5.0 Views

Context

5.1 Holton St. Mary lies in the centre of the plateau (approximately 45-50m AOD) that extends from Higham to the west towards East Bergholt and Brantham in the east; to the south the land falls away gently towards the valley of the River Stour (approximately 5-10m AOD).

5.2 The site and adjoining land to the south at Stratford Hills Farm are located on the southern edge of the plateau where the tree belts both within and adjoining the site, in conjunction with the woodland on the undulating south facing valley sides limit views and provide a good degree of enclosure. In contrast to the north west the plateau is more open with near to middle distance views across the undulating arable fields particularly where hedgerows are absent. Longer views are however restricted by the woodland on the fringes of the area.

5.3 To the south west, the landform is defined by a small tributary of the Stour that extends up the side of the valley between Bobbitts Hall and Wheatlands and Coral Barn. Here the smaller blocks of woodland frame intermittent panoramic views across the River Stour to the ridge of high ground on the other side of the valley where the Church of St. Mary and Langham Hall are important landmarks set within woodland along the ridge.

5.4 From within the site there is subsequently a variety of both enclosed and more open views. Longer distance views across the wider landscape, including those towards Holton St. Mary and the Dedham Vale are limited by intervening blocks of woodland.

Representative Views

5.5 The principal views towards the site are shown on Figure 4. Photographs demonstrating the extent of visibility and the existing visual amenity experienced from various locations in the study area are providing in Figures 5 to 13. These viewpoints do not provide continuous coverage of all locations where the site is visible, but have been selected to be either representative of the views experienced from roads / public rights of way, or from recognised, specific locations. A zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) will be confirmed on preparation of detailed proposals.

5.6 The study area incorporates the A12 dual carriageway along with a system of local roads / lanes. There is good network of public rights of way (bridleways and footpaths), including the Stour Valley Path, St. Edmund Way and Essex Way long distance footpaths; many of the other routes within the Stratford St. Mary and Dedham area form part of local circular walks promoted by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership. Other areas locally with public access include the Holton St. Mary Millennium Green south of St. Mary’s Church.

5.7 All photographs were taken in July 2018, representing the best-case scenario when deciduous vegetation is in full leaf. Consideration is given to winter views where relevant.

Views within and adjacent to the Site

5.8 Public views can be obtained from the bridleway (PRoW 323_19) and footpath (PRoW 503_9) that adjoin and cross the site.
5.9 The bridleway follows the farm track along the north western edge of the site before crossing the western side of the field through the tree belt to the B1068. The route is part of a promoted circular walk around the Brett Valley\textsuperscript{15}. As represented by \textit{views 1 and 2}, the northern section of track is fringed by 2-3m high hedgerows to both sides restricting views to both the west and east. At field entrances and occasional gaps in the hedgerow to the east views are limited to the fields within the site, with wider views enclosed by the perimeter belts of trees. To the west there are views across the adjoining fields towards the scattered properties on Sandpits Lane set against a backdrop of trees and the water tower at the Brett Vale golf club. These views are representative of those experienced by horse riders and pedestrians in winter when vegetation is not in leaf.

5.10 In contrast the southern section of the track and route across the field are open allowing views across the fields. As represented by \textit{view 3}, as above, wider views are enclosed by woodland. To the south west the woodland defining the high ground on the opposite side of the Stour Valley is just discernible, but wider panoramic views across the Dedham Vale are prevented by a shallow ridge.

5.11 The footpath to the east crosses the fields from the B1068 to the tree belt surrounding Squirrels Hall. Representative \textit{view 4} demonstrates the views across the site to the north west; views beyond the site are limited by the surrounding dense blocks of woodland which obscures the property and village of Holton St. Mary. Although the level of vegetation cover will decrease in winter, the depth of the tree belts is likely to continue to restrict the majority of views. To the north there are glimpses of the roofs of properties on the northern section Sandpits Lane (Pintins and Lark Hall) above the hedgerows lining the track. The water tower at the Brett Vale golf course forms a landmark on the skyline.

5.12 To the south as represented by \textit{view 5}, visibility beyond the site is restricted by the tree belt along the B1068 and the dense woodland (Foxhall Coverts and The Commons) on the other side of the A12. Approaching the B1068 traffic passing on the A12 is glimpsed through the gap in the tree belt to the south east beyond intervening vegetation.

\textbf{Views from the West}

5.13 To the west views extend from the site boundary across the adjoining fields within Holton Hall Farm to Sandpits Lane which forms the boundary of the Dedham Vale AONB. Further views are restricted by vegetation to the west of the lane around Dewlands Farm. From the more open areas of the plateau to the north west there are very occasional glimpsed views from the high ground around the junction of Noaks Road, Sulleys Hill and Raydon Road.

5.14 Immediately to the west there are open views along a short section of the B1068 from Holly Bush corner to the boundary of the site. As represented by \textit{view 6}, from the slightly elevated location and in the absence of any field boundaries, the southern section of the site is visible in the near distance with the tree belts forming a wooded backdrop beyond. The visibility of the northern fields is reduced by the hedgerows along the farm track and a shallow ridge, although the canopy of trees remains visible on the skyline.

\textsuperscript{15} Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Walking Guides – Brett Valley Walk
\url{http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/publications/walking-guides/}
5.15 Sandpits Lane is a local single track lane primarily used by local traffic; the road also forms part of National Cycle route 48. The lane is sinuous and in sections lies 0.5-1.5m below the level of the adjoining fields restricting views to passing traffic. Representative view 7 on the lane near the access to Dewlands Farm demonstrates that as well as the roadside bank, a shallow intervening ridge and hedgerows partly limits the visibility of the site; the canopy of the surrounding tree belts providing the backdrop to views. Views will be slightly more open in winter when vegetation cover, including grassland along the bank is reduced and there are no crops.

5.16 Along the lane are a number of private properties including Dewlands Farm (set back off a farm track), Tiffins and Pintins set slightly lower on the head of a tributary valley to the west of the road and Lark Hall, Lait’s Barn, Holton Lodge and Holton Place on the plateau to the east. Dewlands Farm, Tiffins, Pintins, Lark Hall and Holton Place are all Grade II Listed.

5.17 Based on views from the farm track the site is likely to be visible from Lark Hall and Lait’s Barn beyond the vegetation fringing the properties with glimpses from the upper storey of Pintins and potentially Dewlands Farm. Representative views 8 and 9 demonstrate the extent of visibility of the site from the top of the bank to in front of Pintins and north of Lark Farm. From Pintins (view 8), views are restricted by the landform of the intervening ridge and hedgerows, the upper canopy of the tree belts form the skyline. From the more elevated location at Lark Farm (view 9) the hedgerow and mature oaks on the farm track are clearly apparent. All views from Holton Lodge and Place are prevented by a mature tree belt.

5.18 As represented by view 10 there are potential middle to long distance views from the higher ground to the north west around the junction of Noaks Road, Sulley’s Hill and Raydon Road, including the property Snowy Downs. Such views would be primarily in winter, with long distant glimpsed views between the vegetation fringing the properties on Sandpits Lane.

Views from the North and East including Holton St. Mary

5.19 To the north of the site from Holton St. Mary views of the site are restricted by the tree belts that enclose the area from the village. Representative views 11 to 13 demonstrate the dense canopy of vegetation as viewed from the north along the B1070 and adjoining properties which forms a strong wooded backdrop to all areas of the village. There are no views from the church of St. Marys (Grade II* Listed) or its grounds and the Millennium Green where views are further contained by vegetation.

5.20 The intervening land between the village and the site boundary comprises a dense network of footpaths. Private properties include Squirrels Hall and a row of houses on Stubbins Lane to the east. Representative views 14 to 16 demonstrate that the site is completely hidden by the dense tree belts and vegetation on the boundaries, apart from occasional partial views / glimpses through the narrow sections of the copses to the north east.

5.21 Although the level of vegetation cover will decrease in winter, the depth of the tree belts is likely to continue to restrict the majority of views; there will be however limited glimpses from properties on Rose Acre and the adjoining footpath (PRoW 323_18 and 23) through the narrow section at this point.

5.22 No views are anticipated from the properties on Stubbins Lane. The majority of the houses face south with any oblique views screened by vegetation along the footpath (PRoW 503_10) and a belt of coniferous woodland.
5.23 Further to the east all views are further restricted by deciduous and evergreen vegetation along the A12.

**Views from the south**

5.24 The plateau to the south within the AONB comprises a mix of grazing land, paddocks and woodland with a number of scattered properties and farms including Woodhill Cottages and Stratford Hills Farm adjacent to the A12 to the east, with Wheatlands and Corals Barn and Bobbits Hall set within the valley of the tributary stream to the west. The area is crossed by a number of public footpaths.

5.25 To the east of the area the gap in the tree belt along the northern side of the road allows near distance views of the south eastern section of the site from an area of land between the B1068 and the A12. From the B1068, similar to those from the public footpath (view 4), there are open views across the south eastern area of the site and tree belt. As represented by view 17 further south from the continuation of the footpath (PRoW 503_9) and the access to Stratford Hills Farm the land falls away slightly with views partially filtered by the vegetation on the southern side of the B1068. Similar glimpsed views (of lower sensitivity) are available for a short elevated section of the A12 as it sweeps around a bend above the roadside hedge with potential glimpses from the upper storeys of Woodhill Cottages and Stratford Hills Farm. Views will be more open in winter when intervening vegetation is not in leaf.

5.26 Immediately to the south as represented by views 18 to 20 the remainder of views from the road and surrounding network of public footpaths are screened by the mature tree belt alongside the B1068 which forms a strong wooded backdrop. Although the level of vegetation cover will decrease in winter, the depth of the tree belt is likely to continue to restrict the majority of views. Views from Wheatlands and Coral Barn and Bobbits Hall are unlikely as these properties are set considerably lower than the road.

**Views from within and across the Stour Valley**

5.27 Along the River Stour within the Dedham Vale AONB the principal views are along the valley. There are no views of the site due to the topography and the mixed blocks of woodland that extend across the upper valley slopes and the vegetation along the course of the river. This includes views from the Stour Valley Path and St. Edmund Way.

5.28 In contrast the rising ground on the opposite side of the valley (where not prevented by woodland) affords open and occasionally panoramic views both along and across the Dedham Vale. Views 21 to 24 are representative of the visibility of the site in long distance views (2.5km+) from the rising ground on the opposite side of the valley between Dedham and Boxted.

5.29 To the south on the edge of Dedham from the informal viewpoint and bench on Stratford Road (view 21) the edge of the plateau is obscured by the blocks of woodland that extend across the upper slopes of the valley at Stratford Hill. Beyond the Church of St. Mary at Stratford St. Mary the red roofs of Woodhill Cottages are just discernible in the gap in the vegetation alongside the A12 corridor; the site is not discernible beyond this.

5.30 Further to the west in the arc between Langham Hall and Church to Sky Hall Hill the breaks in the woodland on the upper valley slopes around Bobbits Hall and Stratford Hills are evident. As demonstrated by views 22-24, the tree belt maintains the level of vegetation cover and screening of the site on the plateau edge beyond.
6.0 Landscape Strategy

Principle of Development

6.1 As part of the process of preparing the Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan the land at Holton Hall Farm was considered in a Site Selection Report\(^\text{16}\) undertaken by Suffolk County Council. The document considers the suitability of the site as well as additional land to the west between the farm track and Sandpits Lane.

6.2 In terms of landscape the consultation response at paragraph 5.2 states:

“The development of the site to the west of the central track would have a high degree of visibility from the Area Outstanding Natural Beauty and would not be reasonable. The area of the site to the east of the central track is screened from the AONB by the rising land of the western part of the site and is generally screened in many local views by blocks of planting. It is notable that there is a gap in this screening where the access road is proposed to be established. Although it is in the eastern part of the site the proposed plant site location is not acceptable, given its exposed position adjacent to the AONB.”

6.3 Other issues highlighted include:

- The setting of the Listed Buildings to the west of the site on Sandpits Lane.
- The hedgerows and various lines of mature trees on the site are of landscape and ecological importance and should be retained. Appropriate mitigation and compensation should be informed by full arboricultural and ecological surveys.
- There are a number of residential receptors within 250m of the site boundary including Bobitts Hall and Coral’s Barn to the south, Holton Hall and properties in Rose Acre to the north and Squirrels Hall to the east. Mitigation would be required in terms of air quality, noise and visual as appropriate.
- The existing public rights of way that cross the site. These will either need to be kept open on their legal alignment or temporarily closed ideally with alternative routes in a similar condition made available to the appropriate status i.e. footpath or bridleway through the process.

6.4 From a landscape and visual perspective only the eastern part of the site, which benefits from extensive screen planting (the area of land subject to this report) is considered be suitable for development, subject to an acceptable working and restoration scheme.

6.5 This is supported by the assessment of the site and study area set out in this report, which confirms that the area considered has the capacity to accommodate a minerals development subject to appropriate mitigation during the operational phase and a suitable restoration scheme. The applicants have taken on board the comments from Suffolk County Council and the western area of land has been removed from the site promotion area.

\(^{16}\) Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan Site Selection Report – Holton Hall Farm, Holton St. Mary, Suffolk County Council, April 2018
**Landscape Strategy**

6.6 The landscape strategy and masterplan for the operational phase of the development is shown in **Drawing 18018-100**. The strategy has been informed by the existing features of the site, the character of the wider landscape (and associated development / landscape management guidelines) and the visibility of the area to ensure that effects on the area and in particular the Dedham Vale AONB are avoided, or where necessary reduced to an acceptable level.

6.7 It is proposed that this strategy will form the basis of any future planning application, alongside a formal assessment of landscape and visual effects, either as a standalone Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) or chapter of an Environmental Statement.\(^{17}\)

6.8 Appropriate ecological surveys will be undertaken to confirm the presence of important habitats and/or protected species. Where required appropriate mitigation will be incorporated during the operation of the site, with appropriate enhancements to biodiversity included as a key part of the restoration.

6.9 Mitigation in respect of noise and air quality will be incorporated as required.

**Operation**

6.10 The anticipated operational life of the sand and gravel quarry will be a duration of approximately 15 years. The land will be worked in phases, with the area under development being only part of the overall site at any one time. The intention is to extract the site in an anti-clockwise location starting with the area to the north; this will ensure that the land closest to Holton St. Mary is completed and restored first minimising the period of operation (18 months to 2 years) in closest proximity to dwellings.

6.11 Access to the area will be directly to the south east with lorries entering and exiting the quarry on to the A12 via a short section of the B1068, away from the existing village of Holton St. Mary. The location of this access can be achieved with no impact on existing vegetation on the site boundary. There is limited off-site vegetation to the south of the junction of the B1068 and A12, and that present to the north is of low quality; should any improvements be necessary to the A12 junction requiring removal of this vegetation, it should be replaced with appropriate native planting.

6.12 The suggested location of the processing plant lies close the access, away from any adjoining properties and the more open north western edge of the site. Although close to the AONB boundary, the area will be screened by the established tree belt (approximately 15m high) and surrounding areas of woodland.

6.13 The existing vegetation within the site is important as it contributes to the character of the area and provides substantial screening from both the immediate area and wider countryside. This includes the village of Holton St. Mary, other nearby properties and the Dedham Vale AONB. It is therefore essential that the tree belts both within and adjoining the site are retained with an appropriate standoff distance.

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\(^{17}\) In accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 3rd Edition, 2013
During the operational phase, subject to detailed arboricultural and ecology surveys, to ensure the protection of strategic vegetation the strategy plan makes an allowance for a buffer of approximately 10m to the perimeter of all existing woodland areas. The existing field boundaries, similarly important for their landscape and ecological value, will be safeguarded with an approximate 5m buffer, with a 10-15m zone to ensure the protection of mature hedgerow trees, including the oaks along the farm track. Additional planting can be provided within the buffer zone and to gap up existing hedge rows where required. Any earth banks required for mitigation (including noise) should be located outside of the root protection area of retained trees.

The existing open section of the boundary along the B1068 and the western boundary will need to be carefully considered with new screening to be provided to the site perimeter in the form of earth bunds and/or planting as appropriate to reinforce the existing vegetation both on and adjacent to the site.

To the south east, the existing tree belt along the B1068 will be extended as a new landscape zone (approximately 30-35m wide) either side of the proposed access to mitigate the effects on visual amenity to traffic on the B1068 and A12, users of public footpath 503_9 and adjacent properties including Stratford Hills Farm. It is proposed that the weaker section of the tree belt is reinforced with planting. In the open section a graded earth bund could be formed, located in a position set back slightly into the site and planting with new native woodland vegetation. This will provide an immediate screen to the quarry access, with the vegetation providing additional cover in the later phases when this area is worked and in the long-term linking the southern and eastern belts along the frontage of the site.

To the west of the site the existing ridge of high ground and vegetation along the farm track provides a reasonable level of screening in views from Sandpits Lane and the associated properties (many of which are Grade II Listed). Elevated activities within the site may however be discernible above the ridge particularly in winter. The area also lies in close proximity to bridleway PRoW 323_19 and is open to view along the B1068 approaching the site from Holly Bush Corner along the edge of the AONB.

The buffer zone along the north western boundary has therefore been extended to allow the provision of at least a 2-3m high temporary grassed earth bund reinforcing the existing vegetation along the southern side track; this may potentially increase in height to the south where vegetation is absent. The bund should be located outside the root protection areas of existing vegetation. Due to the its relative sensitivity it is envisaged that careful consideration of working practices particularly in the western corner will also be required.

Beyond the site boundary, the landscape strategy incorporates the planting of a permanent species-rich native hedgerow along the B1068 from its junction with Sandpits Lane, retaining and reinforcing the existing mature oak and holly trees. It is proposed that the hedgerow and hedgerow trees return along the northern side of the farm track (within the ownership of Holton Hall Farm) to provide additional screening to the first two phases. Where possible this planting should be established in advance of any works being undertaken, particularly within phase 2. All new planting should incorporate native species that are locally characteristic of the area.

It is proposed that the existing public rights of way are maintained to retain access between Holton St. Mary and the surrounding countryside, including the AONB; where the routes cross the site they will be temporarily diverted away from the working area.
It is envisaged that the southern section of the bridleway (PRoW 323_19) will continue south along the farm track and then east along the northern edge of the tree belt linking back to the B1068 at its current location. Footpath 503_9 could be either rerouted through the woodland or follow the edge of the linked copses on the eastern boundary returning along the edge of the road. Subject to highways advice, the location of the access should be located between the edge of the tree belt and the entrance to the footpath to avoid both areas the extent of the buffer zone has been increased to facilitate earth bunding and/or new planting and a secure fence to protect the amenity of the users of these routes and the adjoining property at Squirrels Hall.

The retention of existing vegetation and proposed temporary screening, along with consideration of working practices (such as noise, lighting, movement of plant and traffic) will ensure that despite the proximity of the site to the Dedham Vale AONB and the Listed buildings along Sandpits Lane the temporary landscape and visual effects of the operational quarry will be reduced during the period of its operation to an acceptable level and that existing residential amenity is protected. This overall effect on tranquillity will be limited in the context of the adjoining A12.

Restoration and Aftercare

The applicants are currently flexible on the restoration and end use of the site; however, it is recognised that it is important that any restoration is sympathetic and seeks to preserve and enhance the landscape character of the Plateau Farmlands LCT as well as the wider landscape of the Dedham Vale AONB to the south and south west of the site.

Based on an agricultural end use, the levels should be restored to a similar or slightly lower level than the existing landform, but in keeping with the general topography of the surrounding plateau area. To minimise the need for any fill to be imported into the site, the area could incorporate a waterbody, such as a large naturally / organic shaped pond or lake which could provide a wetland habitat with opportunities for recreation. Following operation the existing public rights of way will be restored to their definitive routes, with the potential for the creation of additional permissive paths linking the bridleway (PRoW 323_19) and public footpath (PRoW) 503_9) through the woodland or around field margins.

In accordance with the landscape guidelines for the Plateau Farmlands LCT, the restoration scheme provides the opportunity for:

- The management of the existing tree belt and woodland areas for both their recreation and biodiversity value along with the potential for planting of further areas of woodland and/or woodland vegetation to link existing habitats;
- The restoration of historic field boundaries including the management of existing hedgerows along with the planting of new hedgerows and trees; and
- The potential reversion of an area from arable to grassland and creation of a pond or lake to diversify the range of habitats already present.

This would provide potential landscape scale enhancements and potential net biodiversity gain, in conjunction with recreation benefits with increased access to the area via permissive paths adding to the existing public rights of way network and improving the links between Holton St. Mary and the Dedham Vale AONB.
7.0 Conclusion

7.1 SES Strategic Ltd. has been instructed by Strutt and Parker on behalf of H R Philpot & Sons to complete a landscape and visual assessment of an area of land at Holton Hall Farm, Holton St. Mary, Suffolk to support representations to the Submission Draft Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan, June 2018.

7.2 The site, as part of a larger area of land at Holton Hall Farm was originally put forward at the Preferred Options Consultation as a sustainable location for the extraction of sand and gravel. Based on an assessment of the site selection criteria by Suffolk County Council, the area was not recommended for inclusion in the draft Plan. In terms of landscape, although the area to the west was deemed unsuitable, it was identified that the eastern part of the site that benefits from extensive screen planting would be suitable for development, subject to an acceptable working and restoration scheme. The applicants have taken on board the comments from Suffolk County Council and the western area of land has been removed from the site promotion area.

7.3 The report is to provides a more detailed assessment of the eastern area of land, identifying the constraints and opportunities of the site, and the mitigation required to ensure that the effects on the landscape character of the area and visual amenity, including those on the adjoining nationally designated Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, can be satisfactorily addressed.

7.4 The analysis confirms that the development of the site is acceptable in principle. The subsequent landscape strategy describes how the temporary effects on the landscape character of the area and visual amenity can avoided and where necessary reduced by the retention and safeguarding of the existing extensive screen planting, provision of temporary earth bunds and new landscape alongside appropriate working practices.

7.5 In the long-term the end use of the site is flexible; however, it is recognised that the restoration needs to be sympathetic to the landscape character of the area. The management of existing vegetation, areas of new planting and the creation of wildlife habitats provides significant opportunities for landscape scale enhancement alongside net biodiversity gain. Recreational benefits will include increased access to the area via permissive paths adding to the existing public rights of way networks and improving the links between Holton St. Mary and the Dedham Vale AONB.
Landscape and Visual Assessment
Proposed Sand and Gravel Quarry, Holton Hall Farm, Holton St. Mary

Figures

Figure 1: Site Location and Study Area
Figure 2: Site Analysis
Figure 3: Environmental Designations
Figure 4: Location of Representative Views
Figure 5-13: Representative Views
Drawing 18018-100: Landscape Strategy