. Land to the south and east comprises the urban area of Usk (Castle Oak and Burrium Gate estates).
- 3.22 Land to the east and north of Area D is largely in agricultural use, with the former Little Castle Farm complex now comprising three dwellings. The ongoing Burrium Gate development lies to the west. Land to the south of Monmouth Road forms the Olway Brook floodplain and includes areas of grazing and scrub, a disused railway line and allotment gardens.

Highways and Infrastructure

- 3.23 Principal routes within the vicinity of the site include the A449(T) to the east of Usk that links Newport and Monmouth. Usk is connected to the A449(T) via the A472, which provides the principal eastern approach to the town.
- 3.24 The unclassified Monmouth Road forms the southern boundary of Area D.

- 3.25 The B4598 Abergavenny Road follows the eastern bank of the River Usk, to the west of the Castle Farm ridge.
- 3.26 Two minor unclassified roads follow the river valley to the south, linking Usk with Llanbadoc and Newport (Caerleon) to the west of the river, and with Llanllywell and Llanstrisant to the east, respectively.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.27 The Usk Valley Walk forms a promoted 48 mile (77km) walk between Caerleon and Brecon. It follows the eastern bank of the Usk to the south of the town, crossing Usk Bridge to continue along the western bank to the northwest.
- 3.28 Elsewhere, public footpaths and occasional bridleways link settlements along the higher ground to the east and west of the Usk, south of the town.
- 3.29 Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in proximity to the site are sparse and include footpaths in the vicinity of Usk Castle to the southwest; this includes a path that follows Castle Farm Lane from the town up to the farm (definitive map reference 383/7), continuing along the ridge (as footpath 383/9), through Cockshoot Wood and associated woodlands through to Gwehelog Common.
- 3.30 No public rights of way cross or lie adjacent to the Candidate Site.

Built Development

- 3.31 Built development within Usk is of mixed function, age and architectural styles including generally two-storey, with some three-storey municipal and domestic scale buildings and cottages of stone and coloured render. Much of the historic core of the town is low-lying at less than 20m AOD, within Usk flood plain, and is protected by flood defences comprising levees and flood walls. It is separated from the Candidate Site by a dismantled railway and modern developments at Castle Oak and Burrium Gate.
- 3.32 Castle Oak comprises a mix of two storey detached, semi-detached and terraced houses and large detached bungalows dating from the late 20th Century, mostly finished in cream or white render. Some recent infill residential development has occurred toward the western edge of this area, including a substantial bungalow at the end of Castle Oak. Castle Oak lies on rising land to the north of the town, at between 15m AOD and about 48m AOD.
- 3.33 Burrium Gate residential estate, to the immediate south of Area E and south east of Area C, comprises generally two storey buildings of brindle brick or cream and buff coloured render with slate roofs. Burrium Gate lies on land to the north of Monmouth Road rising from the south at c.18m AOD to c.35m AOD at its northern edge.
- 3.34 Castle Farm comprises the main farm complex including the farmhouse and several outbuildings that include traditional stone barns and a small woodland copse to the west of the lane, and a modern large-scale timber-clad barn/shed sited to the east of the lane. The farm complex lies above 60m AOD.
- 3.35 Little Castle Farm lies between 50m AOD and 60m AOD and comprises a substantial two storey former farmhouse finished in white render; and two former outbuildings that have recently been converted to residential use. These former outbuildings were previously used as a stone barn with slate roof to the north, and a stone garage and playroom to the east.

Landscape Features

- 3.36 The River Usk and river valley forms the most distinctive landscape feature comprising the low-lying floodplain and meandering river, contrasting with the slopes of the valley sides.

- 3.37 Landscape features within the vicinity of the site include the sloping landform and established hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- 3.38 Cockshoot Wood and the neighbouring woodlands of Lady Hill Wood and Park Wood combine to create a substantial landscape feature that cloak much of the higher ground immediately to the north of the Candidate Site. The woodlands wrap around a knoll that marks the highest point of the ridge at 110m AOD. The height of this knoll is emphasised by a clump of trees that are planted upon it, forming a noticeable feature in distant views toward the ridge from the river valley to the south.
- 3.39 Usk Castle lies on a bluff overlooking the river valley to the south of Castle Farm and the disused railway. A belt of mature trees wraps around the northern edge of the castle grounds.

Designations

- 3.40 The Candidate Sites do not fall within any statutory landscape related designations. The site is not subject to any other known landscape, heritage or ecological designation. Two tree preservation orders (TPO's) apply (M4 and M109).
- 3.41 Usk Castle is a Scheduled Monument, and together with the historic core of the medieval town some 200m to the southwest of the Candidate Site, is designated as an Area of Special Archaeological Sensitivity under Policy CH10 of the Adopted UDP.

Site Character Area

- 3.42 The Candidate Sites comprise five parcels of land referred to as Areas A, B, C, D and E, as shown on Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan.

Area A (part CS/0115)

- 3.43 Area A is of an irregular rectilinear form, comprising a small to medium-sized field of rough pasture. The irregular south eastern and short south western boundaries are formed by the relatively modern developed edge of the Castle Oak residential estate on the northern edge of Usk (see Photo View 16). This includes two-storey dwellings and bungalows off Castle Oak and Adams Close, and a small area of public open space off Trelawney Close/Adams Close. The existing urban edge is marked by a combination of native and ornamental hedges, trees and close-boarded fencing.
- 3.44 The northeast boundary directly abuts Area B. The north western boundary is defined by a shallow drainage ditch and a hedgerow and scrub that have developed along its route, with mature trees; it runs broadly parallel to the Castle Farm driveway (which is about 140m to the northwest) from which it is separated by pasture. Two mature trees lie within the area, about midway along and c.20m south of this boundary
- 3.45 The landform of Area A is a generally shallow 'S' shaped slope, rising from east to west, ranging from about 30m AOD to 55m AOD.
- 3.46 A line of overhead lines is carried on wooden poles across the southernmost third of the site toward Castle Farm.

Area B (part CS/0115)

- 3.47 Area B comprises a rectangular field of rough grazing aligned in a generally northwest-southeast direction, to the northeast of Area A with which it shares a boundary. The northwest boundary is marked by an established hedgerow and, as with Area A, it runs broadly parallel to the Castle Farm driveway about 120m to the northwest, from which it is separated by horse pasture. An established hedgerow marks the northeast boundary about two-thirds of which is flanked by

adjacent pasture that separates the area from Cockshoot Wood; the remaining third directly abuts Area C. The southeast boundary directly abuts the ongoing two-storey Burrium Gate development (see Photo View 17) and is marked by a new close-boarded timber fence and an older 2m high chain link fence.

- 3.48 Area B landform rises from the southern corner of the parcel at 30m AOD up to the northwest about 52m AOD.

Area C (part CS/0115)

- 3.49 A trapezoidal field of grass aligned southwest-northeast forms Area C. This is bounded to the northwest by a shelter belt of coniferous and native deciduous trees. The southern tip of Cockshoot Wood and a spring-fed stream forms the north eastern boundary to the Area, with an overgrown hedgerow forming the south eastern boundary that separates the site from the neighbouring Burrium Gate development (see Photo View 18). The south western boundary lies adjacent to Area B.
- 3.50 Landform is a gentle slope rising from about 32m AOD in the southeast to about 38m AOD at the northwest boundary.

Area D (CS/0113)

- 3.51 The eastern parcel is a generally rectangular plot presently used for sheep grazing. The northern boundary is marked by a hedgerow that separates the Candidate Site from Little Castle Farm about 60m to the north. The southern boundary is formed by Monmouth Road, and the eastern boundary is defined by the access lane from Little Castle Farm to Monmouth Road. The western boundary is formed by the ongoing residential development known as Burrium Gate (see Photo View 9).
- 3.52 The sloped eastern parcel rises from the south-southwest at about 20m AOD toward the north-northeast at about 50m AOD.
- 3.53 A field gate provides direct access from Monmouth Road at the south eastern corner.

Area E (CS/0114)

- 3.54 Area E is a small triangular parcel of land immediately north of the northern edge of the Burrium Gate estate. Well enclosed to the north by extensive tree and hedgerow vegetation, separating it from Area C to the north west, agricultural fields, Cockshoot Wood and Little Castle Farm to the north and north east. The southern boundary of Area E is generally open with existing properties off Burrium Gate, on slightly lower ground, overlooking it (see Photo View 22). The south west corner of Area E is open allowing access and views to the adjacent Area B. Although unused rough grassland, there is an open and well used access to Area E via a footway off Burrium Gate (see Photo View 13). This is an informal access to the wider sites which appears well used by walkers, albeit that there is no formal access.
- 3.55 Similarly, to all the land parcels within the Candidate Sites, Area E slopes fairly steeply from north to south. The area lies at approximately 32m AOD adjacent to the existing residential dwellings off Burrium Gate rising to approximately 35m AOD at the border with Area C.

Visual Baseline

Existing Views

- 3.56 Principal viewpoints, sensitive visual receptors and the approximate visibility of the land have been recorded from representative publicly accessible viewpoints. Photographs have been taken using a digital camera from each of these viewpoints as a record of the view and have been taken with

the equivalent of a 50mm lens on a 35mm film camera in portrait format at eye level, approximately 1.6m above existing ground level. No access to private properties was obtained, and where impact to residential and other private views (i.e. commercial occupiers) is noted this has necessarily been estimated. Refer to Figure 1 Site Location and Context Plan for photo view locations.

- 3.57 A preliminary visual assessment has been conducted to verify the desk study findings and confirm the extent of visual influence of the Candidate Site; the site visit was completed on 18th August 2021. Views have been categorised into three ranges depending on the proximity of the viewpoint as follows:

- Close less than 500m
- Medium between 500m and 2km
- Long more than 2km

Views from the North

- 3.58 Long and medium-distance views from the north are generally prevented by the combination of the south-facing slope/landform falling away from the viewer, Castle Farm ridge, and the substantial composite woodland of Cockshoot, Lady Hill, and Park Woods.
- 3.59 Close-range severely restricted views, particularly in summer, are afforded from a short length (about 320m) of the footpath that follows the Castle Farm ridge (footpath 383/9/2) some 120m to the northwest of Areas A and B of the site (see Photo Views 6, 7 and C), before the path enters and is screened by trees and vegetation within Cockshoot Wood. Footpath 383/9/2 forms the continuation of route 383/7/1 to the south of Castle Farm (see Views from the West, below).
- 3.60 Generally, the elevated views offered by the footpath allow broad vistas to the southeast and east toward Coed-Cwnwr ridge across the foreground of pasture and hedgerows including those that form the north western boundaries of Areas A and B. Views toward the Usk valley to the south are screened by the intermediate ridgeline of Red Hill to the south of the A472.
- 3.61 The white rendered farmhouse, and to a lesser the extent the stone outbuildings, of Little Castle Farm provide an orientation point in conjunction with Cockshoot Wood to the north; this grouping lies against the backdrop of a minor ridgeline to the east and is set below the horizon formed by the distant bluff of the Olway Brook valley. The northeast corner of Area D (close to Little Castle Farm) is apparent from some parts of the path, although the lower two-thirds of the area are screened by the intervening hedgerows and new development at Burrium Gate. The curving slip roads of the A449(T)/A472 junction are discernible above the visible part of Area D, over the ridgeline to the east of Little Castle Farm, when viewed from the central and northern sections of the footpath.
- 3.62 The nature of the middle and foreground features varies along the route, with glimpses toward the roofline and buildings within Castle Oak and Burrium Gate most apparent from the centre and northern most parts of the footpath.
- 3.63 Area C and E are not immediately apparent from the footpath, but glimpses of the shelter belt that forms its north western boundary are visible through breaks in, or above, an intervening hedgerow parallel to it.

Views from the East

- 3.64 Long-distance views from the east toward the Candidate Sites are generally controlled by intervening landform including the minor ridgeline to the east of Little Castle Farm, which falls in a south easterly direction from the Cockshoot Wood knoll. Close-range views are therefore gained but are limited to a short length (about 300m) of Monmouth Road and the single-track Coed-y-

brain road. Views from the A472, the Olway Inn road, and Red Hill are limited to sections immediately to the south of the site (see Views from the South below).

- 3.65 Views are gained from Monmouth Road, and oblique views from the cluster of houses in the vicinity of Rose Cottage about 200m to the east of Area D (see Photo Views 8, 9 and 10), through to the urban edge of Usk. Buildings principally along the eastern boundary of Burrium Gate and Castle Oak are visible from the road and footway above the roadside hedgerow in places, although heavily screened from views along much of the southern boundary of Area D at the time of the site work due to the hedgerow being relatively overgrown rather than tightly clipped. Rooflines at Castle Oak and Burrium Gate remain below the horizon when viewed from this stretch of road. However, the horizon is punctuated in some views from the road and footway by the new barn and farm buildings at Castle Farm and Little Castle Farm (see Photo Views 9 and 10).

Views from the South

- 3.66 Intermittent long-distance views are gained from south of Usk along the river valley toward the site. From the Usk Valley Walk to the east of the river views are controlled within the town by built development and views are filtered by path side and roadside vegetation south of the town, with occasional glimpses through and over field gates and lower or gappy vegetation (see Photo View A). Red Hill forms an east-west spur that combines with riverside planting to restrict or prevent views to the site from Middle Road Pool/Pentwyn southwards, about 2.3km to the south of the Candidate Site.
- 3.67 Views from the Llangibby/ Llanbadoc to Usk road to the west of the river are controlled by the undulating nature of the route, roadside buildings and vegetation, and levees closer to the town centre. The town forms the principal focus of such views.
- 3.68 Medium and close-distance views include those from the vicinity of Olway Inn at the foot of the convex landform of Red Hill, about 350m to the south. However, vegetation along the A472 embankments and the disused railway beyond, filter and screen views to an extent that the Candidate Site is not a significant element within the view. Brief glimpsed views are gained from the A472 where breaks in roadside vegetation permit, such as at Olway Bridge (see Photo View B).
- 3.69 A sunken single-track lane runs slightly to the south of the east-west Red Hill ridge, flanked by well-maintained hedges of 1.5m to 2m height. Views toward the north/northwest are therefore effectively screened by a combination of landform and vegetation.
- 3.70 Usk Castle lies to the south of Castle Farm and the disused railway. A belt of mature trees wrap around the northern edge of the castle grounds visually screening the area from the Candidate Sites.
- 3.71 Public views are also gained in part from roads and public open space within Castle Oak and Burrium Gate developments to the Candidate Sites. Private views would also be gained from some properties within these estates, although the extent of such views will be controlled by orientation, intervening buildings, topography and vegetation. Photo Views 1 to 4, and 12 to 15 illustrate typical views from within the estate.

Views from the West

- 3.72 Long and medium-distance views from the west are prevented by the landform of Castle Farm ridge, about 140m to the northwest.
- 3.73 Footpath 383/7/1 climbs from its start point on Monmouth Road in the heart of the town, past Usk Castle car park, skirting around the western edge of the Castle Oak estate.
- 3.74 Close-range intermittent views are gained from the public footpath as it follows the ridge top lane, south of Castle Farm. The eastern side of the lane is flanked by a well-maintained hedgerow,

which in part controls views to the east (see Photo View 5) toward Areas A and B, across a foreground of horse paddocks. The new barn at Castle Farm is largely screened from the footpath by a taller hedgerow and hedgerow trees.

- 3.75 Connection with the town is maintained by views of properties off Castle Oak and, when viewed from the upper stretches of the path, Burrium Gate.

4 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

- 4.1 The Initial Sustainability Assessment concludes that the candidate sites have '*no capacity for housing as it rises higher than existing hillside development*'; this is clearly an over-simplification that assumes blanket built development across the whole of the Candidate Site. Control of development within the guidelines identified in the opportunities and constraints as set out here clearly shows that contrary to the Council's opinion, much of the land within the Candidate Site does have the capacity to accommodate housing development.
- 4.2 It is therefore acknowledged that the main constraints in terms of landscape character relate to landform and established landscape features comprising hedgerows, mature trees and the Cockshoot Wood Stream. The Candidate Site lies on the hillside above Usk, and the land falls toward the Cockshoot Wood stream and the Olway Brook corridor.
- 4.3 Whilst hedgerows and mature trees form a constraint (particularly those protected by tree preservation orders), they also offer opportunities in terms of providing an established landscape framework and mature landscape features within which the proposed development would sit. Current national and UDP policy heavily supports protection of hedgerows and trees. This objective also forms a fundamental element of the Area Design Guidelines for the Gwehelog Valleys. In particular, the hedgerows could be managed and enhanced to offer taller screening with abundant tree planting to provide a 'layered' landscape features within the site when viewed from the southeast, south and west. Existing gateways and/or natural gaps in hedgerows would be used to provide access between the site Areas.
- 4.4 The higher elevation of landform and greater visual prominence of parts of Areas A, B and D determine where built development can be accommodated, but also offers opportunities for landscape enhancement; the remaining lower lying parts of Areas A, B and D, together with Area C are more suitable as locations for built development, in terms of minimising effects on landform and views.
- 4.5 Appropriate landscape enhancement measures, together with the established landscape structure of hedgerows and trees, could be used positively to create public open space and/or linear pedestrian routes, which in turn could be extended to link with existing and proposed public open space in Castle Oak and Burrium Gate. These green corridors could also be enhanced with structure planting to reinforce the established hedgerows and to reduce the perceived extent and scale of the proposed development.
- 4.6 There are no public rights of way across or adjacent to the site, with the nearest being along the Castle Farm ridge to the west/northwest. Subject to agreement with adjacent landowners, a connection could be established with the Castle Farm footpath, thus creating new routes around the north and eastern edges of Usk to Monmouth Road and land to the east.
- 4.7 There are no significant or sensitive buildings or infrastructure within the site, and so built development does not pose a constraint. With regard to the proposed development, careful design and materials selection would be employed in accordance with the Design Guidelines to integrate the new built form within its landscape and townscape context.
- 4.8 Views from Monmouth Road to the south and east are sensitive and due to the relative levels of development in Area D to the north of the road, would break the skyline when viewed from the section of road immediately to the south. The Little Castle Farm complex and the new barn at Castle Farm to the west already break the skyline when viewed from Monmouth Road to the south and southeast. Development within the site as proposed would not break the skyline when viewed from the short (c.200m) stretch of Monmouth Road between the eastern corner of Site D and Rose Cottage to the east.

- 4.9 Similarly, development within the site would not break the skyline when viewed from the north, west or south through control of the height above Ordnance datum of the built form and enhancement of existing hedgerow and tree planting.
- 4.10 Control of the maximum contour level at which development would be located would also maintain the character of the upper reaches of the hillside above Usk when viewed from the river valley to the south of the town. Development within the upper parts of Areas A and B should be limited to 1 storey where practicable, similar to those on the northern edge of Castle Oak. Development should also be limited to the area below the 40-45m contour within Areas A and B to limit the potential visual effects of the development and help to maintain views to the ridgeline from the south. By restricting built form to these areas it would reflect the general development pattern of the wider area, particularly as there is generally no development above this level within the local landscape with the exception of scattered farmsteads and individual properties, such as Little Castle Farm. There would be limited or no possible intervisibility between the Candidate Sites and Usk Castle. With substantial intervening vegetation, retained and supplemented, and in particular the landform.

5 LANDSCAPE MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT

- 5.1 It is clear from the planning policy review, supported by the site survey that the retention of the existing hedgerows and all hedgerow trees is paramount. Therefore, the removal of hedgerows and trees is likely to be strongly resisted by the Council.
- 5.2 The sloping landform within and around the sites means that the proposed development may break the skyline when viewed immediately from the south/southeast.
- 5.3 This can be mitigated by controlling the maximum contour level at which development would be located so that it is consistent with neighbouring residential development (a maximum of two storeys), with a maximum of 1 storey at the highest points of Areas A and B, thus minimising the potential negative effects of visually prominent development breaking the skyline.
- 5.4 The mitigation method of controlling maximum contour levels at which development would be located can be further enhanced by introducing tall vegetation (trees and hedgerows) on the higher parts of the site areas, but not necessarily along the lines of existing field boundaries. The effect of this planting will be to establish tree canopies to form a backdrop to the new development when viewed from the south and southeast without obscuring some of the broad vistas from the elevated footpath to the west/northwest.
- 5.5 Existing hedgerows form a logical boundary for the proposed development. Enhancement of these hedgerows with frequent trees will assist in breaking up the perceived mass of the development, as would the introduction of trees within the development parcels.
- 5.6 The higher parts of Areas A, B and D should preclude built development due to the land's elevation in relation to the existing settlement and the likely visual prominence of proposed development. However, this land can be used to create multi-functional space providing ecological enhancement, recreational and leisure amenities, and landscape structure planting to frame and anchor the development within its setting.

6 CONCLUSIONS

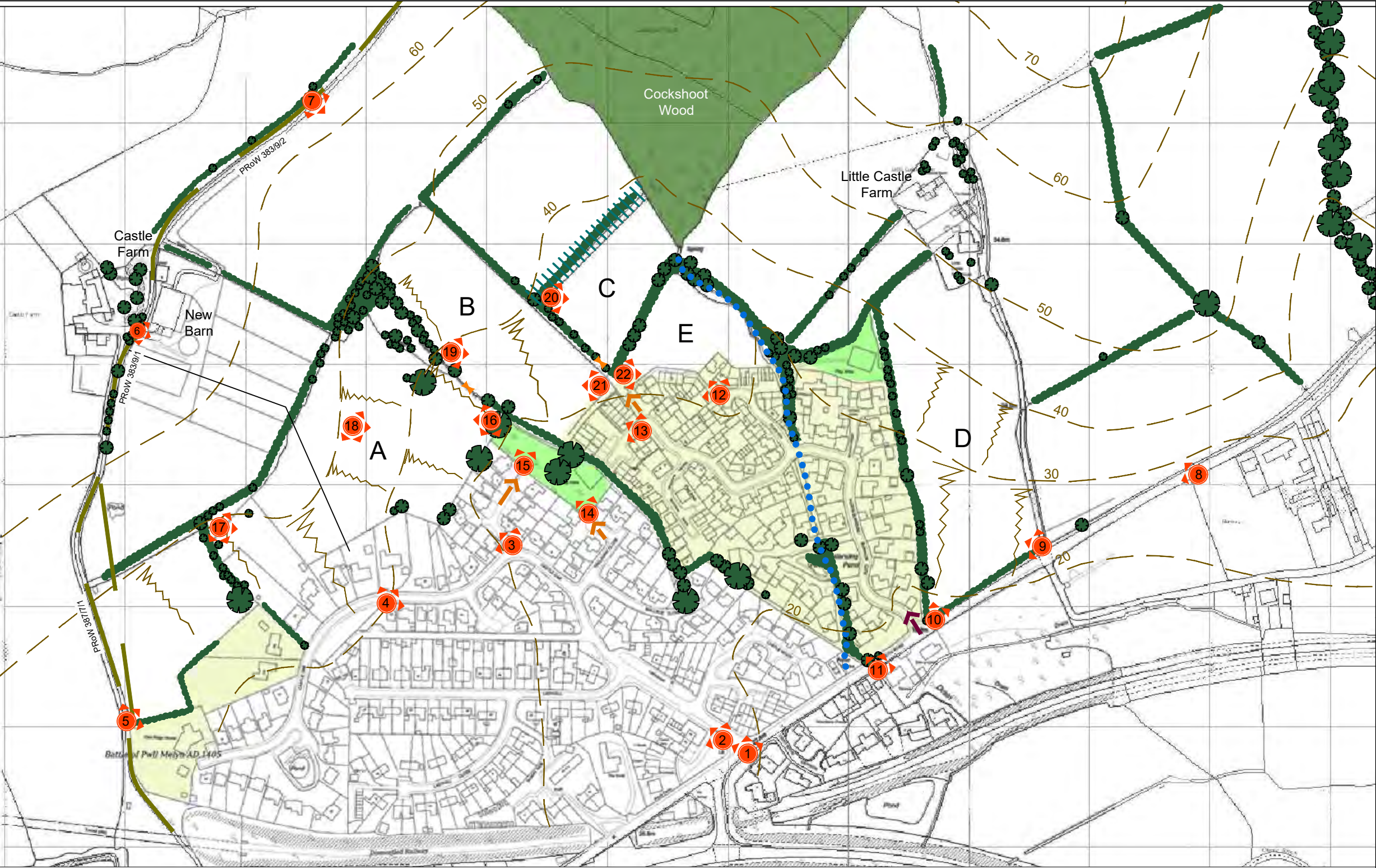
- 6.1 The Candidate Sites are not subject to national, regional or local nature conservation or archaeological designations, nor are they subject to any national landscape and / or visual designation. Although two tree preservation orders apply.
- 6.2 Land immediately to the south of the site comprises the urban edge of Usk including the relatively recently completed Burrium Gate development.
- 6.3 The assessment has found that through the adoption of the Design Guidelines the characteristics of the development will be in keeping with similar neighbouring development within Usk, delivered through sensitive and appropriate treatment of scale, form, materials and detailing. The proposals will not, therefore, result in any significant adverse effects on the stated characteristics of the wider LLCA U02 which are to be retained.
- 6.4 The appraisal has found that whilst the site displays characteristics of the Usk LLCA (U02), it is also influenced by its relationship to, and the proximity of the urban edge of Usk, which it abuts. This is particularly apparent in Area E and the lowermost parts of Areas A, B and D.
- 6.5 The Council has previously published its 'Initial Assessment of Sites against Sustainability Criteria' (the 'Initial Sustainability Assessment'), which includes an assessment of the Candidate Sites. In terms of landscape related issues, the 'Initial Sustainability Assessment' at item 16a queries the landscape sensitivity of the site in terms of the susceptibility of the site to change and the value of its landscape resources.
- 6.7 Item 16a uses terms such as 'unspoilt' and 'tranquil', which from desk and site surveys this appraisal has found cannot be applied to the candidate site as it is affected by urban development and activities within Usk. The site does form part of the backcloth to the town of steep hills and valley sides; but this landscape appraisal demonstrates that carefully designed development on the Candidate Site including the eastern part of the site would not unacceptably impact the setting of the town when viewed from the surrounding landscape and townscape.
- 6.6 Item 16b states that the landscape has no capacity for housing as it rises higher than existing hillside development, with the hillsides prominent in views from valleys to the south. Contrary to this opinion, the findings of the site survey suggest that controlling the maximum contour level at which development would be located would avoid encroachment onto that part of the hillside that is visible from the Usk valley to the south, thereby retaining many of the characteristics of the rural backdrop.
- 6.7 The potential for skyline intrusion through the development on the eastern part (Area D) of the site when viewed from Monmouth Road is also noted by the Council under item 16b. Again, the landscape appraisal and site survey has carefully considered views from Monmouth Road and suggests that by setting a maximum contour level, development could be kept below the skyline when viewed from much of the road.
- 6.8 Consideration should be given to limiting built form within Areas A and B, to below the 40m AOD contour. A similar approach was adopted for neighbouring development on the northern edge of Castle Oak and should be considered for proposed properties within the northern most parts of Areas A and B. Development should be limited to single storey dwellings in the most visually prominent parts of these areas, to limit the potential visual impact upon receptors in the surrounding landscape. By adopting these locational and building height restrictions, development would be maintained below a certain level, above which there is no other development within the local area except for scattered farmsteads and some individual properties set on the valley slopes which is a characteristic feature of the local area and would be maintained.
- 6.9 Potential views towards the site from publicly accessible roads and rights of way have been assessed.

- 6.10 These views are limited to walkers using a short length of footpath to the west and northwest; occupiers of vehicles using Monmouth Road to the east and south of the site; receptors using roads and paths within Burrium Gate and Castle Oak estates; and receptors using roads and paths within the Usk valley to the south including the Usk Valley Walk.
- 6.11 Private views may also be gained from residential properties within Usk, from Little Castle Farm, and properties neighbouring Rose Cottage to the east.
- 6.12 Careful siting of the development and control of the maximum height will minimise the impact on views. Users of Monmouth Road would experience the most notable impact, but occupiers of vehicles using this stretch of road already have views to the urban edge of Usk and ongoing development.
- 6.13 Existing landscape features comprise hedgerows and trees that subdivide areas within the site. These would be retained and enhanced to add maturity to the new development and would serve to reduce the perceived scale of development whilst absorbing and integrating it within its landscape setting.
- 6.14 Established field gates or natural breaks in the hedgerows would be used to provide access between the site areas.
- 6.15 Retention and enhancement of the existing vegetation lends itself to the establishment of a network of green routes through the site that would also connect to existing and proposed open space.
- 6.16 In conclusion, the south-facing slope of the land above Usk is already influenced by the residential developments on the fringes of the town which extend up these slopes and cannot be described as 'unspoilt' or 'tranquil'.
- 6.17 The assessment has found that through the adoption of recommendations within the Design Guidelines the characteristics of the development will be in keeping with similar neighbouring development within Usk, delivered through sensitive and appropriate treatment of scale, form, materials and detailing.
- 6.18 Careful design and control of the maximum height and elevation of development and retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows and hedgerow trees will ensure that landscape and visual impacts are minimised. It is therefore considered that, with such design controls in place, that Candidate Sites CS0113, 0114 and 0115 are suitable for the proposed residential allocation.

7 REFERENCES

- Ref. 1: The Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, (2013): Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition);
- Ref. 2: Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 11 (2021);
- Ref. 3: Monmouthshire County Council Local Development Plan (LDP) 2011-2021 (Adopted 27th February 2014);
- Ref. 4: Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Final Report (October 2020);
- Ref. 5: LANDMAP - the Welsh Landscape Baseline (accessed August 2020); and,
- Ref. 6: National Landscape Character Areas (Wales).

FIGURES



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Rev	Description	By	CB	Date



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Client **Johnsey Estates**

Project **Land at Usk**

Title **Site Location and Context Plan**

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked by
For Planning	GP	AS

Job Ref	Scale @ A3	Date Created
JSL4176	1:25,000	Feb 2010

RPS Drawing / Figure Number	Rev
Figure 1	A

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Location Plan
Scale 1:25,000

Context Plan
Scale NTRS

Photoview locations

Candidate Site Areas reference

Contours

Hedge/hedgerow trees

Woodland

Shelter belt

Approximate gateway location

Existing Public Footpath

Slope

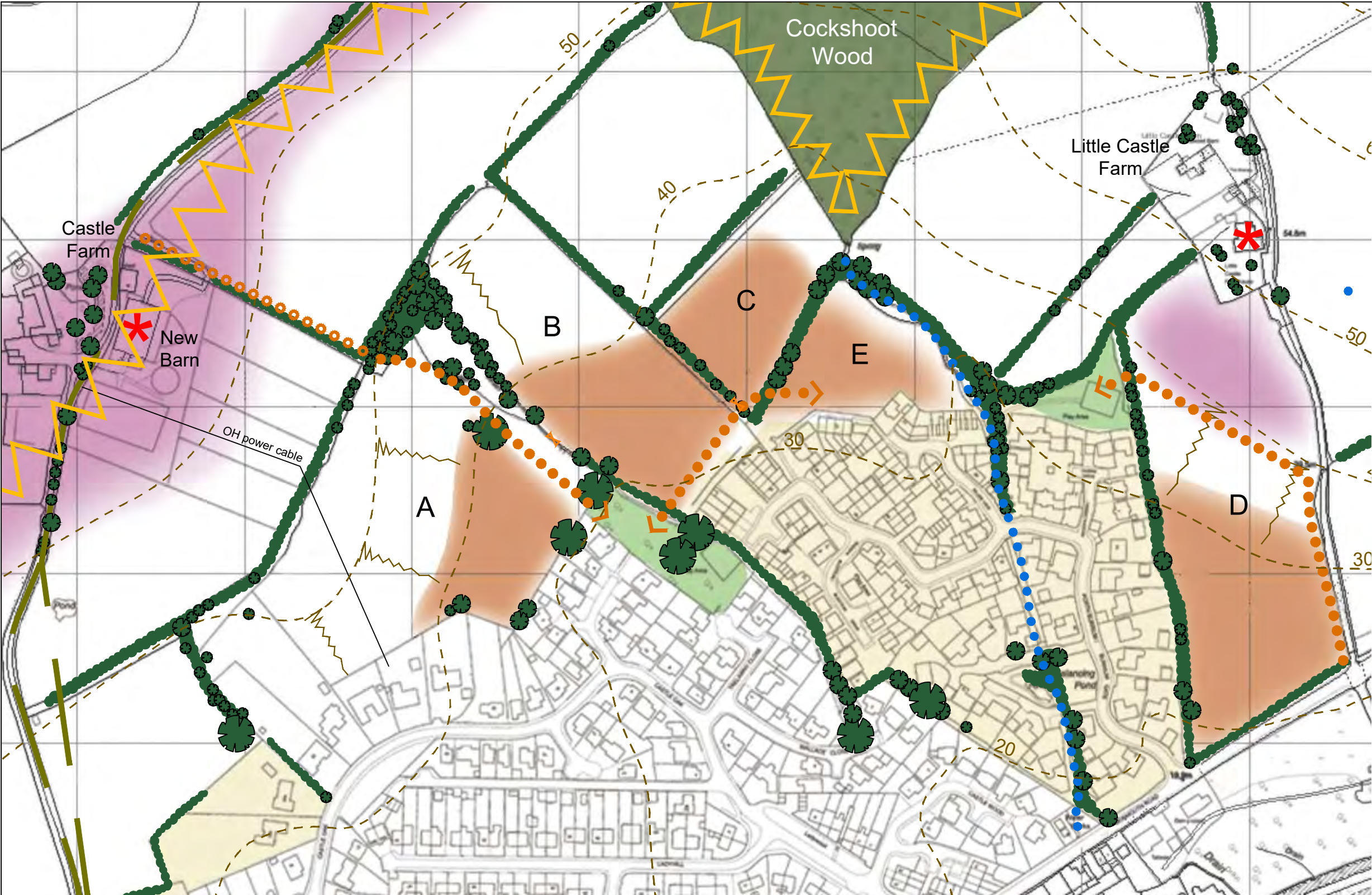
Burrium Gate Play Area

Burrium Gate

Pedestrian Access

Vehicular access

Other recent residential development



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Client **Johnsey Estates Limited**

Project **Land at Castle Oak, Usk**

Title **Opportunities and Constraints**

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked by
For Planning	GP	AS

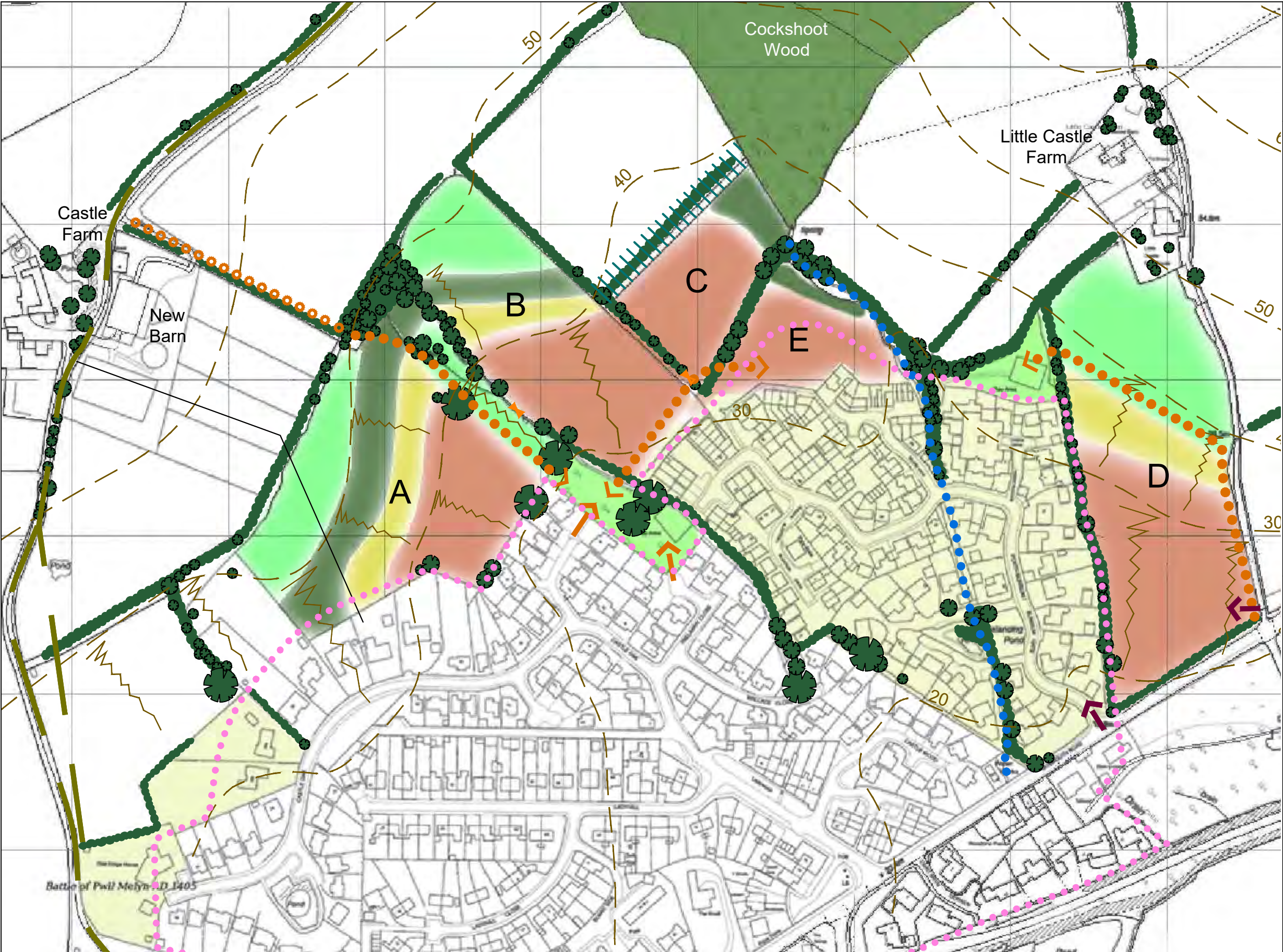
Job Ref	Scale @ A3	Date Created
JSL4176	1:25,000	Feb 2010

RPS Drawing / Figure Number	Rev
Figure 2	A

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- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | Focal Point | | Existing Public Open Space |
| | Steep Slope | | Existing Public Footpath |
| | Established Vegetation/structural landscape feature | | Prominent Land Form |
| | Woodland | | Less prominent/lower lying land form suitable for development |
| | Watercourse | | Visual barrier |

- | | |
|--|--|
| | Potential pedestrian linkage on and off-site |
| | Potential off-site pedestrian route (subject to agreement with others) |
| | Candidate Site Area reference |



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Rev	Description	By	CB	Date



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Client Johnesy Estates Limited

Project Land at Castle Oak, Usk

Title Potential Development Areas

Status	Drawn By	PM/Checked by
For Planning	GP	AS

Job Ref	Scale @ A3	Date Created
JSL4176	1:25,000	Feb 2010

RPS Drawing / Figure Number	Rev
Figure 3	A

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Candidate Site Area reference	Woodland	Potential built development area and curtilage	Potential vehicular access	Usk Settlement Boundary
Contours	Shelterbelt	Open Space	Potential pedestrian route	Public Footpath
Hedge/hedgerow trees	Existing Public Open Space	Structural buffer planting	Potential off-site pedestrian route (subject to agreement with others)	



 Viewpoint 1 (Summer): Ladyhill	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.1
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	Viewpoint 2 (Summer): Monmouth Road at junction with Ladyhill	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.2
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 Viewpoint 5 (Summer): Public Right of Way 383/7/1	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.5
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	Viewpoint 6 (Summer): Public Right of Way 383/9/1 at Castle Farm	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.6
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 Viewpoint 7 (Summer): Public Right of Way 383/9/1	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.7
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Little Castle Farm



 Viewpoint 11 (Summer): Monmouth Road	Land at Castle Oak, Usk, Monmouthshire JSL4176	Date of photograph: 19/08/2021	Horizontal field of view: 39.6° To be viewed at comfortable arms length	Figure: 4.11
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Area E















Burrium Gate



Burrium Gate











APPENDIX A:

Extract from Monmouthshire Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study Update (October 2020)

SUMMARY

Key characteristics

Steeply rising hill and valley sides up to the Gwehelog.

Medium-sized irregular pastoral fields with low-cut hedges and blocks of woodland such as Cockshoot Wood and forestry eg Park Wood.

Scattered farmsteads and rural dwellings and house at Beech Hill.

The area forms the backcloth and positive approach to the settlement and valleys in views from the south, east and west and directly links with the castle.

The isolated white dwelling at Little Castle Farm is a local landmark on the hillside.

Housing estate development is encroaching on its lower slopes to the north and east.

There is a listed building at Beech Hill.

Cockshoot Wood and other woods are SINC.

Landscape and visual sensitivity to housing High/Medium

The susceptibility of the area lies in its important role for Usk in providing an unspoilt, tranquil and rural backcloth of steep hills and valleys sides of woods and pasture defined by the Usk to the west and the Olway Brook to the south. It links into Usk Castle contributing to its setting. The woods and pastures also provide a network of positive habitats which assist connectivity and there are pleasant public footpaths running through the area connecting the settlement with the wider landscape of the Gwehelog. The value of the area lies in its scenic qualities as rising hill and valley sides backcloth with woodland and pasture , the SINC, the listed building at Beech Hill and the PROWs and regional cycle route through the area. LANDMAP value is outstanding for cultural landscapes and high for visual and sensory. The vast majority of the area is considered sensitive to housing development but one small discreet site may have some potential- see CS0114.

Does the area or its attributes contribute to the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act Goals ?

- ☐ a prosperous Wales ☒ a resilient Wales ☒ a more equal Wales ☐ a globally responsible Wales
- ☐ a Wales of cohesive communities ☒ a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language ☒ a healthier Wales

VALUE

Landmap Context		Aspect area value		Aspect area value	
Geological Landscapes		25% high, 75% moderate		Landscape Habitats Moderate	
Historical Landscapes		Moderate		Cultural Landscapes Outstanding	
Visual and Sensory		High			
Designations					
Landscape designations comments					
National Park		AONB			
Historic/archaeology designations comments		Listed building at Beech Hill			
Historic Parks and Gardens		Hist. Parks and Gardens Setting		Listed Building Yes	
Landscape of Hist. Interest		Scheduled Monument		Conservation Area WHS	
Biodiversity designations comments		River Usk adjacent is a pSAC and SSSI. Most woodlands including Cockshoot Wood are SINCs.			
SAC	NNR	SINC Yes	SSSI	RAMSAR	
Recreation Factors					
Country Park		National Trail		National/Regional Cycle Route Yes	

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND SUSCEPTIBILITY

Landscape Character Area

LCA Name Gwehelog Valleys LCA Number 17 also part of 15 0

Characteristics

Landform steeply rising hill and valley sides up to the Gwehelog

Landcover pasture and woodland/forestry plantation

Pattern

Settlement pattern scattered farmsteads and rural dwellings and house at Beech Hill

Woodland cover blocks of woodland such as Cockshoot Wood and forestry eg Park Wood, occasional hedgerow trees and trees along riparian corridors

Boundaries medium-sized irregular pastoral fields with mix of low-cut and outgrown hedges

☒ Presence of water small stream tributaries of the Usk and Olway Brook

Diversity diverse Scale medium

Sense of enclosure generally open with some enclosed areas in woodlands and steep valleys

Function of Area

Pastoral☒ Arable ☐ Horticulture☐ Recreation ☐ other☒

Comments pasture, woodland and forestry plantation

Functional relationship and connectivity

...with wider landscape significant ...with settlement limited

...with adjacent assessed area? some Corridor? ☐

Existing Habitat Connectivity ☒ Habitat Connectivity Opportunity ☒

the area may be managed as part of a wider landholding including land to the north and the Olway Brook to the south and has only one public right of way linking into the settlement. Existing habitat connectivity running north from the settlement edge on the hillside including woodland and pasture. Habitat connectivity opportunity to the north of the settlement associated with PROW.

Are adjacent assessed areas mutually reliant... ...visually? ☐ ...functionally ☐

Comments -

PERCEPTUAL SUSCEPTIBILITY

Skyline

Prominence/importance prominent Complexity simple

Comments the steep hills provide a skyline from various viewpoints, sometimes with woods on the skyline and sometimes hedgerows

Key views

To settlement ☐ the slopes provide a backcloth and positive approach to the settlement when viewed from the south, east and west

From settlement ☐ potential views from Usk Castle tower [in winter] and from bridges over the Usk

Landmarks Little Castle Farm noticeable as a minor landmark on hillside to north east of settlement

Detractors -

Intervisibility

Site observation high ...to key features ☐ ...from key places ☒

Comments hillsides noticeable from surrounding valley floors, and some intervisibility with castle

Tranquillity

Noise sources roads

Views of development one side 180 Presence of people infrequent

Summary high/medium

Comments the area has only a B road adjacent and a minor road running through it with one public footpath and limited views of the town and so is generally tranquil

Settlement edge

Pre C20th edge ☒ C20-21st edge ☒ Nature of edge negative Form of edge moderately indented

Comments whilst the relationship of the castle with the area is positive with a direct link, the recent

developments to the north east are creeping up the hillside, encroaching on the town's setting. These are also progressing east at Burrium Gate which is set down in the landscape to an extent to the south although rising northwards. The older linear development along Abergavenny Road is constrained by landform but is an undesirable northern extension of the settlement.

Visual relationship and connectivity

...with settlement significan ...with wider landscape some ...with adjacent assessed area some

☒ Setting

Comments the area acts as a hillside setting to the town in the valley and the castle linking into the Gwehelog to the north

Receptors	Sensitivity
viewpoints	high
rural residents	high
urban residents	high/medium
long distance/public footpaths	high

Comments there are potential views across the area from the castle, users of public footpaths and roads, rural residents within the area and from residents on the settlement edge

OTHER

Other factors the setting of Beech Hill should be conserved

Potential Improvements (if no development)

Mitigation (if development) -

APPENDIX B:

LANDMAP Evaluation of Aspect Areas (within Local Landscape Character Area U02)

LANDMAP Evaluation of Aspect Areas

In order to supplement the Landscape and Visual Statement and to inform any future assessment, the NRW LANDMAP level 3 data for each aspect layer within Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) U02: Usk was reviewed in accordance the 'LANDMAP Information Guidance Notes'. This included a review and summary of each aspect area within which LLCA U02 is located, including the following:

Visual and Sensory	Scenic Quality
	Integrity
	Character Evaluation
	Rarity
	Overall Evaluation
Geological Landscape	Value
	Rarity / Uniqueness
	Overall Evaluation
Landscape Habitats	Condition
	Value
	Connectivity/Cohesion
	Overall Evaluation
Cultural Landscape	Condition
	Group Value
	Rarity
	Overall Evaluation
Historic Landscape	Condition
	Value
	Overall Evaluation

The results of the mapping exercise are presented in table format in this appendix. All evaluations are as derived directly from the LANDMAP database, accessed August 2020.

Table B1.1: Visual and Sensory Evaluation Summary Table

Local Landscape Character Area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Scenic Quality	Integrity	Character	Rarity	Overall Evaluation
LLCA U02: Usk	Gwehelog (MNMTHVS017)	High	High	High	Moderate	High (The complex pattern of hills and valleys heavily wooded on steep valley sides and tops has a high scenic quality. Long views are possible to the Usk and valleys to the north. The area has a character unspoilt by development and a visual unity through its topography and landcover. The strong pattern of woodland and field boundaries reinforced by the distinctive settlement pattern gives the area a strong sense of place. The distinctly undulating terrain and tree cover is moderately rare in the county.)

Table B1.2: Geological Evaluation Summary Table

Local Landscape Character Area	Geological Aspect Areas	Value	Rarity/ Uniqueness	Overall Evaluation
LLCA U02: Usk	Gwehelog (MNMTHGL038)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate (Few notable sites/landforms recorded and geology known to be better exposed in adjoining areas.)

Table B1.3: Landscape Habitats Evaluation Summary Table

Local Landscape Character Area	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Condition	Value	Connectivity/ Cohesion	Overall Evaluation (Habitat and Species)
LLCA U02: Usk	Farmland W. of Raglan (MNMTHLH128)	Unassessed	Moderate	Unassessed	Moderate (Improved grassland and arable fields are generally quite low ecological value habitat but there are a considerable number of key species present which increases the evaluation to moderate. Encourage farmers to participate in agri-environmental schemes. Consider the requirements of the key species present when

undertaking management. Conserve/enhance hedgerows. Improved grassland is ubiquitous in lowland Wales. Encourage farmers to participate in agri-environmental schemes. Not expanding habitat types. Not a particularly sensitive habitat type as improved grassland is already quite low ecological value. Improved grassland is generally quite low ecological value habitat and there is a limited amount of other more ecologically valuable habitat within the Aspect Area There are a large number of key species records so could be evaluated as high but it must be borne in mind that this is a large Aspect Area so everything being equal you would expect proportionally more key species being present. It is felt that the large number of key species present is more a function of the large size than its actual value for key species.)

Table B1.4: Historic Evaluation Summary Table

Local Landscape Character Area	Historic Aspect Areas	Condition	Value	Overall Evaluation
LLCA U02: Usk	Usk Castle Park (MNMTHHL070)	Unassessed	High	High (It is considered this area should have at least a high overall evaluation, on the basis of the significant association with Usk castle as a former medieval deer park. Whilst the condition has not been assessed, it is felt this would be at least of moderate value and for this reason an overall numerical result of 13 points would have been achieved. Therefore Overall Value on this basis would be High.)