Land off Rowhook Road

Rowhook Hill,

Rowhook,

West Sussex

RH12 3PU

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

By

Landscape Perspective Ltd

25th November 2026

On behalf of

James Lord

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1. Introduction & Scope

Background & Project Brief: Context of the proposed development

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application site lies within a parcel of approximately 4 acres off Rowhook Road, around 500 m from the centre of Rowhook. **Figure 01** shows the application site and the wider tree farm. Appendix A is supplied separately as **Appendix 1: Figures and Photographs.**

1.2 The applicant purchased the land in 2023 to continue the business of a Christmas Tree Farm which reflects the site's historic use and represents a continuation of an established rural activity.

The application proposals

1.3 The planning application is retrospective in nature and seeks to regularise the engineering works comprising of the regrading of land and the formation of an area of hard surfacing, as shown on the submitted plan by Highway Planning Ltd. **(26.91.001)**

1.4 The purpose of such works is to assist in the re-establishment of the Christmas Tree Farm on site, and the hardstanding is intended for vehicles to load/unload trees, manoeuvre, storage and other operational activities, while the land is to return substantially to Christmas tree production.

1.5 A track has been installed to provide access to an area of hard surfacing from which relevant operations, maintenance and harvesting can be undertaken.

1.6 The applicant reports that the existing Christmas tree crop was removed in November 2024 in response to Forestry Commission plant-health requirements associated with eight-toothed spruce bark beetle. **Figure 02 in Appendix A** shows the reported affected area. The clearance left much of the tree farm open, with scattered stands of silver birch.

1.8 As a consequence, the wider site currently presents a more open and operational appearance than would ordinarily be the case within an active Christmas tree plantation and may not represent its long-term condition. For the purposes of this Landscape and Visual Appraisal document, the wider site in which the application site sits will be referred to as the 'tree farm'.

Instructions

1.9 James Lord instructed Landscape Perspective Ltd in September 2026 to prepare a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) in response to Horsham District Council's request for further information about planning application DC/26/0185, concerning regrading of land levels to form a hardstanding associated with horticultural use.

1.10 The Senior Planning Officer asked for the LVA to address the following:
The officer's concern was that the scale and extent of the hardstanding and associated earthworks had introduced an engineered and potentially urbanising feature into the countryside. The officer requested landscape evidence to assess the resulting harm and inform consideration of whether the extent of the works was justified.

1.11 The Senior Planning Officer also stated that the LVA should also include mitigation measures which can be relied on to be implemented.

1.12 This appraisal distinguishes the condition observed after the works from the limited evidence available about the pre-works landscape and assesses how the site could change with continued operation and proposed mitigation.

Site Location & Study Area

Site Location and boundary conditions

1.13 The tree farm lies approximately 500m to the southeast of the hamlet of Rowhook, and south of Rowhook Road, situated between some residential properties, the semi-detached properties of 'Mulberry House' and '1 Rowhook Hill House' to the west, and the detached property known as 'Colts Bushes', together with semi-detached properties immediately to the south of Colts Bushes known as 'Redroof cottage' and 'Rivendell' to the east. **(Figure 01 Appendix A)**

1.14 'Mulberry House' and '1 Rowhook Hill House' have extensive curtilages consisting of gardens woodland and grass paddocks. **(Aerial photograph Figure 03 Appendix A)**

1.15 The boundaries with Mulberry House and Colts Bushes flank the tree farm. The applicant has installed deer fencing around the site. Close-boarded fencing on the Mulberry House side

provides screening alongside existing vegetation but is on neighbouring land, its retention is assumed. (**Appendix A, photographs 06 and 13–15).**

Study area

1.16 The extent of the study area has been informed by the nature, scale and context of the proposed development, together with an appraisal of the site's landscape setting. In accordance with the principles of GLVIA3, the study area has been defined on a proportionate basis to reflect the potential geographic extent of the likely significant landscape and visual effects. A study area extending to approximately 1 kilometre from the application site has been adopted.

1.17 The desk review and site observations indicate that potential visibility is mainly local. No longer-distance views of the hardstanding were identified in the material reviewed. The 1 km study area is considered proportionate to the works and their setting but it does not establish that the development is invisible beyond that distance. (**Appendix A, Figure 04).**

Purpose and Scope of the Landscape and Visual Assessment

Purpose of the Assessment

1.18 This appraisal evaluates changes to landscape character and features, and separately to people's views and visual amenity, arising from the regrading, retained hardstanding and related activity insofar as relevant to the application. It describes the level and nature of effects where the evidence supports a judgement; it does not make an EIA significance finding.

1.19 The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the principles set out in the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3)* (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013). The methodology has also been informed by relevant national planning policy, the Development Plan and published landscape character assessments applicable to the site and its surrounding area.

Scope of the Assessment

1.20 The assessment considers the completed works as observed, any further reinstatement works and long-term operation of the hardstanding in the lower part of the tree farm.

1.21 The assessment includes:

- a review of the planning policy framework relevant to landscape and visual matters;
- a description of the site and its landscape context;
- identification of the landscape character of the site and surrounding area, with reference to published landscape character assessments;
- identification of landscape features and elements contributing to local landscape character;
- assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape resource to the proposed development;
- assessment of the likely effects on landscape character during both the construction and operational phases;
- identification of representative visual receptors and viewpoints;
- assessment of the likely effects on visual amenity experienced by representative receptor groups;
- consideration of embedded design measures and proposed landscape mitigation;
- assessment of residual landscape and visual effects following implementation of mitigation measures; and consideration of cumulative landscape and visual effects where relevant and proportionate.

1.22 The assessment has been prepared on the basis of a proportionate approach, reflecting the nature and scale of the proposals and the characteristics of the receiving landscape.

Key Issues Identified for Assessment

1.23 Having regard to the nature of the proposals and the characteristics of the site and its surroundings, the principal landscape and visual issues requiring assessment are considered to be:

- the extent to which the hard standing area would alter the existing pattern, character and appearance of the tree farm.
- the extent to which the hard standing area would maintain or enhance the established rural character, qualities and setting of the site and of the surrounding rural landscape and the contribution of the site to local landscape character;
- the landscape effects arising from the formation of the hard standing area and the associated site operation facilities that are required to be located upon it including storage container, parking,

- the retention and protection of existing landscape features, including trees, hedgerows and other vegetation that contribute to landscape character and visual containment;
- the integration of the proposed development within its landscape setting through the retention of existing vegetation and implementation of appropriate landscape mitigation and enhancement measures.
- the potential visibility of the development from surrounding roads, Public Rights of Way, neighbouring properties and other publicly accessible viewpoints;
- the effects on the visual amenity of nearby residents, recreational users and other representative visual receptors;
- the degree to which existing landform, vegetation and built development would filter or screen views of the proposed development;

1.24 The appraisal addresses the degree of landscape and visual change associated with the works and whether that change could be reduced through measures capable of being secured and maintained.

2. Planning Policy & Guidance Context

2.1 This chapter of the LVA has been set out using a three-tier policy hierarchy:

- National Planning Policy (NPPF),
- District Planning Policy (Horsham District Planning Framework 2015), and
- Parish Planning Policy.

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026)

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework published on 17 August 2026 replaced the December 2024 framework. Chapters 14 (Achieving well-designed places) and 19 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment) provide the national context for considering the scheme's response to its setting, retention of valued landscape features and integration of development. The appraisal considers these principles; it does not determine compliance with the Framework as a whole.
(Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, National Planning Policy Framework, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework)

District Policy

Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) 2015

2.3 Horsham District Council identifies the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) 2015 as its current adopted local plan. The site lies in Horsham District and outside the South Downs National Park as described in the appraisal. Source: Horsham District Council, Read the current Local Plan, https://www.horsham.gov.uk/planning/local-plan/read-the-current-local-plan.

Policy 25: District Character and the Natural Environment

2.4 This is the primary district-level landscape policy for a district where the rural qualities of Horsham district are highly valued by those who live and work there. The policy requires development to protect, conserve, and enhance landscape character, taking into account distinct landscape types.

2.5 The Policy is set out below:

'*Natural Environment and landscape character of the District, including the landscape, landform and development pattern, together with protected landscapes and habitats will be protected against inappropriate development. The Council will support development proposals which:*

1. *Protects, conserves and enhances the landscape and townscape character, taking into account areas identified as being of landscape importance, the individual settlement characteristics, and maintains settlement separation.*
2. *Maintain and enhances the Green Infrastructure Network and addresses any identified deficiencies in the District.*
3. *Maintains and enhances the existing network of geological sites and biodiversity, including safeguarding existing designated sites and species, and ensures no net loss of wider biodiversity and provides net gains in biodiversity where possible.*
4. *Conserve and where possible enhance the setting of the South Downs National Park.'*

Policy 26: Countryside Protection

2.6 This policy strictly controls development outside defined built-up area boundaries (BUAB) to ensure the rural character of the countryside is protected and maintained and seeks to protect the countryside from inappropriate development whilst recognising that proposals may be acceptable where they conserve landscape character and deliver wider planning benefits. ***(Refer to Figure 11 Built up area boundaries Appendix A)***

2.7 The Policy is set out below:

'*Outside built-up area boundaries, the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside will be protected against inappropriate development. Any proposal must be essential to its countryside location, and in addition meet one of the following criteria:*

1) Support the needs of agriculture or forestry;

2) Enable the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste;

3) Provide for quiet informal recreational use; or4.Enable the sustainable development of rural areas. In addition, proposals must be of a scale appropriate to its countryside character and location. Development will be considered acceptable where it does not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase int he overall level of activity in the countryside, and protects, and/or conserves, and/or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located, including;

4) The development pattern of the area, its historical and ecological qualities, tranquillity and sensitivity to change;

5) The pattern of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, trees, waterbodies and other features; and

6) The landform of the area.

Adopted policies map

2.8 Appendix A, Figure 11 shows a statistical Built-Up Areas 2011 layer from MAGIC. It does not show the adopted built-up area boundary for Policy 26. Use the Council's adopted policies mapping, including Inset 14 Slinfold where relevant, to verify the site's planning status.

Parish-Level Planning Policy

2.9 Horsham District Council confirms that the Slinfold Neighbourhood Plan has been made. Figure 12 in Appendix A shows the neighbourhood plan area. Relevant strategic objectives include those listed below:

1) Protect and enhance the rural character, heritage assets and biodiversity of the Parish.

3) Ensure development does not take place in areas at risk of flooding or where it may cause flooding elsewhere.

5) To retain the Parish's rural identity and protect its natural landscape.

9) Encourage existing businesses to prosper and attract new businesses with high-quality employment opportunities.

10) Encourage and support small businesses throughout the Parish, including home working.

3. Methodology

3.1 This non-EIA Landscape and Visual Appraisal follows the principles of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition (GLVIA3; Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013), having regard to the Landscape Institute's Statement of Clarification 1/13 for non-EIA projects.

3.2 Landscape effects and visual effects are identified and appraised separately. The level and nature of effect are matters of professional judgement; the appraisal does not make a formal EIA significance finding or determine overall planning acceptability.

Framework & Approach

Assessment Categories & Terminology

3.3 In place of determining EIA significance, this appraisal adopts a structured methodology to identify the overall **Level of Effect**. In accordance with GLVIA3, landscape and visual effects are assessed separately, recognising that they relate to different receptors, whilst applying a consistent assessment framework. The assessment considers the **Sensitivity** of each landscape or visual receptor (Table 1) and the **Magnitude of Change** resulting from the proposed development (Table 2). These are then combined, using professional judgement and the guidance matrix in Table 3, to determine the overall **Level of Effect**.

Nature of Effect:

3.4 All identified levels of effect are further categorized as:

- Adverse (harmful to character/amenity),
- Neutral (neither enhances nor harms baseline conditions), or
- Beneficial (enhances or improves landscape quality or visual amenity)

3.5 The engineered landform and retained hardstanding are treated as long-term physical changes. Temporary construction activity and clutter, seasonal operation, changing crop cover and mitigation establishment are considered separately and are not assumed to be permanent or irreversible.

3.6 The appraisal distinguishes the observed post-works condition, early operation (including the first year after mitigation), establishment at about year 5, and longer-term operation at about

year 15. These periods are qualitative, not separate rated scenarios. The photographs were taken in October before leaf fall and therefore no verified leaf-off survey was available.

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL BASELINE

3.7 GLVIA3 Para. 5.3 states that "*landscape baseline studies should record the character of the landscape should also deal with the value attached to the landscape*…"

3.8 GLVIA3 Para. 6.24 states that a baseline report should also combine information on:

- "*the type and relative numbers of people (visual receptors) likely to be affected,*
- *making clear the activities they are likely to be involved in;*
- *the location, nature and characteristics of the chosen representative, specific and illustrative viewpoints, with details of the visual receptors likely to be affected at each;*
- *the nature, composition and characteristics of the existing views experienced at these viewpoints, including direction of view;*
- *the visual characteristics of the existing views, for example, the nature and extent of the skyline, aspects of visual scale and proportion, especially with respect to any particular horizontal or vertical emphasis, and any key foci;*
- *elements, such as landform, buildings or vegetation, which may interrupt, filter or otherwise influence the views.* "

Receptor Sensitivity

3.9 GLVIA3, paragraph 5.39 states that "*Landscape receptors need to be assessed firstly in terms of their sensitivity, combining judgements of their susceptibility to the type of change or development proposed and the value attached to the landscape*. GLVIA3 Para. 5.40 goes on to describe 'susceptibility to change' as "*the ability of the landscape receptor (whether it be the overall character or quality/condition of a particular landscape type or area, or an individual element and/or feature, or a particular aesthetic and perceptual aspect) to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies.*"

3.10 Landscape receptors are those areas, qualities or components of the landscape that would be affected by a proposed development. Visual receptors are those people who would be

affected by changes in views or visual amenity at different places as a result of a proposed development.

3.11 Factors that will influence professional judgement when assessing the degree to which a particular landscape type or area can accommodate change arising from a particular development, without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation would typically include:

- the value placed on the landscape;
- condition or the physical state of the landscape;
- the nature of existing land uses;
- the pattern and scale of the landscape;
- visual enclosure/openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors;
- the scope for mitigation that would be in keeping with the existing landscape; and
- the contribution of the receptor to landscape character.
- the degree to which the particular element or characteristic can be replaced or substituted.

3.12 Landscape value is the importance attached to a landscape, sometimes expressing national or local consensus, because of its quality, which may include scenic and/or aesthetic qualities and cultural and other conservation associations. In most cases, this is indicated by the presence or absence of a landscape planning designation such as a National Park indicating a landscape of national value. Many local landscape designations have been phased out in favour of the landscape character approach.

3.13 Undesignated areas of the landscape may also be of local value and indications of this are likely to be present in the form of documented, locally valued, cultural / natural heritage and scenic or aesthetic qualities such as ‘wildness’ or the presence of well-recognised viewing positions. It should be noted that a landscape of high value may not always equate to areas of high landscape quality and that areas of low landscape value may contain areas of higher landscape quality.

3.14 GLVIA3 Para. 5.20 sets out information that will contribute to an understanding of value, including-

- "*Information about areas recognised by statute such as (depending on jurisdiction) National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Areas of Outstanding Beauty;*
- *Information about Heritage Coasts, where relevant;*
- *Local planning documents, which may show the extent of and policies for local planning designations;*
- *Information on the status of individual or groups of features such as, for example, Conservation Areas, listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders, important hedgerows, cultural heritage elements such as historic landscapes of various forms, archaeological sites of importance and other special historical or cultural heritage sites such as battlefields or historic gardens.*
- *Art and literature, including tourism literature and promotional material such as postcards, which may indicate the value attached to the identity of particular areas (for example 'Constable Country' or specially promoted views)*
- *Material on landscapes of local or community interest, such as local green spaces, village greens or allotments.*"

3.15 One of the options for assessing the value of landscapes is provided in GLVIA3 Box 5.1, which sets out the following range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes:

- *"Landscape quality (condition): A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements;*
- *Scenic quality: The term used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses);*
- *Rarity: The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type;*
- *Representativeness: Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements, which are considered particularly important examples;*
- *Conservation interests: The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;*
- *Recreation value: Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important;*
- *Perceptual aspects: A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity;*

- *Associations: Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area."*

3.16 Receptor sensitivity is expressed as high, medium or low. Landscape sensitivity combines the landscape's value and susceptibility to this type of change. Visual sensitivity combines the susceptibility of people to changes in their views and the value attached to those views. The visibility of the development and existing screening are considered in the magnitude judgement, not used on their own to reduce sensitivity. Table 1 gives indicative criteria.

Table 1: Receptor Sensitivity

Criteria		
	Landscape Receptors	**Visual Receptors**
High	Landscape with important components or of a particularly distinctive character, susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed. Typically, a recognised landscape resource of strong landscape structure with distinct features worthy of conservation and valued at a national level. May contain occasional detracting features.	Occupants of residential properties and people engaged in outdoor sporting and active/ passive recreational facilities, including users of Public Rights of Way. People at tourist destinations, beauty spots, picnic areas and locations for viewing important landscape features.
Medium	Landscape with relatively ordinary, moderately valued characteristics and positive character that is reasonably tolerant of changes of the type proposed. Value may be expressed through consensus, demonstrable use or non-official publications and may include designation at local level. May have some detracting features.	Occupants of residential properties with limited views due to obstruction towards the proposed development. Users of local side roads and country lanes.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape with few features of value or interest	Indoor receptors whose primary activity is unrelated to the view (e.g. occupants

Criteria		
	Landscape Receptors	**Visual Receptors**
	and a weak character. Potentially tolerant of substantial change of the type proposed. Typically, of no features worthy of conservation, a weak landscape structure, some evidence of degradation and frequent detracting features.	of offices, commercial or industrial premises), together with users of main roads and minor urban roads, who typically experience transient views.

Assessment of Magnitude of Change

Landscape Magnitude of Change

3.17 Landscape effects are defined by the Landscape Institute as "Effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right" (GLVIA3 Glossary).

3.18 Landscape effects are assessed by considering the scale and extent of proposed development, which may include the loss or addition of particular features, changes to landscape quality and changes to landscape character. The main factors to be considered are discussed as follows:

- Changes to landscape elements: the addition of new elements or the removal of existing elements such as trees, vegetation, and buildings and other elements which may be characteristic of the landscape character type;
- Changes to landscape qualities: degradation or erosion of landscape elements and patterns, and perceptual characteristics, particularly those that form key characteristic elements of landscape character types; and
- Changes to landscape character: landscape character may be affected through the incremental effect on characteristic elements, landscape patterns and qualities (including perceptual characteristics) and the cumulative addition of new features, the magnitude of which is sufficient to alter the overall landscape character type of a particular area;
- Examples and further guidance on the evaluation of landscape magnitude of change are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Magnitude of Change

Criteria		
	Landscape	**Visual**
High	A prominent change that may be large in scale and / or extent and include the loss of key landscape characteristics, or the addition of new features or elements that would become the characteristics of the landscape, changing the overall landscape quality and character.	The proposals form a significant and immediately apparent part of the scene, appearing as a prominent and contrasting feature.
Medium	A noticeable / prominent change of more limited scale and extent including the loss of some key landscape characteristics or elements, or the addition of some new features or elements, that would potentially change the landscape character	Noticeable alteration that is clearly evident but does not fundamentally alter the view.
Low	A noticeable change affecting small areas of landscape character where the proposed scheme would not quite fit into the landform and scale of the landscape or would add new features or elements of limited characterising influence.	Minor changes to the view, affecting a small proportion of the view that may be obliquely viewed or partly screened and/or appearing in the background landscape. May be a transient view obtained over short periods and capable of being missed by the casual observer.
Negligible	A change affecting relatively small areas of landscape character where the proposed scheme would largely complement the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and existing	Barely perceptible change with little influence on the receptor.

Criteria		
	Landscape	**Visual**
	landscape quality would be substantially conserved.	
None	There would be no change to the receptor.	No change

3.19 Effective mitigation measures and design may reduce the magnitude of change and the resultant residual effects. The proposed development may have both direct (physical) and indirect effects on the landscape, including effects perceived from outside a landscape character area.

Visual Magnitude of Change

3.20 Visual effects are concerned wholly with the effect of the development on views and the general visual amenity. The visual effects are identified for different receptors (people) who will experience the view at their places of residence, during recreational activities, at work, or when travelling through the area. The visual effects may include the following:

- Visual effect: a change to an existing static view, sequential views, or wider visual amenity as a result of development or the loss of particular landscape elements or features already present in the view.
- Cumulative visual effects: the cumulative or incremental visibility of a proposed development may be added to the existing baseline presence of development to yield a combined effect which may or may not be visually significant.
- Visual effects are assessed by considering the sensitivity of the visual receptor and the proposed magnitude of change. The main factors to consider are the activity of the receptor (people) at the viewpoint location, the importance or popularity of the view and / or typical numbers of viewers. Other factors include the location and context of the viewpoint.
- The visual experience from a tourist destination, for example, could involve either the key views to or from the main attraction, or those from the carpark / service area. Whilst views from carparks / service areas may still be experienced by receptors of inherently

higher sensitivity, these types of views may not be considered of higher value or sensitivity.

3.21 The magnitude of visual change is described by reference to the following:

- **Scale of Change:** The scale of change in the view (including horizontal and vertical Angle of View affected) is determined by the loss or addition of features in the view and changes in the composition and extent of view affected. This can in part be described objectively by reference to numbers of new objects visible and the horizontal / vertical angle;
- **Contrast:** The degree of contrast or integration of any new features or changes in the landscape, with the existing, or remaining, landscape elements and characteristics in terms of mass, scale, colour, form and texture. Developments which contrast or appear incongruous in terms of colour, scale and form are likely to be more visible and have a higher magnitude of change.
- **Distance:** The proximity and distance from the development can be provided objectively and often provides a strong indicator of magnitude, subject to any intervening screening of the development by landform, vegetation, or buildings;
- **Speed:** The speed at which the development may be viewed will affect how long the view is experienced and the likelihood of the development being particularly noticed by people travelling in cars compared to those who may be walking and able to stop and 'take in' a view;
- **Angle of View:** The angle of view from the main direction of view may be considered in terms **of** whether the development is experienced directly or more obliquely. Road users are generally more aware of the views in the direction of travel, whilst train passengers are more aware of views perpendicular to their direction of travel. Elevated views are likely to reveal more of the development, whereas low level views are more likely to be screened by intervening built form and vegetation;
- **Screening:** Development may be wholly or partly screened by landform, vegetation (seasonal) and or buildings. Conversely, open views, particularly from landscapes where this is a characteristic, are likely to experience more of the development;
- **Skyline / Background:** Whether a development would be viewed against the skyline, or a background landscape, may affect the level of contrast and magnitude, for example, skyline developments may appear more noticeable, particularly where they affect open and uninterrupted horizons; and

- **Duration:** The duration of the change, whether temporary or long term, intermittent or continuous, seasonal due to periodic management or leaf fall, is a further factor for consideration.

Overall Level of Effect

3.22 The overall **Level of Landscape and Visual Effect** is determined by combining the assessed receptor sensitivity with the magnitude of change. Table 3 provides a guide to the professional judgement applied when determining the overall level of effect. The matrix is intended to assist, rather than replace, professional judgement, and the final assessment reflects the specific characteristics of each receptor and the nature of the proposed development.

Table 3: Level of Landscape and Visual Effect Matrix

Sensitivity	High magnitude	MEDIUM magnitude	LOW magnitude	NEGLIGIBLE magnitude	No change
HIGH	Major	Moderate-Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
MEDIUM	Moderate-Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible	Negligible
LOW	Moderate	Minor	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

3.23 The matrix is a guide, not a substitute for professional judgement. A combined category (such as Moderate–Major) indicates a judgement between the adjacent levels. No change in magnitude is reported as a negligible, neutral effect in this appraisal; an unverified view is not recorded as no change.

4. Baseline Conditions

Landscape Baseline

Introduction

4.1 This chapter describes the existing landscape baseline against which the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development have been assessed. It provides an understanding of the physical, natural and cultural characteristics of the application site and

its surrounding landscape, together with the key attributes that contribute to its character, condition and value.

4.2 The baseline has been established through a combination of desk-based review and site survey, drawing upon published datasets, mapping, aerial photography and relevant landscape character assessments. The information presented within this chapter provides the context for identifying the sensitivity of the landscape resource and evaluating the nature and level of any landscape effects arising from the proposed development.

Access

4.3 Access is from Rowhook Road through a five-bar timber gate set back approximately 15 m. A belt of predominantly deciduous woodland, including hornbeam, follows the northern boundary and is reported to be approximately 35 m deep. The suitability of the entrance for vehicle movements is not assessed in this appraisal.

4.4 A vehicle track runs south from the gate to the hardstanding around the workshop. The hardstanding is described as gravel and crushed limestone, cut into the slope and bounded by steep banks. The hardstanding provides space for:

- storage of agricultural machinery and equipment;
- safe parking of workers' vehicles;
- manoeuvring space associated with management of the site; and
- improved day-to-day access around the existing workshop and operational land.

Topography

4.5 The tree farm falls by about 11 m from north to south and more gently from west to east. The draft records the hardstanding as locally cut about 1.5 m below surrounding levels, with a steep batter.

Local Geology and Soil Type

4.6 The soil type is Wealden Clay and is of poor quality, slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acid but base rich loamy and clayey soil.

Drainage

4.7 The survey describes shallow ditches carrying water from land to the west and south-west and towards the southern boundary **(Appendix A, photographs 27–29).** These observations do not

establish drainage performance, flood risk or the legal status of any watercourse. Verify drainage and outfalls against the technical information before relying on them as mitigation.

Vegetation

4.8 The vegetation on the tree farm site is a mix of self-sown grasses and ruderals, in the areas that have been cleared of Spruce, stands of tall thin Silver Birch (Betula pendula), including some fallen or falling, and a mix of native tree and hedge species including willows, on both the inside and the outside line of newly erected deer fencing together with regularly spaced Cupressus leylandii on a stretch of the eastern boundary to the east of the application site, with a mixed deciduous trees (largely hornbeam) in the woodland belt along the south of Rowhook Road. **(Refer to Photographs 18-19 Appendix A)**

4.9 The application site is not covered by any ancient woodland designation, but there are ancient woodlands in the study area, the nearest Townhouse Wood to the southwest. **(Refer to Figure 05, Ancient woodland habitats, Appendix A)**

Land use and condition

4.10 The wider site is a former Christmas tree plantation intended to return to production. Following clearance of the crop it appeared open and utilitarian, with ruderal vegetation and scattered stands of silver birch **(Appendix A, photographs 16–19).** This temporary loss of crop cover helps explain the site's current appearance but does not remove the effects of the hardstanding or earthworks.

4.11 The October observations describe the post-works condition. That condition is not the baseline for measuring the effect of constructing the hardstanding. Earlier imagery, survey records and the applicant's evidence give context but do not establish the landform and vegetation within the works footprint in sufficient detail to reconstruct the pre-works baseline confidently. The appraisal therefore identifies the evident physical changes qualitatively and does not infer a precise pre-works effect rating.

4.12 The legibility of the site as a former Christmas Tree Farm has largely been altered owing to the order from the Forestry Commission for the extensive felling on site. Prior to this it is understood that, although somewhat unkept, it had the appearance of a clearly planned and managed Christmas Tree plantation with trees arranged in such a manner to facilitate their felling. This is evident by the arrangement of stumps in the land set out in rows and grids.

4.13 Aside from the hard standing area which is the subject of the planning application, the ground within the tree farm which will be planted up with Christmas trees, is uneven and rutted, as a result of heavy machinery tracking over clay, and as all work has ceased on site while the application process is underway, there are unnatural items in this wider landscape awaiting removal or further use to complete the project such as:

- temporary piles of road planings at the northern end of the access track, to be used in the future to resurface the track
- mounds of soil which have been excavated from the site to create the area of hardstanding (up to 2m high) mixed with corrugated sheet metal, and lumps of concrete.
- broken fence posts on the ground amongst the trees,
- an oil tank
- a water tank
- irrigation pipes around the perimeter of the site on the surface for future watering of proposed planting to be connected to water tank.
- small but numerous piles of brash and cuttings from felled trees, (note, not the trees that needed felling as part of the FC order) to be removed.
- Tree stumps from the felled trees
- builders bags, pallets, bricks, and timber fence panels covered by tarpaulin, 2 large tractor tyres, areas of hardcore and brickbats on the side of the access track. ***(Refer to photos 20-23 Appendix A)***

4.14 Within the application site, sitting on the hard standing area are building materials including roofing tiles, large drainage pipes, to be removed or used, and various vehicles and items of machinery including a caravan, parked vans, a trailer, dumper trucks and a small excavator to be used as part of the Christmas tree farm business and a secure storage container for tools (in additional to the workshop) (**Refer to photographs 30-32 Appendix A)**

Historic statutory context

4.15 The statutory designations considered in the study area are shown in Appendix A, Figure 06. The appraisal has not assessed effects on the significance or setting of individual heritage assets.

Listed Buildings (England)			
NAME	**LISTENTRY**	**GRADE**	LISTDATE
WATERLAND FARMHOUSE	1026902	II	28/11/1980
BURNT HOUSE	1026903	II	28/11/1980
ROWHOOK MANOR	1026917	II	28/11/1980
CHEQUERED OAK HOUSE	1026979	II	28/11/1980
THE CHEQUERS INN PUBLIC HOUSE	1039960	II	18/01/1994
OUTBUILDING AT CHEQUERS INN	1240205	II	18/01/1994
TALBOT COTTAGE	1393303	II	29/05/2009
Barn formerly to Clemsfold Farm	1462894	II	26/02/2019
Granary formerly to Clemsfold Farm	1462900	II	26/02/2019
Scheduled Monuments (England)			
NAME			
Section of Stane Street 300yds (275m) in length in Roman Woods	1005837		

Landscape character

4.16 As part of our baseline studies for this LVA we have used a hierarchical review of National, Regional, and Local Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) to establish baseline context, determine landscape sensitivity, and evaluate potential project effects. These are set out below, followed by our own landscape character analysis of the landscape within the 1km study area.

National Landscape Character Studies

National Character Area 121 (Low Weald)

4.17 The site lies within the National Character Area 121 (Low Weald) a broad, low-lying clay vale that wraps around the northern, western, and southern edges of the High Weald. It is characterized by heavy clay soils, pastoral farming, and dense ancient woodlands. Key characteristics of relevance to the site are:

Low Weald - Key Characteristics

- *Broad, low-lying, gently undulating clay vales with outcrops of limestone or sandstone providing local variation.*
- *A generally pastoral landscape with arable farming associated with lighter soils on higher ground and areas of fruit cultivation in Kent. Land use is predominantly agricultural but with urban influences, particularly around Gatwick, Horley and Crawley.*

- *Field boundaries of hedgerows and shaws (remnant strips of cleared woodland) enclosing small, irregular fields and linking into small and scattered linear settlements along roadsides or centred on greens or commons.*
- *Rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches.*
- *Small towns and villages are scattered among areas of woodland, permanent grassland and hedgerows on the heavy clay soils where larger 20th-century villages have grown around major transport routes.*
- *Frequent north–south routeways and lanes, many originating as drove roads, along which livestock were moved to downland grazing or to forests to feed on acorns.*
- *The Low Weald boasts an intricate mix of woodlands, much of it ancient, including extensive broadleaved oak over hazel and hornbeam coppice, shaws, small field copses and tree groups, and lines of riparian trees along watercourses.*
- *Veteran trees are a feature of hedgerows and in fields. Many small rivers, streams and watercourses with associated water meadows and wet woodland.*

Regional Landscape Character Studies

West Sussex County Council Landscape Character Assessment:

4.18 In 2003, West Sussex carried out an assessment of the landscape character of West Sussex. This resulted in the identification of 42 unique areas and the production of land management guidelines for each character area.

4.19 The county assessment identifies 42 landscape character areas and provides:

- landscape descriptions;
- key characteristics;
- sensitivities;
- land management guidelines.

4.20 The application site lies within the Low Weald Hills Character area (LW4) whose Key Characteristics of relevance to this LVA are:

Key Characteristics

- *Undulating, low and densely wooded ridges running mostly east-west. Distinct escarpment to the north of Horsham and low escarpment at Rowhook.*

- *Blocks and strips of interconnecting woodland, including a large number of blocks of ancient woodland. Western area characterised by woodland of some size.*
- *Mostly rural character with intricate patchwork of small to medium size pasture fields with a combination of sinuous and straight boundaries. Larger, more open, field patterns in the east.*
- *Strong pattern of shaws and hedgerows enclosing fields with mature single oaks in hedgerows and fields.*
- *Network of narrow lanes, sometimes sunken, cross the area with strong definition north south. Many of them are former droveways for cattle, pigs and sheep.*
- *Steep, secretive wooded gills.*
- *Hidden hammer ponds near Roman Woods with characteristic narrow form.*
- *Remnant parkland in the north-east, north of Warnham.*
- *Includes the main tributaries of Arun; North River and Boldings Brook which meander through mostly narrow valleys with undulating valley sides, dissecting area north to south.*
- *Dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farms, cottages, hamlets and linear villages. Linear ridgetop villages such as Rudgwick and Rusper are set on higher ground. Farm cottages dispersed along lanes. Rusper forms a particularly attractive area with a traditional core. Some suburban development on village edges.*
- *Strong historic vernacular of sandstone, half-timber and plaster/brick, tile hanging and weatherboarding. Rich collection of timber frame buildings in Rudgwick and surrounding area. Local landmark of Rudgwick Church spire.*
- *Occasional clay quarries/pits and brickworks. Notably in Kingsfold Valley.*
- *Suburbanisation along the A281*

Local Landscape Character Studies

4.21 The site lies within the Low Weald landscape of north-west Horsham District. The landscape is characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and isolated dwellings connected by narrow rural lanes. A well-established network of mature hedgerows, woodland belts and hedgerow trees creates a strongly enclosed rural landscape with a high degree of tranquillity and a distinct historic field pattern.

Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

4.22 Horsham District Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates to produce an LCA for Horsham District in 2003 to provide a district wide assessment of the landscape character within the borough and identified 32 distinctive character areas. ***(Refer to Figure 07 Appendix A)***

4.23 The assessment identifies Landscape Character Types and Areas, provides key characteristics, identifies forces for change and sets out landscape management guidelines.

4.24 The site falls within the landscape character area **I1 Rowhook and Rudgwick wooded ridge** whose Key Characteristics are described as follows:

- *Undulating ridges.*
- *Low escarpment at Row Hook.*
- *Densely wooded character.*
- *Steep sided gills with hidden hammer ponds near Roman wood.*
- *Secluded small to medium sized pasture fields with sinuous and straight boundaries.*
- *Remnant Parkland in the northeast*
- *Ridge top villages and Hamlets.*
- *Rich collection of timber frame buildings in Rudgwick and surrounding area.*
- *Local landmark of Rudgwick church Spire.*
- *Clay pits and brickworks*

Overall character:

- *This area has a very strong structure of large Woodlands, hedgerows and shaws which wrap over the undulating ridges of Wealden clay.*
- *The pasture fields are sometimes entirely enclosed by woodland and shaws with very sinuous boundaries.*
- *Other areas are hedged with standard oak trees.*
- *Much of the landscape has a Parkland and estate farmland character.*
- *There is a general lack of settlement apart from a few ridgetop villages and Hamlets linked by narrow lanes.*
- *These have a local mix of traditional building materials, half timber and brick and tile.*

Biodiversity.

- *Wooded gylls,*
- *unimproved pasture,*

- *some large Woodlands have been coniferised.*
-

Key issues

- *Pressure for Urban Development,*
- *Potential for expansion of horse paddocks,*
- *loss of Parkland features and introduction of high fences.*
- *Increasing traffic on minor roads.*

Landscape condition.

- *Overall condition is good.*
- *There are local areas of decline, EG mineral extraction and undistinguished modern housing near Rudgwick.*
-

Local character within study area

4.25 The wider landscape within the 1 km study area is predominantly rural in character, comprising extensive areas of woodland interspersed with agricultural fields, scattered farmsteads and occasional private residences set within spacious grounds. Residential development is generally dispersed, although there is a small cluster of properties at Stane Street Cottages on the northern side of Rowhook Road, closer to the centre of the hamlet. Elsewhere, properties are typically well set back from the road and contained within mature vegetation.

4.26 Rowhook Road is a single-carriageway, unclassified local road with the character and appearance of a rural country lane. It follows an undulating but generally straight alignment through a strongly verdant setting, enclosed by mature trees, hedgerows, roadside banks and ditches. Trees frequently overhang the carriageway, reinforcing the enclosed and well-vegetated character of the route. There are no footways, and properties do not generally front directly onto the road; instead, entrances are set back and are typically informal and discreet, with small signs identifying individual properties. Mulberry House is a notable exception, with a more formal entrance defined by metal gates and brick piers. Despite its rural character, Rowhook Road carries relatively frequent traffic, often travelling at speed, although the speed limit reduces from 40 mph to 30 mph on the approach to the hamlet.

4.27 To the south of the application site, at Clemsfold, the rural character becomes more influenced by commercial and industrial activity associated with the Guildford Road (A29). Land uses in this area include a sawmill, mobile homes, a forge, a telecommunications mast, welding and fabrication activities, motor sales and agricultural sales. The A29 itself is a prominent transport corridor and forms a noticeably more developed and functional landscape context than the quieter rural roads and countryside surrounding Rowhook.

4.28 As illustrated by the sequence of aerial photographs included at **Figure 09 Appendix A,** the condition and appearance of land associated with some of these commercial and industrial uses has deteriorated over time. Publicly available aerial photography from 2001 onwards indicates a gradual expansion of associated operational areas, storage and other paraphernalia into land which otherwise forms part of the agricultural landscape.

4.29 The 2003 district assessment describes the overall condition of the character area as good. The aerial sequence for Clemsfold shows localised expansion of commercial and industrial activity but does not establish a decline across the character area. The developed A29 corridor provides local context; it does not remove the need to assess the works in the wooded rural setting of Rowhook.

Visual baseline

Introduction

4.30 This chapter describes the existing visual baseline for the application site and its surrounding area and provides the basis for the assessment of the likely visual effects of the proposed development. It identifies the nature and extent of existing views, the principal visual receptors that may experience changes in those views, and the factors influencing visibility of the site.

4.31 The visual baseline has been established through a combination of desk-based analysis and field survey, undertaken to understand the existing visual context of the site and the relationship between the proposed development and surrounding receptors. The assessment considers the influence of landform, vegetation, existing built development, field boundaries and other landscape features that contribute to the degree of visual containment or openness within the study area.

4.32 The visual appraisal uses representative views and considers the people who experience them. The available photographs were taken in October before leaf fall. Appendix A, Figure 14 identifies photograph locations; the photographs document conditions at the time, not visibility throughout the year.

Representative Viewpoints

4.33 Representative public viewpoints were selected following desk review and site observations. Private properties were not accessed. Potential effects on residents are considered separately, using boundary conditions, photographs and relative positions to describe the limits of the evidence rather than to substitute public photographs for private views.

4.34 The viewpoints have been selected to reflect:

- the geographic distribution of potential views within the study area;
- the range of viewing distances and directions from which the site may be experienced;
- areas where the proposed development has the greatest potential to influence visual amenity;
- the varying sensitivity of different receptor groups; and
- locations that illustrate the degree of visual containment provided by existing landform, vegetation and surrounding development.

4.35 The selected viewpoints provide a proportionate sample of public views in the area. They do not establish what can be seen from all receptor locations, throughout the year or under night-time conditions.

Visual Receptors

4.36 The principal visual receptors within the study area comprise:

- residents of nearby residential properties;
- users of the local highway network;
- pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians using local roads, lanes and Public Rights of Way;
- recreational users of the surrounding countryside; and
- visitors to publicly accessible locations within the vicinity of the site, where applicable.

4.3 The sensitivity of each receptor group varies according to the nature of the activity being undertaken and the importance of the existing view to that activity, in accordance with the methodology set out at chapter 3.

Existing Views

(For photographic viewpoint locations Refer to Figure 14 Appendix A)

Views looking north

4.38 No representative public viewpoint to the south was recorded. Potential views from private commercial, working and residential land around Clemsfold are unverified. Outward views from the site show some gaps in the southern boundary **(photographs 24–26 Appendix A)** and no effect rating is assigned to these receptors on the available evidence.

Views looking south from Rowhook Road

4.39 The hardstanding was not visible from the surveyed sections of Rowhook Road under the conditions recorded. The northern woodland belt and the position of the hardstanding well inside the tree farm are the principal reasons for its containment in these views (Appendix A, photographs 01–04 and 35).

4.40 There are views of the timber access gate, and deer fencing either side of the apron that leads to the gate, which secures the site. The deer fencing runs along the full length of the northern boundary, allowing views into the shaw behind. ***(Refer to photographs 01-04 Appendix A)***

Views from public rights of way (PRoW)

4.41 The routes considered for potential views were SLD 1435, SLD 1434 and WAR 1427 **(Figure 08 Appendix A).** Photographs 36 and 37 illustrate views from Townhouse Copse to the south-west and from WAR 1427, respectively.

4.42 No direct or filtered view of the hardstanding was recorded on the surveyed sections of the footpath network in October. Intervening vegetation, buildings and topography explain that finding. The extent of visibility under leaf-off conditions has not been verified.

Views looking east and west from adjoining residential properties

4.43 No photographs were taken from neighbouring properties and no views from homes, upper storeys or gardens were directly assessed.

4.44 The available evidence indicates that boundary vegetation, landform and, on the western side, close-boarded fencing limits the views into the site, but the outlook from any particular property is unconfirmed. The outward glimpses towards Colts Bushes in photograph 12 indicate that the eastern boundary is not wholly opaque.

4.45 The closest named properties include Redroof Cottage, Mulberry House and Colts Bushes however no receptor-specific magnitude or effect rating is assigned to private residential views.

5. Description of the Proposed Development

Scheme Overview

5.1 As explained in the introduction, the planning application is retrospective in nature, and the engineering works have largely already been undertaken, comprising regrading of land and the formation of an area of hard surfacing and clearing a track to provide access to an area of hard surfacing from which relevant operations, maintenance and harvesting can be undertaken.

5.2 The applicant proposes to resume Christmas tree production and use the hardstanding for parking, loading, manoeuvring and storage.

5.3 A schematic plan has been produced which illustrates the intended set up on the area of hard standing. This will house the following, all centred around a large turning head with defined storage and operational zones around the perimeter:

- A WC and staff welfare facilities
- Staff parking and machinery parking
- Workshop
- Polytunnel
- Storage container (tools)
- Materials storage
- Trailers and loaders

Construction Phase: Temporary groundworks, plant equipment, compound areas, and vehicle access.

5.4 The completed cut, hardstanding and banks were observed after construction and therefore no independent account of construction-stage effects is available. Further profiling, soil handling, clearance and reinstatement would create temporary disturbance, which should be controlled by an agreed programme and working limits. The indicative operational layout is shown in Appendix A, Figure 13.

Operational Phase: Long-term site operations, access, and ongoing maintenance.

5.5 The business plan attributed to Laurence Gould (August 2026) describes the intended long-term operation.

5.6 The applicant envisages phased planting over approximately 2.5 acres, beginning in spring 2027 and completing in spring 2028, subject to approval and site readiness. Access and operational areas would remain between and around planted compartments.

5.7 The applicant describes a cropping cycle of roughly seven years, with trees generally harvested at about 5–7 ft and cutting expected from around year eight of the business programme. Staggered replacement means that crop cover will vary and is not assumed to be a permanent visual screen.

5.8 Routine husbandry would include management and shaping of the trees, together with spraying where required. Planting, maintenance and harvesting would be undertaken by contract staff, with no full-time employees based at the site. Operational activity would therefore be intermittent and largely seasonal, rather than continuous.

5.9 Access would be required periodically for staff, machinery and equipment associated with planting, maintenance and harvesting. During the early establishment period, equipment would principally relate to planting, spraying and shaping. Additional equipment for harvesting and handling would be introduced once the trees reach maturity and harvesting commences. The majority of harvested trees are intended to be distributed to local wholesale outlets, with a smaller proportion sold directly from the site. Vehicular activity associated with collection and sales would consequently be concentrated primarily around the Christmas harvesting and sales period, rather than occurring consistently throughout the year.

5.10 Overall, the operational phase would retain a predominantly vegetated and horticultural character. Changes in the appearance of the site would occur gradually as successive planting areas establish, mature and are harvested, resulting in a managed and evolving pattern of tree cover rather than an intensive or continuously active form of development.

6. Assessment of Landscape Effects

6.1 This section considers physical changes to elements such as:

- vegetation (trees, hedgerows, woodland);
- landform/topography;
- water features;
- field boundaries and patterns;
- land uses and settlement pattern.

6.2 Table 4 distinguishes local effects on landscape elements and site character from effects on the wider landscape character areas. Limited public visibility does not negate the physical effects of the cut platform of the hard standing area, artificial banks and surfacing, albeit these are considered temporary if the mitigation measures are undertaken. The retention of the enclosing woodland belt and field pattern is more relevant to the wider character judgement.

6.3 Table 4 records the indicative judgements supported by the evidence and notes where a rating cannot reasonably be assigned. The ratings for wider landscape character are not ratings for the as-built landform or for the site as a whole.

6.4 The hardstanding, steep banks, eastern mounds and dispersed operational materials give the site a more engineered and utilitarian appearance (**photographs 20–23 and 30–34 Appendix A).** The existing appraisal identifies a minor adverse local effect in the observed condition. The available evidence does not establish a material change to the wooded ridge, field pattern or settlement pattern of the wider I1 character area.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Direct Effects on Landscape Features / Elements						
Trees and Woodland	• The hardstanding footprint was already cleared when surveyed. Elsewhere, crop clearance has left open ground and scattered birch. Existing Leyland cypress and northern broadleaved woodland contribute to enclosure. • The hard standing area has already been formed. • There are stands of Betula pendula, some fallen or falling, and Cupressus leylandii on the eastern boundary with a mixed deciduous trees (largely hornbeam) in the woodland belt along the south of Rowhook Road.	Medium	Negligible	Negligible	Beneficial	• Crop replacement is a separate programme and does not compensate for loss of established boundary vegetation. Retention and management of the northern woodland and existing boundary cover underpin the later landscape and visual judgements. • Leylandii will remain as provide screening and a beneficial microclimate (wind and shade) for the proposed Christmas trees. (firs (Abies), spruces (Picea), or pines (Pinus species) • Woodland belt along northern boundary will remain and will be managed as a woodland, in accordance with a management plan.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Hedgerows and Field Boundaries	• No hedgerows on site, field boundaries are formed of deer fencing and close boarded fencing and a mix of native tree and hedge species on both the inside and the outside line of newly erected deer fencing together with regularly spaced Cupressus leylandii on a stretch of the eastern boundary to the east of the application site.	Low	No change	Negligible	Neutral	• The existing vegetation either side of the deer fencing will remain and belongs to the applicant. • Some of the vegetation is in between the boundary wire fence as the deer fence, the deer fence has been erected in such a way as to avoid damaging tree roots and is not on the actual boundary.
Drainage	• There are small ditches across the site with water draining onto the site from neighbouring land in the west and south-west of the site and off the site heading south via shallow ditches but there are no water courses registered on site or off site within the study area.	Low	Not verified	Not rated	Not verified	• Retain functioning ditches. Treat the statement on permeability below as an unverified assumption. No drainage effect is rated. • Surface of the application site is permeable.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Topography and Landform	• Levels across the tree farm fall approximately 11m north to south and slope gently west to east, with the reduced levels within the excavated hard standing area currently 1.5m lower than the existing levels, with a 45-degree batter. Mounds of material (approx 2m high) excavated from the hard standing area are located on the eastern boundary.	Medium	Not rated	Not rated	Adverse as built	• The cut platform of the hard standing area, steep batters and temporary mounds alter the local landform. Selected clean soil could be reused to restore gentler profiles, subject to agreed levels, drainage, stability and tree protection. The pre-works landform and final profiles are not sufficiently verified for a separate rating. • All non-soil debris in the mounds, including brick, metal, and concrete, will be removed.
Land Use and Field Pattern	• Existing land use on the application site and Christmas tree farm is one of former Christmas tree farm, recently cleared of trees following FC orders. Field pattern is one of fenced boundaries (deer fencing and close boarded) with native and non-native vegetation either side.	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Beneficial	• Replanting the previously cleared tree farm would restore a managed horticultural landscape without changing the existing field pattern. This benefit relates to the proposed reinstatement, not to the permanent hardstanding itself.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Effects on Landscape Character						
National Landscape Character Area NCA 121 Low Weald	• A generally pastoral landscape with arable farming associated with lighter soils on higher ground and areas of fruit cultivation in Kent. • Land use is predominantly agricultural but with urban influences, particularly around Gatwick, Horley and Crawley. Rural lanes and tracks with wide grass verges and ditches. • The Low Weald boasts an intricate mix of woodlands, much of it ancient, including extensive broadleaved oak over hazel and hornbeam coppice, shaws, small field copses and tree groups, and lines of riparian trees along watercourses.	Medium	Negligible	Negligible	Neutral	• The National landscape character of NCA 121 Low Weald will remain unaffected by either the reinstatement of the Christmas tree farm, or the creation of the engineered surface to the hard standing area required for the operations of a tree farm. • The land use is also common to the NCA, being a specialist horticultural crop within the broader agricultural sector which is the predominant land use of the character area.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Regional Landscape Character Type / Area LW4	• Undulating, low and densely wooded ridges running mostly east-west. • Distinct escarpment to the north of Horsham and low escarpment at Rowhook. Blocks and strips of interconnecting woodland, including a large number of blocks of ancient woodland. • Western area characterised by woodland of some size. Mostly rural character with intricate patchwork of small to medium-size pasture fields with a combination of sinuous and straight boundaries. • Larger, more open, field patterns in the east. Strong pattern of shaws and hedgerows enclosing fields with mature single oaks in hedgerows and fields. • Occasional clay quarries/pits and brickworks.	Medium	Negligible	Negligible	Neutral	• With blocks and strips of woodland being characteristic of the region, the tree farm would not be out of character, albeit it commercially planted, however the broadleaved woodland along the northern boundary will remain which is also typical of the LCA. • Whilst the application site and tree farm does not contain other elements that are characteristic such as land used for pasture, nor does it exhibit a strong pattern of shaws and hedgerows overall the landscape character of LW4 will remain unaffected by the proposed land use as a tree farm, remaining rural in character.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Local Landscape Character area I1 Rowhook and Rudgwick wooded ridge	• Undulating ridges, low escarpment at Row Hook, Densely wooded character. This area has a very strong structure of large • Woodlands, hedgerows and shaws which wrap over the undulating ridges of Wealden clay. The pasture fields are sometimes entirely enclosed by woodland and shaws with very sinuous boundaries.	Medium	Negligible	Negligible	Neutral	• The works are confined to part of one existing landholding. The defining wooded framework, pattern of enclosures and dispersed settlement on the wider ridge are not materially altered. The local physical change at the site is addressed separately. • The boundaries to the application site and the tree farm are not sinuous, but straight, so again are not representative of the Local landscape character.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Local character within 1km study area	• Predominantly rural, well-wooded and strongly verdant landscape, comprising agricultural fields, scattered farmsteads and dispersed residential properties. • Some large Woodlands have been coniferised. Rowhook Road retains an enclosed rural lane character, defined by mature trees, hedgerows, banks and ditches. • Towards Clemsfold and the A29, immediately south of application site, the character becomes more developed and functional, reflecting commercial and industrial land uses and the influence of the main transport corridor. • Landscape condition, in Clemsford is in decline, with land associated with commercial and industrial uses gradually expanding their operational areas, storage and paraphernalia into agricultural land.	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Neutral	• The works do not materially change the predominant woodland and rural settlement pattern of the 1 km study area. Commercial activity around Clemsfold is local context; it does not negate the adverse change within the tree farm. • The rural, well-wooded landscape character will remain, the application site being located within the tree farm, which over time, once operational, will once again contribute to the verdant nature of the existing landscape, and the LCA already acknowledges some woodland areas have been coniferised.

Table 4: Assessment of Landscape Effects						
Landscape Receptor	**Baseline Conditions**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Tree farm site character: observed post-works condition	Localised engineered landform, hardstanding and temporary materials within the wider tree farm.	Low	Medium	Minor	Adverse	• The cut platform of the hard standing area and steep banks have an physical effect. Temporary mounds, road planings and dispersed storage add to the observed adverse effect. Clearance and reinstatement will reduce this effect • These contribute to a degree of localised visual clutter and detract from the otherwise rural character of the site. However, these items do not form permanent components of the proposed development and are intended to be removed, utilised or rationalised as the site is brought back into active Christmas tree production. • Their presence has therefore been considered in regard to the existing condition of the site but is not assumed to form part of its long-term operational character.

7. Assessment of Visual Effects

Representative Viewpoint Analysis:

7.1 A description of each representative view is provided in Appendix A. Table 5 below considers the effects of the proposals on the baseline visual receptors, the sensitivity to and magnitude of change, and the overall level and nature of effect.

7.2 The representative viewpoints have focussed on views from Rowhook Road and views from the Public Rights of Way to the south-east and north. Internal views have been included in Appendix A for information only, they are not assessed as they only effect the applicant and are not publicly accessible.

Receptors Analysis:

7.3 Typically views from roads are not considered highly valued, but in this case, the views along Rowhook Road have been assigned a higher value because of the landscape context in which the road is located, raising the sensitivity to medium from low. There are no footpaths along Rowhook Road therefore any views are only available from walking in the road crossing from one side of the other to gain access to public footpaths or from a car and then they are fleeting. Road users in the wider area will not experience any changes in view resulting from the proposed development.

Table 5: Assessment of Visual Effects						
Visual Receptor / Representative Viewpoint	**Baseline View**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude of Change**	**Overall Level of Effect**	**Nature of Effect**	**Assessment Commentary**
Viewpoints 01–04: Rowhook Road	Drivers and passengers, cyclists and occasional pedestrians. Northern woodland encloses the site; the gate, entrance apron and deer fencing are visible. No hardstanding was recorded in the October views. Photograph 35 gives additional road context.	Medium	No change	Negligible	Neutral	No change anticipated to the surveyed views of the hardstanding, subject to retained enclosure and no material change to the entrance. Leaf-off conditions were not verified.
Viewpoints 36–37: Townhouse Copse and WAR 1427	Users of public rights of way. No view of the hardstanding was recorded from the illustrated positions in October.	Medium	No change	Negligible	Neutral	No change anticipated in the surveyed views on the available evidence. This does not establish visibility in winter or from all parts of the network.

8. Mitigation & Landscape Enhancement

8.1 Primary mitigation comprises measures already incorporated into the design, location, layout and implementation of the development which respond to the landscape and visual context of the site and reduce adverse landscape and visual effects.

8.2 The hardstanding occupies a lowered position relative to the surrounding ground levels, which assists in containing views of the operational area and associated agricultural activity. Whilst the formation of the banks represents a localised alteration to the existing landform, their visual appearance could be softened through selective landscaping and vegetation establishment.

8.3 Excavated material has been temporarily formed into mounds, notably to the east of the hardstanding. These introduce an artificial profile and are not intended to form permanent landscape screening. Their removal or appropriate redistribution would assist in restoring a more natural appearance, having regard to the existing topographical information, retained vegetation and visual containment identified within this appraisal.

8.4 The visual appearance of abrupt banks may be softened through selective reprofiling, natural vegetation establishment and appropriate planting where practicable. Such measures should respect the existing operational footprint, ground stability, drainage arrangements and retained vegetation.

8.5 Substantial primary landscape mitigation has already been incorporated within the development, including:

- Retention of established mature trees and boundary vegetation, maintaining the existing landscape structure and restricting views towards the operational area.
- Retention of the broadleaved woodland along the northern boundary, providing substantial visual containment from Rowhook Road and maintaining the established wooded character of the locality.
- The use of a subdued hardstanding finish, appropriate to the agricultural setting.

8.6 These existing features make an important contribution to the landscape integration and visual containment of the development.

8.7 The intended granular finish is visually consistent with the agricultural character of the site and avoids the more urban appearance associated with bound surfacing materials. The landscape assessment of the surface treatment relates to its visual characteristics; drainage performance and permeability fall outside the scope of this landscape appraisal.

Secondary Mitigation Measures and Landscape Enhancements

8.8 Having regard to the existing landscape containment and the localised nature of the identified adverse landscape effects, further targeted mitigation and landscape enhancement opportunities are identified below. A distinction should be made between measures necessary to address the effects of the development and opportunities to enhance the wider landscape through the ordinary management of the agricultural holding. The nature and extent of any additional mitigation should be proportionate to the landscape effects identified within this appraisal.

Re-profile abrupt bunds and earthworks

8.9 The appearance of artificial bunds and exposed banks could be improved through selective reprofiling, rounding of abrupt edges and vegetation establishment. The objective is to achieve a softer and more natural visual transition between the operational hardstanding and surrounding agricultural land, rather than prescribing a uniform engineered gradient. The extent of any reprofiling should be proportionate to the identified localised landscape effects and should have regard to ground stability, drainage, retained trees and the operational requirements of the agricultural enterprise. Specialist technical advice should be obtained where warranted by the nature and extent of the proposed works or by identified site risks.

8.10 Suitable clean excavated soils may be retained and reused for appropriate landscape reinstatement and agricultural purposes, having regard to existing ground conditions and applicable environmental requirements. Redundant materials and unsuitable spoil should be appropriately removed from areas intended for reinstatement. These works may be undertaken in coordination with the seasonal requirements of the agricultural enterprise. Where specific clearance or reinstatement works are necessary to mitigate the development, a proportionate completion period may be identified.

Reinforce the boundary vegetation structure

8.11 The retention of established boundary trees, hedgerows and woodland provides the principal means of landscape integration and visual containment. Supplementary native planting within suitable gaps would offer an opportunity to further enhance the existing landscape structure and could be undertaken as part of the ongoing agricultural management of the holding. Any additional planting considered necessary specifically to mitigate the development should be limited to locations where a demonstrable landscape or visual benefit would be achieved.

8.12 The submitted topographical survey, operational layout and supporting landscape appraisal provide the starting point for identifying the relationship between the hardstanding, surrounding ground levels and retained vegetation. Any additional mitigation considered necessary should be clearly defined and proportionate to the identified landscape effects, making use of the existing submitted information wherever sufficient. Where appropriate, a concise schedule of specific mitigation works may be agreed, having regard to agricultural operations and seasonal ground conditions.

Christmas tree planting pattern

8.13 The progressive reinstatement of Christmas tree cultivation represents the continuation of the established agricultural use of the site and will contribute to the restoration of its predominantly vegetated character. The pattern, timing and management of planting, harvesting and crop replacement will necessarily reflect the commercial, horticultural and seasonal requirements of the agricultural enterprise. The Christmas tree crop provides a supplementary landscape benefit but is not relied upon as permanent visual screening for the development.

Site management and storage

8.14 The removal of redundant materials and appropriate management of temporary storage would assist in reducing the localised operational appearance of the site. The hardstanding provides a defined area for the storage and use of agricultural machinery, equipment and materials associated with the enterprise, whilst allowing for the changing seasonal requirements of a working agricultural holding. Any future external lighting should be appropriate to the rural setting and designed to minimise unnecessary light spill, having regard to any applicable planning requirements.

8.15 Good agricultural site management, including the appropriate organisation of machinery and materials and the removal of redundant items, would assist in maintaining the rural character of the site. Such management should recognise the changing operational and seasonal requirements of an active Christmas tree enterprise.

Colour treatment of containers and ancillary structures

8.16 Muted agricultural colours, such as dark green or dark brown, are appropriate for permanent storage containers and fixed ancillary structures where their appearance may influence the surrounding landscape. The existing workshop already demonstrates the suitability of this approach. Agricultural vehicles and operational machinery will naturally retain their functional or manufacturer's finishes.

Long-term landscape management

8.17 The continued retention and appropriate management of established woodland and boundary vegetation would maintain the existing landscape structure and visual containment of the site. Opportunities for supplementary native planting and landscape enhancement may be incorporated within the ordinary management of the agricultural holding. Any formal landscape maintenance requirements should relate specifically to planting or other mitigation demonstrated to be necessary to address the landscape effects of the development.

Residual Effects

8.18 The removal of temporary spoil mounds and redundant materials, together with appropriate landscape reinstatement, would assist in softening the engineered appearance of the development. The permanent hardstanding and associated changes to the landform would remain apparent from within the site. Over time, vegetation establishment and the progressive reinstatement of Christmas tree cultivation would further contribute to the integration of the operational area within its agricultural setting. The established boundary vegetation remains the principal means of visual containment, with rotational crop cover and supplementary planting providing additional landscape benefits.

8.19 The residual effects associated with the permanent hardstanding and altered landform are expected to remain localised and adverse to some degree. The existing landscape enclosure, together with proportionate landscape mitigation, provides opportunities to reduce the visual prominence and engineered appearance of the operational area. The evidence supports a

qualitative reduction in landscape effects rather than a revised numerical or categorical residual rating. Public visual effects are expected to remain limited at the surveyed locations, subject to the retention of existing landscape enclosure and the appropriate management of operational activities, storage and any external lighting. The assessment reflects the conditions observed at the time of survey. Private viewpoints and conditions following seasonal leaf fall have not been independently verified.

9. Summary & Conclusions

9.1 The works have introduced a hard-surfaced area and steep engineered banks into the lower part of the tree farm. Eastern spoil mounds and temporary storage accentuate the local change, but the observed condition was judged minor adverse locally. This is separate from the effects of crop clearance and does not imply a material change to the wider I1 Rowhook and Rudgwick Wooded Ridge landscape character area.

Policy Assessment

National Planning Policy Framework

9.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2024, as amended in February 2025, provides the national policy context for achieving sustainable development through the delivery of well-designed places while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

9.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2024, as amended in February 2025, provides the national policy context for achieving sustainable development through the delivery of well-designed places while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

9.4 The most relevant section of the NPPF in relation to this proposal is ‘Conserving and enhancing the natural environment’. Section 14 deals with achieving well-design places. The objective of the section being to promote high quality, healthy, inclusive and sustainable places through design. The relevant policies to the proposal are considered to be: DP3 (Key principle for well-design places).

9.5 Policy DP3 seeks to ensure that development responds appropriately to the history, character and features of its site and setting, so that it integrates with and enhances its surroundings. In landscape and visual terms, the proposals respond positively to this requirement. The

hardstanding forms part of the operational requirements of the established Christmas tree farm, while areas disturbed during the engineering works are to be reinstated and returned to Christmas tree cultivation. The proposed reinstatement will therefore restore a land use and vegetation pattern already characteristic of the site and, as planting establishes, will assist in integrating the development into its rural landscape setting. In this respect, the proposals are considered to accord with the landscape and design objectives of Policy DP3.

9.6 Section 19 deals with the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and landscape. The relevant policies are considered to be N2 (Improving the natural environment).

9.7 Policy N2 seeks to ensure that development contributes positively to the natural environment, including through consideration of landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, the conservation of existing natural features and the use of appropriate landscaping to integrate development into its surroundings.

9.8 The proposed replanting of the tree farm retains the established use and predominantly vegetated character of the Christmas tree farm. Areas of land disturbed by the engineering works, other than the operational hardstanding, will be reinstated and returned to Christmas tree cultivation and as the replacement planting establishes, it will restore the characteristic pattern of Christmas tree planting across these parts of the site and will assist in integrating the retained hardstanding into its wider landscape setting. The proposals therefore respond positively to the landscape objectives of Policy N2, in particular N2(a) and N2(d).

9.9 In summary, a smaller or demonstrably necessary footprint, a more natural transition in levels, protection of established vegetation and reinstatement of disturbed ground would respond to the Framework's design and natural-environment objectives. This appraisal does not determine national policy compliance.

Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) 2015

HDPF Policy 25: District Character and The Natural Environment

9.10 In landscape and visual terms, the proposals are considered to accord with the objectives of Policy 25. Retention of the wider woodland and boundary pattern and reinstatement of disturbed ground would support the landscape objectives of HDPF Policy 25, and the development retains the established use and predominantly rural character of the site as a Christmas tree farm.

9.11 As the replacement planting establishes, it will restore the characteristic pattern of planting across the affected parts of the site and assist in integrating the retained hardstanding into the wider landscape. The proposals therefore conserve the prevailing landscape character of the site and its rural setting.

9.12 Areas across the tree farm site disturbed by the engineering works to create the hard standing, will be reinstated and returned to Christmas tree cultivation. The operational hardstanding which will be reorganised in accordance with drawing 26.91.001 produced by Highway Planning Ltd,

9.13 As the replacement planting establishes, it will restore the characteristic pattern of planting across the affected parts of the site and assist in integrating the retained hardstanding into the wider landscape. The proposals therefore conserve the prevailing landscape character of the site and its rural setting.

HDPF Policy 26: Countryside Protection

9.14 As the application site lies outside the built-up area boundary within the countryside, the proposals have been considered in the context of Policy 26 which protects the countryside against inappropriate development.

9.15 The hardstanding is associated with the operational requirements of the established Christmas tree farm and supports the continued use of the site for Christmas tree cultivation. In landscape terms, the proposals are of a nature and scale that can be accommodated without material harm to the rural character of the surrounding countryside.

9.16 The reinstatement of land affected by the engineering works and its return to Christmas tree cultivation will restore the established pattern of vegetation across the affected parts of the site. As the replacement planting establishes, it will further assimilate the development into its surroundings. The proposals would not therefore significantly alter the development pattern or defining landscape features of the locality and are considered to conserve the key characteristics of the landscape in accordance with the landscape objectives of Policy 26.

Parish-Level Planning Policy

Slinfold Neighborhood Plan

9.17 The proposals are also considered to be consistent with the relevant landscape objectives of the Slinfold Neighbourhood Plan, in particular the objectives to protect and enhance the rural character of the Parish and to retain its rural identity and natural landscape. The continued use of the site as a Christmas tree farm maintains an established rural land use, while the reinstatement and replanting of areas affected by the engineering works will restore the characteristic vegetated appearance of these parts of the site and assist in integrating the operational hardstanding into the surrounding landscape.

9.18 The proposals also support the continued operation of an existing rural business, consistent with the Neighbourhood Plan objectives seeking to enable existing businesses to prosper and to support small businesses throughout the Parish. Overall, the proposals are considered compatible with the landscape and rural economy objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. **(Refer to Figure 12 Slinfold Neighbourhood Plan boundary plan Appendix A)**

Policy Assessment Conclusion

9.19 The assessment demonstrates that the proposal provides an appropriate response to the landscape, visual and countryside objectives of national, district and neighbourhood planning policy.

9.20 The proposal retains the established rural use and predominantly vegetated character of the site as a Christmas tree farm. The operational hardstanding occupies a limited part of the wider site, while areas affected by the engineering works, other than those required for the operational development, will be reinstated and returned to Christmas tree cultivation. As the replacement planting establishes, it will restore the characteristic pattern of Christmas tree planting across the affected parts of the site and assist in integrating the retained development within its wider rural landscape setting.

9.21 In landscape and visual terms, the proposal responds positively to the objectives of national policy and Policy DP3 and Policy N2, through its response to the existing character and context of the site, the conservation of landscape character and the use of reinstatement and planting to integrate the development into its surroundings.

9.22 At District level, the proposal similarly responds positively to the landscape objectives of HDPF Policy 25: District Character and the Natural Environment, by conserving the prevailing rural character and landscape qualities of the site and its setting.

9.23 HDPF Policy 25 forms part of the adopted Horsham District Planning Framework, within its policies for conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment.

9.24 The principal policy consideration requiring qualification is HDPF Policy 26: Countryside Protection. The application site lies outside the built-up area boundary and the determination of whether the development is essential to its countryside location and satisfies the wider requirements of the policy is a planning matter beyond the scope of this LVA.

9.25 In landscape and visual terms, however, the assessment demonstrates that the proposal can be accommodated without significant harm to the rural character of the countryside and will conserve the key characteristics and features of the landscape in which it is located.

9.26 The proposal also responds positively to the relevant objectives of the Slinfold Neighbourhood Plan, particularly those seeking to protect and enhance the rural character of the Parish, retain its rural identity and natural landscape and support existing rural businesses. The operation of the Christmas tree farm, together with the reinstatement of disturbed areas to Christmas tree cultivation, is compatible with these landscape and rural economy objectives.

9.27 Subject to the wider planning considerations associated with HDPF Policy 26, the proposal is therefore considered to provide a good level of conformity with the relevant national, district and neighbourhood planning policies insofar as they relate to landscape character, visual amenity, countryside character and the integration of development within its rural setting.

9.28 Overall, the landscape and visual evidence demonstrate that the operational development can be successfully assimilated within the established Christmas tree farm and the wider rural landscape. The proposed reinstatement will progressively reduce the influence of the engineering works and restore the established vegetated character of the affected parts of the site, such that the rural character and key landscape qualities of the site and its surroundings will be conserved.

9.29 The policy assessment distinguishes the effects of the as-built works from the more limited residual effects anticipated if mitigation is secured.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

9.30 The cut and hardstanding, steep banks and temporary clutter give part of the site an engineered appearance and detract from the otherwise rural character of the site. However, these items do not form permanent components of the proposed development and are intended to be removed, utilised or rationalised as the site is brought back into active Christmas tree production and will not form part of its long-term operational character. At the scale of I1, the enclosing woodland, field pattern and settlement pattern remain legible, and the evidence does not indicate a material change to the wider character area.

9.31 From the surveyed stretches of Rowhook Road and the public rights of way, the hardstanding was not seen in October. Existing landform and the wooded and vegetated boundaries, rather than the future crop, are the principal sources of containment and the future crop will add further screening.

9.32 The residual local landscape effect is expected to lessen if the recommended mitigation measures set out in this document are undertaken: