

Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal

for

Stebbing Parish Council

Planning | March 2017

Contact:

Simon Neesam
Technical Director

The Landscape Partnership

The Granary, Sun Wharf
Deben Road
Woodbridge
Suffolk, IP12 1AZ

www.thelandscapepartnership.com

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The Landscape Partnership
Registered office
Greenwood House
15a St Cuthberts Street
Bedford
MK40 3JG

Registered in England No. 2709001

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Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan: Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal for Stebbing Parish Council

Executive summary

In November 2016, Stebbing Parish Council, via its Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee, commissioned The Landscape Partnership to undertake a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal of the parish of Stebbing in the Uttlesford district of Essex in order to determine the sensitivity of the various landscapes within the parish to change and their capacity to accommodate new development. The study will assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any future development could be absorbed into the landscape, and if so, what scale of development would be appropriate and what mitigation measures might be required to ensure that there would be no unacceptable residual effects on the landscape.

A combination of desktop study and fieldwork was used to identify parcels of land with common characteristics within a study area defined by the parish boundaries and a range of landscape and visual criteria were identified, assessed and scored in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development.

Parcels were rated as having Low, Medium-Low, Medium, Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate development based on the criteria and assumptions set out in Section 1 below. Five No. parcels were identified as having a Medium capacity to accommodate development. These were located immediately adjacent to the existing settlement fringes, where they responded to the landscape features and visual characteristics present. These parcels included:

- Three parcels of land on the eastern edge of Stebbing village that have a close connection to the existing settlement edge and a relatively low visual influence on the surrounding landscape (being relatively well screened), and which could be considered a natural extension of the village's development. The acceptability of such extensions would be dependent on the re-creation of a new vegetated edge that mimics the successful transition between village and wider agricultural landscape that currently exists and the safeguarding of the setting of the nearby Conservation Area and Listed Buildings.
- A parcel of land within Bran End that has strong connections to the existing settlement grain, and which could provide an opportunity to create a softer edge to this portion of the village, as experienced in views from the B1057 as it approaches the village. For such a development to be successful, it would be necessary to restrict new built forms to the upper/higher portions of the parcel, maintain some views across the valley from Brick Kiln Lane and to respect the setting of the footpath that crosses the site. It may be appropriate for the lower section to be used from public open space.
- A small parcel of grazing meadows to the rear of properties fronting Warehouse Road. This parcel is contained and well screened from the surrounding landscape.

The appraisal considered only aspects relating to landscape character and visual amenity and development in these parcels may not prove to be feasible or practicable for other reasons, for example an inability to provide suitable access arrangements or unavailability of the land.

The analysis found that most landscapes within the parish of Stebbing had a Low or Medium-Low capacity to accommodate development. Parcels within the Low category fell, largely, within the following types:

- Valley side landscapes that provided a setting and backdrop to the historic elements of Stebbing village, Bran End and Church End, including the Grade I Listed church and the Conservation Area.
- Open agricultural landscapes that contributed to the setting of Stebbing village, the Warehouse Road hamlet and Stebbing Green.
- Land that provided important breaks, necessary to maintain the historic settlement pattern of the discrete hamlets within the village, e.g. between Warehouse Road and Church End.

Any development in these parcels would have significant adverse effects on the historic integrity of the village and its development, the setting of Listed Buildings, and/or the attractive views and vistas that are available from points within the village.

Those parcels that fell in the Medium-Low category generally fell into the following groups:

- Parcels that had some affinity with the existing settlement edges but where development had the potential to compromise other factors such as public or private views.
- Land with little connection to existing settlements but where topography and vegetation structure provided a degree of containment and resulted in the parcel having a limited visual influence on the character of the wider landscape.

The preferred options Braintree Local Plan 2016 proposes in draft Policy SP10 a West of Braintree New Garden Community, which is a new settlement of between 10,000 to 13,000 homes to the west of Braintree that could potentially be extended into the parish of Stebbing. The broad area of search includes Andrewsfield, Boxted Wood and land to the west of Stebbing Green, which are being promoted by landowners and developers, as well as Braintree District Council. Although the area of search for the proposed development is largely within the neighbouring parishes of Great Saling and Rayne it does extend into the south-eastern part of Stebbing parish. As such, it has the potential to have major impact on the area and adversely affect the setting of the village, and in particular the hamlet of Stebbing Green. Consequently, this report analyses the essential area of minimum separation between Stebbing and the proposed new garden settlement.

An analysis was undertaken to establish the minimum extent of land required to safeguard the setting of Stebbing Green. Figure 6 demonstrates the necessary swathe of open valley side that would need to be maintained to the east of Stebbing Green. Maintaining such a swathe of land free from development would also help safeguard the setting of Boxted Wood, an Ancient Woodland at the top of the valley slope.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the appraisal

1.1.1 In November 2016, Stebbing Parish Council's Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Committee commissioned The Landscape Partnership to analyse the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape within the parish of Stebbing to accommodate new development. The results of this Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal are to form part of the evidence base that the Parish Council will use when compiling its Neighbourhood Development Plan.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 The parish of Stebbing was designated as the Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan Area under an Executive Decision by the Leader of Uttlesford District Council on 08 June 2016, following an application from Stebbing Parish Council. The plan area is contiguous with the parish boundaries.

1.2.2 Stebbing Parish Council has commissioned this study to inform its Neighbourhood Development Plan and help it understand the sensitivity of the landscape within Stebbing, and to provide a clear and concise evaluation of various parcels of land within the parish to determine the relative sensitivity of their landscape character to change. The study will assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any future development can be absorbed into the landscape and, if so, what scale of development is appropriate and what mitigation measures might be required to ensure that there would be no unacceptable effects on the landscape.

1.2.3 It is important to note that the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal considers only landscape-related aspects in its assessment of the ability of a parcel of land to accommodate development. For example, no account has been taken of access or highway issues, or the presence of ecologically-important habitats. It is quite possible that a parcel of land could score well in terms of the ability of its landscape to accommodate development (e.g. it is relatively well screened or set in strong vegetation framework) but that such development is not deliverable on account of other aspects, e.g. access or flooding issues.

1.2.4 The Appraisal does not respect landownership boundaries and so takes no account of whether or not a landowner might wish to take land out of its current use and promote it for future development.

1.3 Approach and methodology

1.3.1 The methodology for the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal was based on the approach promoted in Topic Paper 6, 'Techniques and criteria for judging capacity and sensitivity', which forms part of the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage guidance 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland'. The paper

explores thinking and recent practice on judging capacity and sensitivity. The recommended methodology developed for this study adopted the following premise from Topic Paper 6:

$$\textit{existing landscape character sensitivity} + \textit{visual sensitivity} = \textit{Overall Landscape Sensitivity}$$

1.3.2 Alongside the development of the methodology, a desk-based study was undertaken that involved the gathering and reviewing current and background information relating to the landscape setting of Stebbing. This included reference to:

- Adopted Uttlesford Local Plan 2005
- Natural England's National Character Area profiles
- Essex Landscape Character Assessment, 2003
- Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessments, 2006

1.3.3 The outer boundaries of the study area accorded with those of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Area, i.e. the parish boundaries and the Development Limits, as defined in the Adopted Uttlesford Local Plan 2005, were used to determine the inner edge of the study area; see Figure 01.

1.3.4 The landscape within the study area was divided into a series of parcels of land with common characteristics. The parcels were defined by desktop research that was then refined and adjusted in the light of findings in the field as necessary. Characteristics that informed the identification of the parcels included:

- landform
- landscape designations
- hydrology
- landscape scale
- vegetation cover
- land uses
- pattern of settlement
- presence of views and landmarks features
- communications

1.3.5 These parcels largely reflected the main natural elements of the landscape such as rivers and floodplains, tributary valleys, valley slopes, ridgelines and elements relating to land use, human influences, etc.

- 1.3.6 The drawing of boundary lines was a necessary part of the process but did not always mean that parcels were dramatically different to either side of the line, as change was typically a more gradual transition. However, in some instances the boundary lines for parcels marked more a watershed of character where the balance of the defining elements had shifted from one landscape character to another. For practical purposes the boundary was aligned on features that could be identified on the ground such as boundary features or landscape elements. This analysis was typically at the field level scale with, where appropriate, some aggregation of field and landscape units of a similar character.
- 1.3.7 The field survey work was carried out by Landscape Architects who used a standard pro forma (see Appendix A) to record data in a consistent manner. The parcels were photographed (where relevant) to capture landscape character for internal purposes when reviewing and evaluating the character and analysis studies and compiling the report. The fieldwork confirmed important views into, out of, and through the village, any landmark landscape features, and sensitive routes/corridors and their corresponding sensitivity to change. Information was also gathered around opportunities for landscape enhancements in keeping with local landscape character and the potential for green infrastructure provision.
- 1.3.8 Following the fieldwork the parcels were reviewed, mapped and the field survey notes written up to provide a general commentary to describe and assess the key characteristics, distinctive features and landscape elements, as well as an indication of the 'strength of character' and 'condition' of each parcel.
- 1.3.9 The parcels were assessed for their landscape sensitivity and capacity, based on a pre-defined set of criteria. These criteria reflect both the national guidance in Topic Paper 6 and the particular circumstances for the rural landscape in the vicinity of Stebbing.
- 1.3.10 The criteria were grouped into primary factors (representing features that are more permanent in the landscape such as landform or those that would take a substantial period of time to vary) and secondary factors (representing features that are of a more temporary or transient nature or that could be subject to relatively rapid change or improvement, e.g. through sensitive design).
- 1.3.11 The following criteria were selected to reflect existing landscape features:
- slope analysis (primary)
 - vegetation enclosure (primary)
 - the complexity and scale of the landscape (secondary)
 - the condition of the landscape (secondary)
- 1.3.12 The following criteria were selected to reflect visual sensitivity:
- openness to public view (secondary)

- openness to private view (secondary)
 - relationship with existing urban conurbation (primary)
 - safeguarding the separation of settlements and/or historic settlement patterns (primary)
 - scope to mitigate the development (primary)
- 1.3.13 It is recognised that Topic Paper 6 refers to a wider range of factors within what is termed 'Landscape Character Sensitivity'. However, in the context of this study these were not considered to be relevant and that they would be picked up as part of other evidence base work, e.g. nature conservation or cultural heritage. It was also considered that, for the purpose of this evaluation, the main relevant existing landscape and visual factors were addressed in the above categories. These were incorporated into the field survey forms used to assess each parcel (refer to Appendix A).
- 1.3.14 The Overall Landscape Sensitivity provided an evaluation of the sensitivity of a parcel in broad strategic terms. In order to assess the Overall Landscape Capacity of a parcel, 'Landscape Value' was added to the equation, as follows.
- Overall Landscape Sensitivity + Landscape Value = Overall Landscape Capacity*
- 1.3.15 Landscape value can be measured in a number of ways, e.g. by the presence of statutory landscape designations, local landscape designations, other ecological/cultural heritage designations, or local perceived value. For the purposes of this appraisal, in the absence of any consensus studies as informed by stakeholders, a landscape value score was determined by reference to any landscape-related designations that encompassed all or part of a parcel of land. Each parcel was assumed to have an initial, middle ground, C rating, and this score was amended in line with any designations that might be present. For example: the presence of a Conservation Area might change this score to a D rating, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to an E rating.
- 1.3.16 To assess the landscape capacity of a parcel to accommodate development, certain assumptions needed to be applied. For the purposes of this study it was assumed that development would include mainly two to two and a half storey residential units and that any commercial units would be of a similar height. It was not anticipated that there would be a demand for taller structures, but if a parcel was considered able to accommodate such structures, this was identified in the description of the parcel. It was also assumed that development would be of a low to moderate scale, that it would be of an architectural character that typically reflected vernacular qualities of existing properties in the settlement, that any developments proposed for the village would be viewed holistically and that build-out would be phased over an appropriate period of time.

- 1.3.17 Each parcel was assessed against the criteria noted above, using a five-point scale from most suitable to least suitable (A to E), guided by a set of definitions/descriptions that had been developed for this study to reflect local characteristics (see Appendix B). An assessment was made of each parcel in order to determine a score for: Landscape Sensitivity Profile and Overall Capacity Profile. To build in weighting for the primary and secondary factors, a 1.5 x weighting was applied to primary factors.
- 1.3.18 The results were recorded on a set pro forma to provide a consistent approach reflecting each of the criteria.
- 1.3.19 The Overall Capacity Profile score identifies the parcel's capacity based on the following range:
- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| 27 – 33.5 | Low Landscape Capacity |
| 34 – 40.5 | Medium-Low Landscape Capacity |
| 41 – 47.5 | Medium Landscape Capacity |
| 48 – 54.5 | Medium-High Landscape Capacity |
| 55 – 61.5 | High Landscape Capacity |
- 1.3.20 The principle of applying a numerical scale to define landscape capacity was used to help provide transparency through the field judgement process. However, it should be emphasized that scores were not to be regarded as a precise and definitive judgement but merely as a means to establish relative capacity, and no absolute conclusion should be drawn from the numerical totals. The influence of individual criteria in a given parcel and in the context of the wider landscape character was also given due consideration. Those parcels that were borderline in terms of suitability were considered in more detail based on the overall spread and balance of the profiles and scope to mitigate in making a final judgement. To aid these considerations a commentary of the key points has been provided for each parcel.
- 1.3.21 In terms of assumptions as to the scale of any appropriate development it is unlikely that any development, save occasional individual plots in very specific locations, would be appropriate in parcels with a Low landscape capacity. Anything but very localised, small-scale development in parcels with a Medium-Low landscape capacity is likely to have a significant adverse effect on landscape character and/or visual amenity, even with mitigation measures in place.
- 1.3.22 Parcels that have a Medium, Medium-High or High landscape capacity are considered to be the most likely to be suitable as a potential location for development. Where appropriate, further detail regarding the type, nature and principles for development are described within the narrative summary to help provide guidance in identifying the most suitable locations and/or layouts for any future development. Notwithstanding this, even where parcels are considered to have an ability to accommodate some development it is unlikely that this would

be appropriate over the whole parcel. New development would need to be accompanied by suitable and often significant mitigation measures such as planting to assist in assimilating the development into the surrounding landscape, as well as green infrastructure provision to provide biodiversity and amenity value. Elsewhere, significant portions of the parcel would need to be left undeveloped in order to maintain separation or to provide appropriate buffers to particular features.

1.3.23 Parcels with Medium, Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate development in landscape terms will potentially have one or more of the following capacities (which would typically be confirmed by further in-depth assessment appropriate):

- Limited/localised capacity for some small-scale development – land parcels in which small areas of development could be accommodated in specific areas without significant adverse landscape effects. Sites would be typically less than 1ha and would accommodate up to 15 units.
- Limited/localised capacity for some medium scale development – land parcels in which medium-scale areas of development could be accommodated in specific areas without significant adverse landscape effects. Sites would be typically 0.5ha to 2ha, and would accommodate up to 25 units
- Opportunities for some medium to large scale development – land parcels in which large-scale widespread development could be accommodated without significant adverse landscape effects. Sites would be typically larger than 2ha and accommodate more than 25 units.
- Opportunities for some large-scale development, e.g. more than 60 units, without significant adverse landscape effects.

1.3.24 It is unlikely that any extension of the built edge of the village extending over, say, 1ha would be appropriate without accepting significant change to the character of the surrounding landscape or the urban grain of the settlement, and that such a footprint could be significantly less in locations that have specific constraints.

2 Landscape context

2.1 Stebbing parish

2.1.1 The parish of Stebbing is located centrally in the northern portion of the county of Essex, some 9km west of Braintree and 3.5km east of Great Dunmow, to the north of the A120 corridor. To the north, the parish abuts Lindsell, Little Bardfield and Great Bardfield; to the east, Bardfield Saling and Great Saling; to the south Felsted; and to the west, Little Dunmow and Great Dunmow.

- 2.1.2 Settlement within the village has largely developed along the line of the Stebbing Brook that flows southwards to meet the River Chelmer at Felsted. The Stebbing Brook has formed a relatively narrow, steep sided valley along the western edge of the parish. Here, the well wooded valley sides provide an important setting to the main part of the village and a backdrop to many attractive views out from the historic core of the settlement.
- 2.1.3 The settlement has developed as a series of hamlets along the valley and now comprises the main Stebbing village with Bran End and Duck End to the north, Church End and a further hamlet fronting Warehouse Road to the south.
- 2.1.4 Stebbing Green at the south-eastern end of the parish has developed along the line of the shallower River Ter. This presents as a series of intact Listed (frequently thatched) agricultural workers' cottages each set within a generous plot and fronting a wide verge, set within remnants of common land. To the east of the cottages the valley side continues to gently rise and provides an open agricultural backdrop to the cottages accentuated by the presence of Boxted Wood (Ancient Woodland) on the horizon.
- 2.1.5 A further hamlet between Church End and Stebbing Green is formed by the collection of houses fronting Warehouse Road and Collops Villas. Despite their proximity and the interlinking road, each of these collections of properties have maintained a sense of their own identity both in terms of character and physical separation from each other.
- 2.1.6 Dating from around 1360 the parish church of St Mary the Virgin is Grade I Listed and located at Church End at the junction of High Street and Watch House Road. Its spire is an important focal point in many views across the parish.
- 2.1.7 Like many towns and villages in north Essex, the village owed much of its prosperity during the C15, C16 and C17 to the cloth industry and this is evident today in the number of surviving historic buildings that line the main route through Stebbing village and hamlets. Many of these buildings are Listed and the central portion of Stebbing village itself is designated as a Conservation Area.
- 2.1.8 Away from Stebbing village and associated hamlets, the wider parish has a rural, agricultural character and in places, particularly to the north and west, a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness. The landscape comprises medium to large scale arable fields divided by hedges and, particularly to the south-east, small blocks of woodland.
- 2.1.9 The B1057 follows a line south-westwards from Finchingfield through Duck End and the northern portion of the parish and on to Great Dunmow. At Bran End, a road continues from the B1057 south-eastwards through Stebbing village High Street to Church End where it becomes Watch House Road, and then, sequentially, Warehouse Road, Collops Villas and Stebbing Green. At the southern end of the parish it joins the B1256 Dunmow Road, which follows a line east-west parallel with the relatively recent A120. The later dual carriageway

links the A12 at Marks Tey with Stansted Airport and Bishop's Stortford, and continues westwards to join the A10 at Puckeridge.

- 2.1.10 The narrow and winding Protected Lane known as Whitehouse Road follows a line up the valley side where it becomes Lubberhedges Lane and continues across the plateau before descending to meet the B1057 in the vicinity of Duck End. Aside from this lane, the eastern half of the parish is free of vehicular transport routes. The lane provides access to a small number of properties set in individual plots on the eastern edge of the parish.
- 2.1.11 Andrewsfield, located on high ground on the eastern side of the parish and partly within the adjacent Great Saling parish, is a privately owned airfield, providing landing and hangerage facilities, operating as a flying club and offering training courses.
- 2.1.12 The British Geological Survey shows that Stebbing is underlain by London Clay, with Crag deposits approximating to the higher land in the north-east of the parish. The valley and its tributaries are overlain with glacial and post-glacial sands, gravels, clays and silts.
- 2.1.13 Reference to Soilscales shows that the soils of the valley floor and lower slopes are free-draining, slightly acid loamy soils with a lower fertility. Those of the wider landscape have a higher fertility and comprise lime-rich and clayey soils with impeded drainage.

2.2 Landscape-related designations

Scheduled Monuments and Ancient Monuments

- 2.2.1 There are four Scheduled Monuments within the study area. These are:
- The Mount: described in English Heritage's records as "a motte castle situated on a prominent west-facing spur in Stebbing Park, 750m north-west of the church".
 - Two moated sites, one at Porter's Hall, north-west of Stebbing Green (described in English Heritage's records as "*On a hill top and overlooking and 1.25km south-east of Stebbing Brook*") and another at Holt's Farm, at the northern end of the parish, east of Duck End, "*situated on high ground over-looking Stebbing Brook*".
 - The medieval tile kilns south of Church End.
- 2.2.2 The Mount and the two moated sites are identified in the Local Plan as Ancient Monuments, where they are subject to Policy ENV4: Ancient Monuments and Sites of Archaeological Importance. In the case of the tile kilns, it is an adjacent piece of land that falls under the remit of Policy ENV4.

Listed Buildings

- 2.2.3 There are approximately 150 Listed Buildings in the study area; of these one is Grade I listed: the Church of St Mary the Virgin located at Church End, and six Grade II*: the Friends Meeting House, Town Mill, Tan Office Farmhouse, and the old manor houses of Priors Hall, Porters Hall, Stebbing Park.

- 2.2.4 Listed buildings are located throughout the parish, with the highest concentration being within the Stebbing Conservation Area (see commentary below). Generally, the Listed Buildings front onto the main routes through the string of hamlets that make up the settlement: Bran End, Stebbing, Church End and Stebbing Green. Elsewhere, Listed Buildings are generally associated with isolated farmsteads.

Conservation Areas

- 2.2.5 Conservation Areas are defined by the 1990 Planning Act as “*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. Published Conservation Area Appraisals provide an overview of the existing character that should be preserved, as well as possible areas for future enhancement.
- 2.2.6 The Uttlesford Local Plan addresses the design of development within its Conservation Areas at Policy ENV1.
- 2.2.7 The Stebbing Conservation Area was first designated by Essex County Council in 1977 and was reviewed in 1991 and 2010. The 2010 Stebbing Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals report revised the boundary to include three additional small areas. It also makes proposals for planning controls and good practice in respect of Listed Buildings and other buildings that make an important architectural or historic contribution to the streetscape, important open spaces, and trees and distinctive features that make an important visual or historic contribution to the landscape. The report also proposes enhancements that might address visually detracting elements.
- 2.2.8 The extent of the Stebbing Conservation Area reflects the principle form of the settlement community as it existed in the late 19th century. The main core consists of Church End, the High Street, Mill Lane and Stebbing Park. The 2010 Appraisal and Management Proposals report describes Stebbing as:

A tranquil, rural village of some importance in historical, visual and archaeological terms...throughout the conservation area and along the peripheries of the settlement significant open spaces and extensive tree cover enhance the individual buildings of importance, whilst reinforcing the pleasantly rural character.

Ancient Woodland and important woodland

- 2.2.9 Ancient Woodland is formally defined by Natural England and comprises woodland that has existed continuously since 1600. Such woodland is likely to have developed naturally, since before that date the planting of woodlands was not commonplace.
- 2.2.10 Ancient Woodland falls under the remit of Local Plan Policy ENV7: The Protection of the Natural Environment - Designated Sites. The Local Plan also identifies Important Woodland, at Policy ENV8: Other Landscape Elements of Importance for Nature Conservation.

2.2.11 There are a number of Ancient Woodlands within the study area. These are located in the eastern portion of the parish, along the ridge of land between Stebbing Brook and Pods Brook. Ancient Woodland recorded in the Local Plan generally accords with that identified by Natural England with the exception of Lubberhedges Wood at the northern end of the parish, which is not annotated on the Local Plan Proposals Map as Ancient Woodland.

- Lubberhedges Wood, 10.68ha of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland in the north-eastern corner of the parish.
- Whitehouse Spring, 3.93ha of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland south-west of Old Whitehouse Farm.
- Mousin Wood, 3.30ha of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland north-west of Badcocks Farm.
- Boxted Wood, 13.75ha of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland on the eastern parish boundary, to the east of Stebbing Green.

2.2.12 The following blocks are designated on the Local Plan Proposals Map as Important Woodlands and subject to Policy ENV8:

- Whitehouse Spring, south-west of Old Whitehouse Farm.
- Mousin Wood, north-west of Badcocks Farm.
- Cannon Wood, on the eastern parish boundary, south-east of Whitehouse Farm Cottages.
- Nick's Hole, on the western parish boundary, following a minor tributary of the Stebbing Brook to the north-west of Bran End.
- Leaselands Spring on the east-facing valley side, to the west of Bran End.
- The Fir Wood to the west of Stebbing Park.

Special Verges and Protected Lanes

2.2.13 Special Verges are designated in the Local Plan at Policy ENV8: Other Landscape Elements of Importance for Nature Conservation. The following Special Verges fall within the study area:

- Bordering the B1057 between Poplar Farm and Hill Farm, north of Duck End.
- Bordering the High Street, close to the junction with Brick Kiln Lane, Bran End.
- Virom Island, adjacent to the High Street, Stebbing, east of The Mount.

2.2.14 Protected Lanes are designated in the Local Plan at Policy ENV9: Historic Landscapes, these include:

- Warehouse Road, northwards from its junction with the B1256, past Cowlands Barn and Collops Farm to Warehouse Villas.

- Whitehouse Road, eastwards from its junction with Clay Lane, and then Lubberhedges Lane to its junction with the B1057 at Duck End, close to Hill Farm.
- Lindsell Lane, westwards from its junction with the B1057, along the northern boundary of the parish.

2.3 Landscape character

2.3.1 There are three published landscape character assessments, conducted at different scales that encompass the parish.

1. At the national level the National Character Area profiles.
2. At the county level the Essex Landscape Character Assessment.
3. At the district level the Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment.

With regard to informing the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal, the latter is considered to be the most relevant as it provides the most detailed information.

National Character Area profiles

2.3.2 In the mid-1990s, English Nature and the Countryside Commission jointly produced The Character Map of England – a single map that identified and described 159 Joint Character Areas (JCA) covering the whole of England. (The Landscape Partnership undertook the mapping and character assessment work on behalf of Natural England for the east of England). Each distinct area was defined following consideration of its landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. The boundaries of the areas followed natural rather than administrative boundaries. The various volumes of the Map were published between 1998 and 2000.

2.3.3 More recently, Natural England has undertaken a review of the JCAs in order to fulfil, in part, responsibilities set out in the Natural Environment White Paper 2011, Biodiversity 2020 and the European Landscape Convention 2007 creating National Character Area (NCA) profiles which are based on the original JCA profiles¹.

2.3.4 The NCA profiles are guidance documents that can assist communities in decision-making by informing them about the places that they live in and care for. The profiles are working documents that draw on current evidence and knowledge. Natural England aims to refresh and update them periodically as new information becomes available.

2.3.5 Each NCA profile includes:

- a description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes;

¹ <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/>, retrieved 03.04.2014

- details as to how the landscape has changed over time;
 - the current key drivers for ongoing change; and
 - a broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services.
- 2.3.6 Statements of Environmental Opportunity are suggested and guidance offered on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future
- 2.3.7 Stebbing Parish is located centrally within NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands.
- 2.3.8 NCA 86 is a broadly flat, chalky, boulder clay plateau, dissected by an undulating river valley topography that is particularly marked in upper valley reaches, which are much smaller in scale. Land use is predominantly arable with a wooded appearance and some pasture on the valley floors. Field patterns are irregular, despite rationalization, due to remnants of ancient countryside.
- 2.3.9 Settlement consists of scattered farmsteads, divided by deep ditches and moats. Parishes are dispersed with small settlements focused around tyes (commons) or strip greens in isolated hamlets. Buildings tend to be timber-framed and colour-washed houses which are sometimes faced with Georgian red brick. There are also large villages and frequent towns, most with medieval street plans and elaborate timber-frame houses, as well as a rich heritage of barns and impressive churches.
- 2.3.10 This well preserved, archetypal, lowland pastoral English countryside is coupled with attractive vernacular buildings dating from a period of industrial wealth. There are a few large woods (20 acres plus), including some ancient coppice wood, as well as a typical pattern of copses connected by hedgerows. Trees and woods appear to join together to give wooded skyline, with occasional bare ridgelines. The road pattern away from major routes, is winding with wide verges and strong hedgerows. Sunken hollow lanes lined with hedgerows are a common feature with the impact of Dutch elm disease quite apparent. The main hedgerow trees in this area are elm, oak and ash.
- 2.3.11 The following 'key drivers' for change within NCA 86 are noted:
- *The Haven Gateway is subject to major housing and jobs growth putting potential pressure on sensitive landscapes and habitats through increased public access and recreation. Water resources are predicted to become stretched. Priorities are to ensure a balance between economic, housing and infrastructure growth with continued protection of environmental assets of the area.*
 - *Locally determined planning and development control may in some cases have the potential to impact on the landscape. Ensuring that local development frameworks*

recognise the importance of conserving and enhancing the landscape will help reduce any potentially negative impacts.

- *Potential growth may lead to increases in the importance of the recreational and environmental value of landscapes within the urban surround; the potential for green infrastructure funding; opportunities for improved access and climate change adaptation.*

2.3.12 With regard to accommodating new development, NCA profile 86 includes the following landscape opportunities:

- *Protect the pastoral river valley landscape from further fragmentation by resisting inappropriate use and development, promoting traditional management practices, protecting existing pasture from conversion to arable use (especially those containing archaeological features), and seeking opportunities to create more permanent grassland as appropriate, through the uptake of agri environment options.*
- *Conserve the rural settlement pattern by ensuring that new development is complementary to intrinsic local character.*
- *Conserve rural settlement character by using traditional materials in new developments especially the use of colour-washed render and pegtiles.*
- *Conserve the strongly nucleated character of settlements by encouraging new development to take place within the existing curtilage of settlements.*
- *Work in partnership with the AONB partnership, following guidance set out within the AONB Management Plan, to protect the tranquillity of The Dedham Vale and its setting, from intrusive communication and utility infrastructure, noisy recreational pursuits, air traffic and light pollution.*
- *Raise the design quality of new and existing development. Incorporate green infrastructure that provides opportunities for wildlife and public access within urban areas and screens intrusive urban influence (especially on the periphery of settlements), with the use of substantial and appropriate landscaping, such as woodland planting, earthworks and green roofs.*

Essex Landscape Character Assessment

2.3.13 The Essex Landscape Character Assessment was carried out in 2002/3 to a scale of 1:50,000. The landscape character area B1 Central Essex Farmland, a part of the B Glacial Till Plateau landscape character type, entirely encompasses the parish of Stebbing. C5: Chelmer Valley located c.2km to the south-west. However, the ridge formed between the Chelmer and the Stebbing Brook would effectively block development in Stebbing parish from having any

influence on that landscape character area. For this reason, only B1 Central Essex Clayland character area is considered further.

2.3.14 The landscape character assessment notes:

The Central Essex Farmlands is an extensive area of gently undulating arable farmland bisected by the Chelmer Valley. Irregular fields are enclosed by thick but intermittent hedgerows, or just marked by grassy banks and ditches. In long views scattered small woods and copses, and hedgerow trees coalesce to sometimes create the illusion of a wooded horizon. The dispersed settlement pattern is characterised by small isolated hamlets and farmsteads, often straggling along lanes, with a few widely separated towns and larger villages. Narrow strip greens and moated farmsteads are distinctive features of the area. Away from the A120, A130, A12, M11 road corridors/Stansted Airport and its flightpaths large parts of the area have a tranquil character, embracing tracts of fairly secluded countryside.

Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment

2.3.15 Subsequent to the Essex Landscape Character Assessment, a district-level landscape character assessment was commissioned jointly by Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council. This was completed by Chris Blandford Associates in 2008. Generic landscape character types were identified and within this discrete landscape character areas were assessed. The landscape character types and landscape character areas were identified and boundaries drawn to a scale of 1:25,000. As this is the most detailed landscape character assessment available, the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal will use this landscape character assessment as a baseline.

2.3.16 The study area encompasses parts of three landscape character areas (LCAs) within two landscape character types (LCTs). In addition, two further LCAs are located beyond, but in the vicinity of, the study area, one of which is adjacent to the southern boundary of the parish.

2.3.17 Landscape Character Type A: River Valley Landscapes, described as V or U shaped valleys with an undulating or flat valley bottom that dissects a boulder clay/chalky till plateau and sometimes with an intimate or wooded character, is sub-divided into 12 landscape character areas. **LCA A6: Upper Chelmer River Valley**, encompasses the lower elevations of the Stebbing Brook valley in which the settlement of Stebbing is located, in the western portion of the parish. **LCA A12: Pods Brook River Valley** is located immediately to the east of the parish boundary. The ridge of higher land between the two valleys (Stebbing Brook and Pods Brook) largely blocks intervisibility between the study area and LCA A12. However, any

development located on the highest elevations of the ridge, within Stebbing parish, is likely to be visible from the points at lower elevations in LCA A12.

- 2.3.18 For each LCA, the landscape character assessment provides additional descriptions and key characteristics, identifies key planning and land management issues and sensitivities for change, proposes landscape strategy objectives and suggests planning and land management guidelines.

LCA A6 – Upper Chelmer River Valley

- 2.3.19 Key characteristics of LCA A6 are noted as:

- Narrow valley, with a restricted valley floor.
- Small meandering river channel on the left side of the valley close to the riding ground of the valley side.
- Dense riverside trees.
- Arable valley sides with a fairly open character.
- Small linear settlements occupy the upper valley sides or straggle down to a few bridging points.
- Historic watermills and Second World War pill boxes are distinctive features.
- Mostly tranquil away from Great Dunmow, Chelmsford and the A120.

- 2.3.20 Within the study area, LCA A6 encompasses Stebbing Brook, one of several small tributaries of the Chelmer that form valley sides in the LCA. The valley sides are described as

undulating... which are steep in places, have a more open character with low thick but fragmented hedgerows, scattered hedgerow trees and only occasional woods separating the large arable fields that line the valley sides meeting at the river. The fields to the east of the River Chelmer tend to be larger and more regular in shape.

- 2.3.21 Visual characteristics are identified as generally open views from the valley sides into the gently meandering valley floodplain which are framed and/or enclosed in places by small patches of woodland along the valley corridor.

- 2.3.22 The landscape character assessment summarises LCA A6's historic land use as being: *"dominated by extensive enclosed meadow pastures along the river valley floodplains and pre-18th century generally irregular fields, probably of medieval origin or older"*. The assessment notes that the medieval pattern of dispersed settlements and scattered farmsteads largely survive despite much C20 development.

- 2.3.23 Key planning and land management issues relevant to built development are identified as:
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings or residential expansion of villages onto the valley slopes, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.
 - Increasing traffic on minor roads.
 - Potential further decline in condition of field boundaries through further agriculture intensification.
- 2.3.24 The landscape character assessment summarises LCA A6 as having a relatively high sensitivity to change. Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within LCA A6 are described as including:
- Dense riverside trees and a string of small wet woodland on the sloping valley sides, sensitive to land management changes.
 - Skyline of the valley slope, with open and framed cross-valley views and long views along the river corridor, visually sensitive to new tall or non-screened development.
 - Views to valley sides from adjacent LCAs.
 - Strong historic integrity including a largely surviving medieval settlement pattern and vernacular building features.
 - Several important wildlife habitats scattered throughout the area.
- 2.3.25 Landscape planning guidelines are suggested. Relevant to new built development in LCA A6 are:
- Consider the visual impact of new residential development and farm buildings upon valley sides.
 - Conserve and enhance cross-valley views and characteristic views across and along the valley.
 - Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.
 - Protect and enhance the role of the river valley in providing a network of informal open space and nature conservation sites.
- 2.3.26 Land management guidelines are suggested for LCA A6 as:
- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting where appropriate to local landscape character.
 - Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.

- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area.
- Strengthen the recreation role of the woodland resource.
- Conserve and promote the use of building materials, which are in keeping with local vernacular/landscape character.
- Conserve and enhance the nature character of the river valley through appropriate management of wildlife habitats.

LCA A12 – Pods Brook River Valley

2.3.27 Pods Brook River Valley is located in Braintree district, outside of the study area's boundaries. However, its proximity to Stebbing and valley bottom position, below the ridge that Stebbing Parish's boundary approximately follows, means that development on the ridge may be visible from LCA A12 and therefore affect its aspects of landscape character that rely on its setting and views out of the area. Key characteristics are identified as:

- Narrow shallow valley.
- Predominately pastoral and heavily wooded.
- Wet meadows.

2.3.28 Its key visual characteristic is of generally open views into the gently meandering valley that are sometimes framed in places by small patches of woodland or hedgerow trees.

2.3.29 Key planning and land management issues that may be relevant when considering built development outside of the LCA are:

- Potential for erection of new farm buildings on the valley slopes, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.
- Increasing traffic on minor roads, especially during busy tourist periods and rush hour.

2.3.30 LCA A12 has a relatively high sensitivity to change. A key characteristic that could be affected by changes outside the LCA, is: *"The overall sense of tranquillity and skyline of the valley slopes"*.

2.3.31 The landscape planning guidelines suggested by the landscape character assessment are also relevant to development outside its boundaries:

- Consider the visual impact of new residential development and farm buildings upon the sparsely populated valley.
- Maintain cross--valley views and characteristic views across and along the valley.
- Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale and responds to the local historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and distinctive building styles.

2.3.32 Two landscape character areas, both within the Landscape Character Type B: Farmland Plateau, cover the remaining majority of Stebbing Parish: the northern portion by **B11 – Lindsell and Bardfield Farmland Plateau**, and the central and southern portions of the Parish by **B13: Rayne Farmland Plateau**. Adjacent to the southern boundary of the Parish and study area is a third landscape character area: **B16 Felsted Farmland Plateau**. This LCA is separated from the site by the B1256. Close to the south of this boundary is the A120 which forms a barrier separating the two landscape character areas and minimising the influence of change in one's LCA with LCAs in the other area's character.

LCA B11 – Lindsell and Bardfield Farmland Plateau

2.3.33 Key characteristics are given as:

- Glacial Till farmland plateau in Central Essex farmlands.
- Open, broadly rolling plateau, dissected by Pods Brook and Stebbing Brook.
- Mainly arable farmland with many shelterbelts forming dark backdrop to many views.
- Shelterbelts often thickly planted containing a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees
- Horse pasture visible near settlements.
- Linear settlement pattern along roads and lanes, or scattered farmsteads; there are no major villages, although Lindsell has an historic church.
- Vernacular architecture pale cream or white-washed plaster with thatched roofs, some half-timbered buildings.
- Tall species-rich hedgerows along many lanes; some hornbeam coppice visible.

2.3.34 The supporting text notes:

It is gently rolling, open countryside, covered by medium to large arable fields. Regular field patterns are delineated by a variety of vegetation but the overall character of the area is formed by the constant backdrop of trees, sometimes as dense shelterbelts, and sometimes interspersed between field boundaries, along with gappy hedgerows. Hedges are usually hawthorn and it is used in a variety of ways: as low field dividers, as tall screens along lanes, as gappy remnants of pre-enclosure and as mature specimens in isolation or grouped together, especially near settlements.

And:

In spite of the tree cover, the landscape appears very open; the field pattern is medium to large scale and there are no villages of any size.

- 2.3.35 Relevant visual characteristics given by the landscape character assessment are:
- Views across farmland plateau from roads and public rights of way are usually open, but often framed or limited by tree belts or high hedges.
 - Attractive views across the Chelmer valley slopes can be gained from the western edges of the area.
- 2.3.36 Evidence of historic land use within LCA B11 is dominated by predominantly pre-18th century irregular fields, relatively small in size in the southern half of the area. There is also the occasional common field which had been later enclosed piecemeal by agreement. Historically the settlement comprised dispersed or polyfocal settlement strung along an extensive network of linear and triangular greens, the latter located at road junctions. In addition, there were isolated farms set within their own lands. Other main historic landscape features include: twisting and partially sunken roads, and a number of small parks and some ancient woodland.
- 2.3.37 Key planning and land management issues relevant to built development are identified as pressure from expansion of settlements which may be detrimental to landscape character in particular Lindsell, Little Cambridge and pressure from increased traffic on rural lanes and erosion of verges. Also likely to be applicable to other types of development are those related to farms, including potential loss of hedgerows and field pattern due to intensive agricultural practices, and the potential for visual intrusion from new farm buildings on higher ground.
- 2.3.38 The landscape character assessment assesses B11's sensitivity to change as moderate. Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements in B11 are described as:
- Landscape pattern of small patches of ancient woodland scattered across the landscape, and several important wildlife habitats are sensitive to changes in land management.
 - Areas of plateau with a very open skyline are visually sensitive to new development that may interrupt views across, to and from the plateau.
 - Sense of historic integrity.
- 2.3.39 Landscape planning guidelines are suggested for LCA B11. Relevant to new built development are:
- Conserve the rural character of the area.
 - Ensure that any new development responds to historic settlement pattern, especially scale and density, and that use of materials, and especially colour, is appropriate to the local landscape character; such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape.

- Encourage the appropriate use of colour as well as tree planting to mitigate the visually intrusive effects of large modern farm buildings.
- Small scale development should be carefully sited in relation to existing farm buildings.

2.3.40 Land management guidelines for LCA B11 are suggested as:

- Strengthen and enhance hedgerows with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.
- Enhance existing landscape character by avoidance of further conifer planting along roads.
- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation sites.
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.
- Establish arable field margins as important nature conservation habitats.

LCA B13 – Rayne Farmland Plateau

2.3.41 The Rayne Farmland Plateau covers the central and southern portions of the site except for where it LCA A6 extends through the Stebbing Brook Valley. The landscape character assessment identifies its key characteristics as:

- Irregular field pattern of mainly medium and large arable fields, marked by sinuous fragmented hedges and ditches,
- Many small woods and copses provide structure and edges in the landscape.
- Scattered settlement pattern, with a few small hamlets.
- A concentration of isolated farmsteads, some with moats.
- A comprehensive network of rural lanes and Public Rights of Way.

2.3.42 The supporting text notes:

The Rayne Farmland Plateau is an area of gently rolling hills with wide flat tops and valleys covered by predominantly medium to large arable fields interspersed with small grass paddocks and pasture used for grazing horses. The farmland plateau is located west of Braintree with its southern boundary abutting the A120. The area is cut into by two small narrow river valleys with small narrow meandering streams which exaggerate the landscape slopes. Away from the valleys, there are long distance wide views over the large fields with the field boundaries generally delineated by hedges, which are often gappy and fragmented. The hedgerows vary in height from low well trimmed to tall with lots of hedgerow trees across the whole area. Some of the fields were only bound by ditches creating a very open view. On the valley slopes the fields are smaller and the views more channelled by the topography of the land and the higher density of

trees. The valley floors are dominated by wet meadows marshes and woodland which create constrained views. In the open view south west of Stebbing lies Andrew's Field airstrip with a large grey hanger and several light aircraft adjacent to the grass runway. Several small, often linear settlement are scattered across the landscape concentrated in the eastern and western extents of the area dominated by 20th century brick houses. Variety and interest is provided by the presence of occasional local vernacular buildings with timber-frames, colour wash and thatched roofs and isolated farmsteads, some of which have moats. There is an overall sense of tranquillity throughout the area away from the A120 and Braintree with a comprehensive network of quiet rural lanes and byways winding through the landscape.

2.3.43 Visual Characteristics:

- The circular tower of Bardfield Saling Church and the Andrewsfield airstrip form the key landmarks within the views across the farmland plateau.
- The views on the tops of the hills are generally open to panoramic depending on the heights and density of the surrounding trees and hedgerows.
- Views along the valley corridors are generally constrained or channelled depending on the frequency and density of trees.

2.3.44 In terms of historic land use, it is noted that LCA B13 is dominated by *“pre-18th century irregular fields, probably of medieval origin and some maybe even older, interspersed by what is categorised as ‘mixed origin’ fields”*.

2.3.45 Key planning and land management issues relevant to built development are noted as:

- Potential for erection of new farm buildings on the open farmland, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.
- Potential residential expansion of villages, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.

2.3.46 The landscape character assessment assesses LCA B13's sensitivity to change as moderate to high. Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements in LCA B13 include:

- Many small woods and copses and a mosaic of wet meadows, marshes and woodland along the valley floors, sensitive to changes in land management.
- The comprehensive network of quiet rural lanes and byways, which cross the landscape, sensitive to potential increased traffic flow, associated with new development.
- The skyline of the valley slopes, sensitive to new development that may be visible within views across and along the valleys.

- The sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern (with isolated farms, moated sites and small hamlets strung out along linear greens, several of which are visible today) and extensive enclosed meadow pastures along both river valleys.

2.3.47 Landscape planning guidelines are suggested for LCA B13. Relevant to new built development are:

- Consider the visual impact of new residential development and farm buildings upon the farmland plateau.
- Maintain cross-valley views and characteristic views across the farmland.
- Ensure new development within the farmland is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.

2.3.48 Land management guidelines for LCA B11 are suggested as:

- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting where appropriate to local landscape character.
- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important historical landscape and nature conservation features.
- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area.
- Conserve and promote the use of building materials, which are in keeping with local vernacular/landscape character.

LCA B16 – Felsted Farmland Plateau

2.3.49 Felsted Farmland Plateau is located in the parish of Felsted, outside of the study area's boundaries. However, due to its proximity to Stebbing Parish, changes within the study area may affect the setting of LCA B16 and aspects of its landscape character that relies on its setting and views out. Key characteristics are identified as:

- Gently undulating farmland.
- Network of narrow, winding lanes.
- Many small woods and copses provide structure and edges in the landscape.
- The farmland is predominantly arable with field boundaries delineated by fragmented hedgerows.

2.3.50 The supporting text makes the following observations regarding the character of LCA B16:

- *The farmland is gently undulating with a patchwork of irregular medium to large fields. Their boundaries are enclosed by either thick but intermittent hedgerows, or*

just marked by grassy banks and ditches. In long views scattered small woods and copses and hedgerow trees coalesce to sometimes create the illusion of a wooded horizon.

- *The area is fairly densely populated with villages straggling along the roads to coalesce with each other. The farmsteads also form clusters of buildings. There is a comprehensive network of narrow winding rural lanes around which the settlement pattern is based. Many of the roads surrounded by fields tend to be surrounded by raised banks or hedges.*
- *The area has a strong sense of place and away from the key settlements and the A120 and A131 is relatively tranquil.*

2.3.51 LCA B16's key visual characteristic is open panoramic views across the farmland, with variation in the views dictated by trees.

2.3.52 Key planning and land management issues relevant to built development are noted to include the potential for erection of new farm buildings and residential dwellings on the edge of the settlements, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.

2.3.53 The landscape character assessment assesses LCA B16's sensitivity to change as low to moderate. Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements in LCA B16 include:

- Many small woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees, which are sensitive to changes in land management.
- The comprehensive network of quiet rural lanes and byways, which cross the landscape, and which are sensitive to potential increased traffic flow associated with new development.
- The overall sense of tranquillity within the area is sensitive to change from increased traffic flows.

2.3.54 Landscape planning guidelines are suggested for LCA B16. Relevant to new built development are:

- Ensure that new build is in keeping with landscape character.
- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of settlements.
- Maintain cross-valley views and characteristic views across and along the valley.
- Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.

2.3.55 Land management guidelines for LCA B16 are suggested as:

- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting where appropriate to local landscape character.
- Conserve and manage areas of semi-natural woodland as important landscape and nature conservation features.
- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of hedges within the character area.
- Conserve and promote the use of building materials, which are in keeping with local vernacular/landscape character.
- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting where appropriate to local landscape character.

3 Visual context

3.1.1 The visual context of the landscape around Stebbing Parish has been analysed and the key views into and out of the Parish are noted on Figure 05.

3.1.2 Views can be divided into the following groups.

3.2 Views out from Church End

3.2.1 Attractive middle distance and longer views westwards and south-westwards out over the Stebbing Brook valley from higher ground in the vicinity of the church. The views provide one of the key components of the setting of Church End. The views encompass a complex topography of folding land forms that drop down to the valley floor. The upper slopes accommodate medium to large arable fields with good hedges and the lower elevations a pattern of smaller-scale grazed field. The east facing valley slope provides an important and well-vegetated backdrop to the views. Overall, the view has a settled character, with the view frequently framed by historic buildings.

3.3 Views westwards across Stebbing Brook to the valley side from points within Stebbing village

3.3.1 Further attractive middle and longer distance views westwards out over the Stebbing Brook valley from many points on the High Street and other receptors in Stebbing village. The views provide one of the key components to the setting of the village. The view encompasses the relatively narrow and steep-sided valley topography, with a backdrop provided by the well-vegetated east-facing valley side. Blocks of woodland are visible on the valley side, along with the parkland of Stebbing Park on the lower slopes and the valley floor. Open space grassland in the form of The Downs provides the foreground to many of the views.

3.4 Views westwards over Stebbing Brook valley to the distant landscape beyond from points in the vicinity of Warehouse Road

3.4.1 From points in the vicinity of Warehouse Road, long distance views are available out over the Stebbing Brook valley. Given the higher elevation of the viewpoint, views into the lower sections of the valley itself are limited, and the valley is denoted by the willow and poplar plantations planted along its floor rather than topography. There are limited references to built development and the view encompasses a largely arable, agricultural landscape.

3.5 Views eastwards out from Stebbing Green across open agricultural valley side to Boxted Wood

3.5.1 To the east of Stebbing Green, the valley side rises gently to Boxted Wood located on its upper reaches. As such, the open, arable valley side provides an important setting for the properties fronting Stebbing Green, and a further reference to their agricultural heritage.

3.6 Views north-eastwards towards Stebbing from higher points to the south and south-west

3.6.1 From a number of points along the B1254, and in particular from higher points on the road, immediately to the south and south-west, beyond the parish boundary, there are middle and longer distance views across the Stebbing Brook valley towards the village. Properties in the vicinity of the Warehouse Road hamlet are clearly visible sat on the upper valley slopes, and set in a relatively well vegetation landscape.

3.7 Panoramic views across the plateau over extensive open agricultural landscapes

3.7.1 From points in the north-east of the parish, e.g. from Lubberhedges Lane, there are open views out over a relatively extensive arable landscape. There is little reference to built form and the views have a strong sense of remoteness.

3.7.2 In many views, Lubberhedges Wood sits low in the landscape but still provides an horizon. From other points there is a strong sense of an unseen landscape beyond the parish boundary, resulting from a change in topography and horizon lines as the land dips down into the Pods Brook valley.

3.8 Views out over the central rolling agricultural landscape

3.8.1 From many points within the parish, e.g. from Whitehouse Road, Lubberhedges Lane, and connecting public rights of way, there long distance views out across rolling agricultural landscapes. In general, these views encompass medium to large scale fields with occasional farmsteads, with horizons formed by the topography or occasional blocks of woodland.

3.8.2 Those orientated to the west and north are frequently very far reaching, and encompass landscapes beyond the parish.

3.9 St Mary the Virgin parish church

- 3.9.1 The church spire is a frequent and recognisable landmark in many views in the vicinity of Stebbing village, providing a sense of impending habitation and arrival in many approaches to the settlement, e.g. from Warehouse Road, Brookend, Whitehouse Road.

4 Review of separation of Stebbing, Boxted Wood and Andrewsfield Garden Settlement

- 4.1.1 The preferred options Braintree Local Plan 2016 proposes in draft Policy SP10 a West of Braintree New Garden Community, which is a new settlement of between 10,000 to 13,000 homes to the west of Braintree that could potentially be extended into the parish of Stebbing. The broad area of search includes Andrewsfield, Boxted Wood and land to the west of Stebbing Green. The opening paragraph to the Policy states:

The broad area of search, as shown on the adopted policies map, is identified as a strategic area for development of a new garden community of which details and final numbers of homes will be set out in a Masterplan Framework to be prepared jointly between Braintree DC and Uttlesford DC if applicable and which will incorporate the following....

- 4.1.2 The policy then sets out a list of land uses and other requirements. Of particular reference to this landscape appraisal, the Policy requires the new development to be developed to high standards of design and layout drawing on its context and the assets within its boundaries including Boxted Wood and the historic airfield. It also states that the new community will also address the relationship with existing communities close to its boundaries including Great Saling, Stebbing Green and Stebbing. Furthermore, the Policy requires landscape buffers between the site and Great Saling, Stebbing, Stebbing Green and Rayne.
- 4.1.3 The broad area of search includes Andrewsfield, Boxted Wood and land to the west of Stebbing Green. Although the area of search for the proposed development is largely within the neighbouring parishes of Great Saling and Rayne it does extend into the south-eastern part of Stebbing parish. As such, it has the potential to adversely affect the setting of the village and, in particular, the hamlet of Stebbing Green. Consequently, this report analyses the essential area of minimum separation between Stebbing and the proposed new garden settlement, as shown on Figure 06.
- 4.1.4 As noted above, the open, arable valley side provides an important and much valued setting to the collection of farm-workers' cottages that comprise the Stebbing Green hamlet and a link to their agricultural past.
- 4.1.5 A process of desktop study and field work was undertaken in order to establish the minimum extent of land required to safeguard the setting of Stebbing Green. The analysis considered:

- The extent of visibility north-eastwards from Stebbing Green. In general, this was considered to be held by upper reaches of the valley slope and, in particular, by Boxted Wood, a block of Ancient Woodland located on the upper valley sides and plateau top. Further limitation of view is provided by established hedge lines on the upper valley slopes to the in particular those west of Bacons Farm. The latter blocks or at least filters many potential views of the Andrewsfield Airfield, particularly in summer months.
 - The extent of visibility north-eastwards from the Warehouse Road hamlet. Here, longer distance views are available up the valley side to the plateau top, encompassing a rolling, arable agricultural landscape. Andrewsfield Airfield is clearly visible on the plateau horizon.
 - The extent of visibility southwards and south-westwards from the plateau top. In the vicinity of the airfield and the public rights of way along its southern boundary, most potential views southwards are screened by the lines of hedges on the upper valley slopes, immediately to the south of Bacons Farm. Views to the south are blocked by Boxted Wood. Further to the west, longer distance views are available down the valley side towards Stebbing village, and encompassing the properties fronting Warehouse Road.
 - The sense of leaving Stebbing Green and arriving at the airfield/plateau top from points on inter-connecting transport routes; an analysis of publicly accessible routes between Stebbing Green and the airfield from where the separation can be physically experienced. The most important route is New Pasture Lane. Here, there is a strong sense of leaving the settled, lower slopes in the vicinity of Stebbing Green and Porters Hall, with its denser vegetation and built form, of travelling up the valley side on a winding and hedged lane, through an open, agricultural landscape, and arriving at the airfield on the plateau top. The sense of destination being accentuated by the change in topography from undulating valley side to plateau and the change in land cover from arable to open grassland.
- 4.1.6 Taking the findings of the analysis into account, Figure 6 demonstrates the necessary swathe of open valley side that would need to be maintained to the east of Stebbing Green in order to protect its setting. Maintaining such a swathe of land free from development would also help safeguard the setting of Boxted Wood, an Ancient Woodland at the top of the valley slope.
- 4.1.7 Figure 6 also highlights areas of land at the top of the valley slopes that have an association with Boxted Wood, and which might be used to provide mitigation to further protect the setting of Stebbing Green. Such areas should also be maintained free of built development but could include appropriate woodland planting and possible a degree of recreational access.

5 Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Analysis

- 5.1.1 The completed Landscape Capacity Appraisal forms for each parcel of land can be found at Appendix C. The findings are considered at Section 6.

6 Findings of Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Analysis

6.1 Identification and arrangement of Parcels

- 6.1.1 As described in the methodology, a combination of desktop and comprehensive fieldwork was used to identify parcels of land with common characteristics within Stebbing parish. This involved a systematic survey of the natural elements of the landscape and overlying elements relating to land uses.
- 6.1.2 An overview of the scale and arrangement of the parcels reveals that they are smaller in scale where they abut the existing settlement fringes, where the boundaries are responding to the varied landform and organic nature of the existing settlement edge. Parcel size increases away from the settlements, with more substantial compartments lying in the most distant/remote parts of the parish.
- 6.1.3 The parcel boundaries are shown on Figure 07: Landscape parcels.

6.2 Parcel analysis

- 6.2.1 For each of the parcels, six inherent landscape characteristics (comprising the impacts of landform and land cover; historic pattern; discordance or tranquillity, frequency or rarity, and visual unity) were reviewed and scored with the criteria Weak, Moderate or Strong. The landscape condition, partially reflecting the active management of the landscape for agriculture, amenity uses or nature conservation, together with the impact of existing development on the landscape, was similarly assessed and scored as Poor, Moderate or Good.
- 6.2.2 A range of landscape and visual criteria were identified, assessed and scored in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development. The assumptions made with regard to the scale of any future development are considered at Section 1. The potential to alleviate the effects of built development on each parcel was considered, based on the ability of the landscape to provide effective mitigation across the short – medium – long term. The consideration around mitigation was undertaken as part of the fieldwork, and based on factors such as scale, enclosure, pattern, type and maturity of vegetation, movement and visibility of each parcel.

6.3 Description of results

- 6.3.1 See Figure 08: Findings of Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Appraisal

High Landscape Capacity

- 6.3.2 Evaluation of the landscape features, visual factors, potential landscape features and landscape value revealed that there are no parcels with a High capacity to accommodate residential or commercial development within the parish of Stebbing.

Medium-High Landscape Capacity

- 6.3.3 Likewise, evaluation of the landscape features, visual factors, potential landscape features and landscape value revealed that there are no parcels with a Medium-High capacity to accommodate residential or commercial development within the parish of Stebbing.

Medium Landscape Capacity

- 6.3.4 Five parcels have been identified as having a Medium capacity to accommodate development. These are located immediately adjacent to the existing settlement fringes, where they respond to the existing landscape features and visual characteristics:
- 6.3.5 Parcels 14, 15 and 16 comprise three parcels of land on the eastern edge of Stebbing village that have a close connection to the existing settlement edge and a relatively low influence on the surrounding landscape (being relatively well screened), and which could be a natural extension of the village's development. The acceptability of such an extension would be dependent on the recreation of a new vegetated edge that mimics the successful transition between village and wider agricultural landscape that currently exists.
- 6.3.6 It is considered that Parcels 14, 15 and 16 have localised capacity for some medium scale in landscape terms.
- 6.3.7 It should be remembered that this appraisal considers only aspects relating to landscape character and visual amenity. It may well be that development within Parcels 13, 14 or 15 is not practicable, e.g. on the grounds of access arrangements.

Parcel 14

- 6.3.8 Parcel 14 comprises a parcel of arable land that slopes down towards Brick Kiln Lane. The character of the parcel is influenced by adjacent development. Although development has eroded the surrounding historic field patterns in the relatively recent past, the field boundaries of the parcel itself remain intact.
- 6.3.9 The boundaries give some degree of containment, particularly Clay Lane to the north-east, which provides a demarcation to the wider and open farmland landscape beyond.
- 6.3.10 In the capacity analysis, Parcel 14 scores relatively favourably in terms of relationship to existing settlement edge, retention of settlement separation and historic patterns, and scope to mitigate. It scores less well in terms of openness to public and private view.
- 6.3.11 Should development be considered appropriate within Parcel 14 the following aspects should be taken into account:

- A scheme layout that extends from the existing development in the vicinity of Gardenfields; it is likely that the northern and eastern portions of the parcel are not suitable for residential development.
- An exploration of opportunities to create or incorporate a softer, more vegetated edge to this part of the village.
- Creation of a broad vegetated buffer on the north-eastern edge of the parcel to maintain the rural character of Clay Lane.
- Respect as regard the setting of this portion of Stebbing village and in particular the aspect from the north-west: from the narrow tributary valley and from points in the vicinity of Brick Kiln Lane, Brick Kiln Farm and Clay Lane.

Parcel 15

- 6.3.12 Parcel 15 comprises a collection of arable fields on the eastern fringe of Stebbing village, bound to the east by Clay Lane. The hedged field boundaries limit views out and provide some containment. The village has limited visual influence on the site, but is evident by changes in vegetation structure and occasional glimpses of built form. The site itself is well traversed by public footpaths and so affords extensive internal visibility.
- 6.3.13 In the capacity analysis, Parcel 15 scores relatively favourably in terms of slope, simplicity of scale, openness to private view, relationship to existing settlement and scope to mitigate. It scores less well in terms of openness to private view and its provision of a setting to Listed Buildings in Warehouse Road.
- 6.3.14 Should development be considered appropriate within Parcel 15 the following aspects should be taken into account:
- A scheme layout that extends out from the existing village edge on the northern portion of Parcel 15.
 - Creation of a broad vegetated buffer on the north-eastern edge of the parcel to replicate the existing soft village edge and to maintain the rural character of Clay Lane.
 - Creation of significant buffers to the existing public footpaths and the exploration of opportunities to enhance green infrastructure through the parcel and for the benefit of the wider village.
 - Respect as regard the setting of Listed Buildings on Warehouse Road.
 - The retention of current land uses on the southern portion of the parcel, thereby safeguarding the setting of the church and other Listed Buildings.

Parcel 16

- 6.3.15 Parcel 16 comprises a narrow section of land on the eastern built edge of Stebbing village, influenced by the proximity of adjacent gardens and built form. The parcel abuts the Conservation Area and numerous Listed Buildings, including the Grade I church on its south-western corner.
- 6.3.16 The parcel is relatively well contained in visual terms, except at its southern end. A public footpath follows the north-eastern boundary.
- 6.3.17 In the capacity analysis, Parcel 16 scores favourably in terms of relationship to existing settlement, scope to mitigate and topography; it scores less well in terms of openness to public and private view and in its provision of settings to Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area.
- 6.3.18 Should development be considered appropriate within Parcel 16 the following aspects should be taken into account:
- A scheme layout that extends out from the existing village edge on the northern portion of Parcel 16; subject to the provision of an appropriate relationship with the Conservation Area.
 - The southern portion of Parcel 16 is likely to be more appropriate as public open space, in order to safeguard the setting of the church and listed buildings fronting Warehouse Road.
 - A vegetated buffer would be required on the north-eastern boundary to replicate the existing village edge and safeguard the setting of the public footpath.

Parcel 21

- 6.3.19 A small parcel of grazing meadows to the rear of properties fronting Warehouse Road. This parcel is well hidden from the surrounding landscape.
- 6.3.20 In the capacity analysis, Parcel 21 scores favourably in terms of screening from public view, relationship with existing settlement and lack of adverse effects on separation and historic settlement patterns; it scored less well on openness to private view.
- 6.3.21 It is considered that Parcel 21 has limited/localised capacity for some small-scale development in landscape terms. Its location means it has a close connection to the existing settlement edge and would form a natural extension to the village. It is likely that development would only be appropriate within the portion of Parcel 21 adjacent to existing built form; the portion that extends eastwards into the arable land may have more potential to provide an open space element.

6.3.22 It should be remembered that this appraisal considers only aspects relating to landscape character and visual amenity. It may well be that development within Parcel 21 is not practicable, e.g. on the grounds of access arrangements.

6.3.23 Should development be considered appropriate within Parcel 21 the following aspects should be taken into account:

- Retention of existing vegetation and field patterns and, where necessary, inclusion of new planting to enhance and reinforce the existing framework.
- Respect as regard the setting of adjacent residential development.

Parcel 39

6.3.24 A parcel of land within Bran End that has strong connections to the existing settlement grain, and which could provide an opportunity to create a softer edge to this portion of the village, visible from points on the B1057 as it enters the village. For such a development to be successful, it would be necessary to restrict new built forms to the upper sections of the parcel, maintain some views across the valley from Brick Kiln Lane, and to respect the setting of the footpath that crosses the site. It might be appropriate for the lower section to be used from public open space.

6.3.25 In the capacity analysis, Parcel 39 scores favourably in terms of relationship to existing settlement, lack of adverse effect on coalescence and historic settlement patterns, and opportunities to provide mitigation; it scores less well on openness to public and private views.

6.3.26 It is considered that Parcel 39 has limited/localised capacity for some small-scale development in landscape terms. Its location means it has a close connection to the existing settlement edge and would form a natural extension to the village edge. It is likely that development would only be appropriate on the higher ground to the north-east of the public footpath, and that land to the south-west is retained for enhancing green infrastructure provision and the creation of a route around the western edge of Stebbing village.

6.3.27 It should be remembered that this appraisal considers only aspects relating to landscape character and visual amenity. It may well be that development within Parcel 39 is not practicable, e.g. on the grounds of access arrangements.

6.3.28 Should development be considered appropriate within Parcel 39 the following aspects should be taken into account:

- Creation of soft transition between the development site and the adjacent, steeper valley side landscape.
- A buffer to the existing public footpath and the exploration of opportunities to enhance green infrastructure through the parcel and for the benefit of the wider village.

- Retention of existing vegetation and field patterns and, where necessary, inclusion of new planting to enhance and reinforce the existing framework.
- Respect as regard the setting of adjacent residential development.

Medium-Low Landscape Capacity

6.3.29 The analysis found that the landscape around much of the settlement fringes within Stebbing and at some of the more visually contained, higher ground, had a Medium-Low capacity to accommodate development. Parcels with this capacity rating fall within a number of types:

- Parcels that had some affinity with the existing settlement edges but where development had the potential to compromise other factors such as public or private views.
- Land with little connection to existing settlements, but where topography and vegetation structure provided a degree of containment and resulted in the parcel having a limited visual influence on the character of the wider landscape.

Low Landscape Capacity

6.3.30 Parcels within the Low category fell, largely, within the following types:

- Valley side landscapes that provided a setting and backdrop to the historic elements of Stebbing village, Bran End and Church End, including the Grade I Listed church and the Conservation Area.
- Open agricultural landscapes that contributed to the setting of Stebbing village, properties fronting Warehouse Road, and Stebbing Green.
- Land that provided important breaks, necessary to maintain the historic settlement pattern of discrete hamlets within the village, e.g. between Warehouse Road and Church End.

6.3.31 Any development in these parcels would have significant adverse effects on the historic integrity of the village and its development, the setting of Listed Buildings, and and/or the attractive views and vistas that are available from points within the village.