

# **SNAP North: Landscape opportunity mapping**

Supporting paper for  
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# 1 Stevenage North: Landscape opportunity mapping. Supporting guidance to NHDC

- I.1 This note sets out and responds to recommendations set out in LUC plans 4897/SK 01B and SK02B, to inform NHDC in relation to future masterplanning of SNAP north, in landscape terms. The note supports and expands on the annotation on those drawings.
- I.2 It sets out key messages in relation to the three potential neighbourhoods within SNAP north, which comprise the land west of Forster Country and the two to the east of Forster Country (Tilekiln -Warrens Green and north east of Great Ashby), and for the Forster Country/Chesfield green lung. The recommendations for the neighbourhoods are set out under the following headings, with paragraphs cross referenced on drawings SK01B/SK02B, as appropriate:
- Landscape edge and urban: rural interface
  - Existing landscape character, place and landscape elements/structure
  - Views and visual relationships
  - Green infrastructure
  - Distributor road
  - Delivery and management implications (initial thoughts and options for consideration, in relation to all three neighbourhoods, are set out at the end of this paper)

## **West of Forster Country including Forster Country Green Lung (Drawing SK01B)**

### ***Landscape edge and urban: rural interface***

- I.3 The north facing chalk valley slopes extending towards Graveley are important in defining the rural setting of Graveley village and the sense of separation with Stevenage. The hanger woodland of Ledgeside Plantation forms a natural edge to development within the SNAP and provides a sense of containment. By extending the woodland westward towards the A1(M) and along North Road to the west, with new native planting, not only would there be the potential to assist with reducing fragmentation of landscape and habitat features, but this could also provide a robust edge, and assist in maintaining the sense of separation, with the land to the north either retained in agricultural use or used for potential landscape and habitat re creation e.g. chalk grassland (identified as a priority within the North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, and potentially deliverable through Higher Level Stewardship administered by Natural England).
- I.4 A 20 metre deep woodland corridor would provide an appropriately robust buffer to this development edge. By considering a variety of management regimes and planting types (e.g. coppice, coppice with standards and copse), an interesting and diverse landscape edge could be created to foil (e.g. to filter, or create a soft, porous development edge), rather than blanket screen the development within the SNAP. This would be appropriate as the wider

landscape is essentially settled in character and the aim of woodland planting would be to mitigate perceptual landscape and visual impacts of the new development edge as opposed to hiding the scheme.

- 1.5 Forster Country and Chesfield edge present a key opportunity for a positive landscape edge between development and the principal area of strategic green infrastructure within SNAP north, through reducing development density (also to the northern development edge), and creation of greater areas of amenity greenspace at this point (and potential for larger grade tree planting, to mirror that in Forster Country/Chesfield) – the appearance of development within parkland, which faces onto, and interacts positively with, the new green infrastructure. It is however recognised that additional buffering in relation to the historic designed landscape of Chesfield Park would be desirable, to avoid over reliance on existing mature landscape structure within the park. This could also provide an enhanced setting for the Hertfordshire Way, which follows the potential development edge at this point – a woodland walk, as part of a series of different landscape experiences along the route.

***Existing landscape character, historic environment, place and landscape elements/structure***

- 1.6 The primary landscape and cultural assets are the traditionally managed parkland of Chesfield Park and the area known as Forster Country to the south. It is suggested that Chesfield Park should be conserved as one of the primary green infrastructure assets, as should Forster Country (which forms part of the setting and context of Rooks Nest Farm). There is the opportunity to extend this parkland landscape character to link the two areas as part of the proposed green lung. Restoration of parkland landscape features and ‘setting’ could also fall within the remit of Higher Level Stewardship, as could provision of an enhanced landscape setting to Home Farm, Chesfield and the associated ruins of St Etheldreda’s Church (Scheduled Monument). Whilst there is the potential to incorporate an amount of very low density ‘aspirational housing’ in the western field of Chesfield Park (due to the more eroded character and quality of the landscape at this point), this should only be pursued if absolutely required to deliver site capacity requirements. If this option is pursued it should seek to provide a positive interface with the green lung, in terms of parkland tree vegetation/planting, so that settlement merges seamlessly into the wider parkland landscape. Retention of the existing parkland tree groups or ‘roundels’ within amenity greenspace in this area should provide a template for the landscape design context of development, as should the use of an appropriately porous/‘soft’ landscape edge to the park and the ornamental gardens of Chesfield House, to the north east.
- 1.7 Beyond Forster Country, there are relatively few elements of the historic landscape structure or of the enclosure fieldscapes. Recent woodland planting along the Local Authority administrative boundary line could be retained as a focus for new movement corridors – local greenways/rights of way as part of the green infrastructure network within development. Masterplanning and detailed landscape design could look to historic field pattern and reinstatement of treed hedgerows as a template within which

development can sit, and as focus for more local level or 'incidental' amenity greenspace and green links. Provision of strategic/larger blocks of planting (creation of new character) may however be more appropriate than seeking to re create what has been lost.

- I.8 Within the development footprint, a key aim is to conserve existing mature landscape structure such as trees, linked by new planting (urban greening), and to maintain an appropriate buffer zone between such landscape features and development (dimensions to be determined through tree survey).

### ***Views and visual relationships***

- I.9 Key views are:

- Views to Forster Country from the Hertfordshire Way; and
- Views north across the dry valley from the northern SNAP boundary, to the east of Ledgeside Plantation and immediately west of Harbourclose Wood.

- I.10 Of the view to Forster Country, this and the church spire of St Nicholas can be seen from the Hertfordshire Way, adjacent to the woodland forming the south western tip of Chesfield Park. The development edge should ideally step back at this point and aim to create a green wedge which connects the Hertfordshire Way to Forster Country. This would also enable opportunities to create new views across the expanded parkland landscape linking Chesfield and Forster Country.

- I.11 The view north across the chalk valley from the western edge of Harbourclose Wood is representative of more intact rolling chalk landscapes within North Hertfordshire and forms a positive setting to SNAP north. Similarly in views back from the chalk valley, the gap in these woodlands at the head of the valley (northernmost part of the Chesfield Estate) should be conserved to create visual and physical connectivity between SNAP and the wider landscape.

### ***Green infrastructure***

- I.12 Key green infrastructure opportunities are:

- Forster Country and the green lung (accessible); and
- The way leave which would be necessary for the double line of pylons to the west (limited access).

- I.13 The green lung provides a significant opportunity for informal recreational provision for all ages and sections of the new community (natural play, walking, riding, cycling, events space), and for contact with and access to nature. Undulating landform characterises much of the green lung and may limit the scope for more formal sports provision in character terms (due to the potential need for landform regrading). The proposed community parkland can provide for a range of open space typologies and functions such as natural and semi natural greenspace, as well as park and garden and community gardens/productive landscape such as allotments. As such the space has the potential to form a valued common ground for SNAP north, linking both existing and new communities and the new neighbourhoods to the east and west, and connected by the Hertfordshire Way and more local

level shared use loops. The proposed neighbourhood park to the north of the green lung (to meet Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace or ANGSt standards requirements, and which could be delivered as part of the amenity greenspace allocation for SNAP) may also be able to provide an alternative focus for formal recreation, given its relative proximity to the local centre.

- I.14 A number of the existing site characteristics of the proposed green lung also present opportunities for landscape and green infrastructure. These are field boundary ditches and wet ditches running north-south towards Forster Country – opportunities to enhance wetland landscape features and habitats for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and biodiversity functions.
- I.15 The pylon way leave acts as a significant constraint to development, but may present opportunities for appropriately managed and supervised green infrastructure, although recreational access to much of this is likely to be limited, as described below. It is understood that there is an agreement to underground the northernmost pylon line from North Road to the edge of the proposed green lung. The need to maintain a way leave to the southern pylon line could accommodate appropriately designed and managed semi natural greenspace. For example, topography and natural drainage routes within the corridor may provide opportunities for new wetlands to fulfil SuDS functions and to enhance site biodiversity (also less intensity of management, which may avoid problems in terms of future revenue costs, in relation to the significant size of this area), provided that vegetation is managed in such a way that it does not obstruct the lines/create hazards. An appropriate landscaped buffer zone should also be provided between the outside edges of the pylon lines and the nearest residential development (for both visual and potential health reasons – although no distances have yet been determined for such buffer zones in the UK, this may be up to 50 metres, with attendant implications for site capacity, although it may prudent to pre-empt any future changes to statutory requirements in this respect. Such a buffer zone could however also form part of the amenity green space network for the development). The buffer zone could also be managed as the site for more formal play/sport and recreational provision (opportunity for natural surveillance), appropriately supervised and controlled. For active recreation, National Grid recommend a buffer of 30 metres between open and supervised access areas, to prevent potentially hazardous recreational activities (such as fishing and kite flying), and this should be applied across the green lung to the east.
- I.16 It is suggested that NHDC liaise with National Grid as soon as possible in the early stages of development masterplanning, to determine that land uses, safety clearances/buffers, design and management are appropriate in relation to the pylon way leave. National Grid have also provided detailed design guidance in relation to landscape and open space around pylon lines, and in terms of health and safety clearances (*Creating a Sense of Place*).
- I.17 Re routing or undergrounding the power line as the pylon towers reach their operational life is likely to be prohibitively expensive, even if it could be coordinated with development phasing, and the cost would have to be borne by developers and factored into land purchase. Again, early liaison with National

Grid is advised, as this option may however be desirable in relation to the character and management of the central part of the green lung.

- I.18 The Hertfordshire Way forms the primary greenway link within this neighbourhood, and there are clearly opportunities for enhancement of the route as it passes through potential development, to create a series of different character areas – an urban greenway or new green lane, to reflect green lane features elsewhere within the SNAP, woodland walks etc. Again sufficient space should be left to achieve these aims when landscape schemes are implemented. For shared use tree lined greenways and green lanes between 10 and 20 metres width is likely to be the minimum required, to allow for the route and attendant landscape proposals.
- I.19 A series of more local shared use greenway links (existing and new) should be provided to link the Hertfordshire Way, the neighbourhood centre, development area and the green space network, to help create walkable neighbourhoods and to deliver green space which can meet the Stevenage Open Space travel distance standards.
- I.20 The potential appearance of different greenway options is shown in the sketches appended to this paper.

#### ***Distributor road options***

- I.21 Two options have been presented for the alignment of the distributor road, these are:
- Option 1: Along the northern development edge at the foot of Ledgeside Plantation and cutting through the northern end of the plantation to enter the development near Harbourclose Wood;
  - Option 2: Through the development, and to the inner edge of Ledgeside Plantation adjacent to Chesfield, meeting up with the eastern part of the development at Harbourclose Wood;
- I.22 A brief summary of the landscape and visual implications of both is set out below (assuming a maximum 20m wide corridor for both the road and attendant infrastructure).
- #### ***Option 1***
- I.23 The landscape opportunities map proposes that the western end of the road is contained within a new woodland corridor to provide an extension of woodland planting at Ledgeside Plantation. There would be the potential for significant adverse landscape and visual impact and need for landform regrading as the road crosses the slope at the foot of the plantation (and allowing for minimum 20m stand off to trees for root protection area – to be determined through tree survey). The road should adopt the character of an unlit rural road at this point if this option was pursued. To reduce landscape and visual impact on Ledgeside Plantation, a staggered route across and along the contours may be helpful, by enabling retention of the majority of the woodland cover. This road layout would also result in the loss of some woodland at Harbourclose Wood. The road should be directed closer to the replanted woodland to the north (with appropriate replacement planting),

to avoid/reduce impacts on ancient woodland in the southern part of Harbourclose Wood.

### ***Option 2***

- I.24 This would potentially limit wider landscape and visual impacts resulting from loss of landscape structure, although more detailed site investigation has confirmed that it may give rise to significant adverse impacts on the rural character and setting of the Chesfield estate (the green corridor between the estate buildings and the southern edge of Ledgeside Plantation is only 40 metres wide at narrowest point in this location). It would also be likely to result in the loss of some non listed cottages, and would effectively create a new road parallel to the rural lane through Chesfield.
- I.25 Both options accommodate the potential diversion of part of the rural lane through Chesfield west, e.g. part of this lane can be retained as a traffic free green lane for pedestrians, riders and cyclists, enhancing the character and tranquillity of Chesfield Park.

### **Tilekiln - Warrens Green and land north east of Great Ashby (Drawing SK02B)**

- I.26 Given their close proximity and the fact that landscape issues are similar across both neighbourhoods, these two areas are described together, with specific points brought out where appropriate.

#### ***Landscape edge and urban: rural interface***

- I.27 Key considerations are to provide an appropriate structural landscape buffer to mitigate potential effects on the historic parkland at Weston Park, and to assimilate the potential development into the wider landscape, to the west of Weston Park. North of Claypits Wood (Tilekiln-Warrens Green neighbourhood), a 20 metre deep woodland corridor would provide an appropriately robust buffer, extending to 30-40 metres in width to the west of Weston Park. By considering a variety of management regimes and planting types (e.g. coppice, coppice with standards and copse), an interesting and diverse landscape edge could be created to foil (to filter, or create a soft or porous development edge), rather than blanket screen the development within the SNAP. This would be appropriate as the wider landscape is essentially settled in character and the aim of woodland planting here would be to mitigate perceptual landscape and visual impacts as opposed to hiding the scheme.
- I.28 It would be important to plan for multifunctional use within this landscape corridor (e.g. shared use access/greenway links), particularly if development were pursued in the land parcel WPI to the north, as part of longer term growth requirements to 2026. The landscape opportunities map shows the landscape framework which would be necessary if development were to take place within WPI. A greenspace buffer, managed as part of the amenity greenspace network, would provide an appropriate degree of separation with Weston Park, and could also be designed and managed as parkland, to reflect this historic landscape character. By reducing development density to the outermost residential block (20m or single residential block depth), a positive interface could also be created between landscape and townscape at this

point. Providing a structural landscape buffer of up to 30 metres in depth to the northern and western boundaries of WPI (and of a similar landscape character to that described in paragraph 1.27 above) would help secure assimilation of the development within the wider landscape.

- I.29 A wooded landscape character already exists along the SNAP boundary south of Weston Park, as one moves into the site of the potential neighbourhood north east of Great Ashby. This is due to the presence of Warrensgreen Wood and the green lane network west of Hall's Green. This should be reinforced with new native woodland planting of 30-40m depth to the northern SNAP boundary, to reconnect landscape features and assist in avoiding habitat fragmentation.
- I.30 A 30-40m deep native woodland buffer would also help maintain the sense of separation with Halls Green near the eastern SNAP boundary, and would 'foil' the development edge at this point. Retention of the land immediately south of the group of cottages at Leatherwells as greenspace, with an appropriate, porous structural landscape edge, would help to protect the amenity of these properties. It would also create a permeable landscape edge, which responds to and accommodates the pylon way leave at this point.
- I.31 To ensure good landscape integration and to create a positive response to other environmental constraints to development in the south eastern corner of SNAP, a key opportunity is the creation of a further green wedge in the small valley south of Newberry Grove. A flood channel and balancing pond already exist in this area, and could form the focus for an enhanced and expanded wetland park/landscape – new semi natural greenspace to facilitate low key recreation and access to nature with areas of wet woodland, and a wooded settlement boundary, to provide a foil to development.

***Existing landscape character, place and landscape elements/structure***

- I.32 Both of the neighbourhoods to the east of Forster Country display a relatively intact historic landscape framework, due to the presence of large scale broadleaf woodland blocks, a number of which are ancient woodlands (Claypits Wood and Tilekiln Wood), in addition to remnants of a green lane network to the west of Hall's Green and field boundary hedges defining a relatively large scale rectilinear field boundary network, the legacy of both pre 18<sup>th</sup> Century and parliamentary enclosure. Also listed farm buildings at Tilekiln and Dane End Farms, the setting of which should have appropriate wooded landscape buffers, of 10 metres minimum depth and of similar character to those described in paragraph 1.27 above.
- I.33 All of these elements should be conserved and reinforced to create a positive, landscape led template for development in these two neighbourhoods. The woodland in particular provides a key opportunity not only for access to nature but also for natural play, and could form a focus for amenity greenspace provision within development. Such mature landscape features will also need an appropriate buffer zone in relation to root protection areas for mature trees (likely to be at least 20 metres, but extent should be determined through tree survey). This buffer would work better and integrate more positively with the woodland blocks if this were also

designed and managed as part of the amenity greenspace network as opposed to domestic gardens.

- I.34 Provision of a buffer zone would also be applicable to the mature enclosure hedgerows within both of these neighbourhoods, many of which have a strong network of mature hedgerow oaks. This could however be accommodated within streetscape layout, or through retention of hedgerow trees within domestic gardens, which would retain the sense of the historic landscape framework.

### ***Views and visual relationships***

- I.35 Key views to conserve are:
- Views towards the Beane Valley from the 'mount' within Great Ashby Country Park; and
  - View west along the pylon way leave from the eastern SNAP boundary, looking towards the woodlands at Brooches Wood.
- I.36 Retention of the south eastern corner of SNAP as part of the greenspace network (wetland park, as described in paragraph I.31 above), would assist in conserving the rural aspect and foreground of the expansive view to the Beane Valley from within Great Ashby Country Park.
- I.37 The key objective with regard to the view along the pylon way leave should be to conserve something of the rural aspect, in terms of the landscape structure and mature woodland framework which crosses it. This would facilitate the creation of a transitional landscape towards the eastern development edge and provide a sense of visual integration between the new settlement and the wider rural landscape towards the Beane Valley.

### ***Green infrastructure***

- I.38 In addition to the potential for a new wetland park green wedge described in paragraph I.31 above, and the opportunities for access to nature and natural play afforded by the woodlands within this part of SNAP, other principal green infrastructure opportunities are:
- New neighbourhood parks for the two neighbourhoods, e.g. to the east of Claypits Wood and south of Long Dell Wood respectively, to meet Natural England Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANGSt) standard requirements (these could be provided as part of the amenity greenspace allocation);
  - Management of the pylon way leave as semi natural greenspace (limited access), facilitating opportunities for habitat creation through grassland restoration, copses and new woodland planting outside of the safety clearance zones recommended by National Grid (refer to their guidance – *Creating a Sense of Place*). The topography of the way leave to the south and west of Longdell Wood may facilitate opportunities for wetland creation and SuDS for the development.
- I.39 Neighbourhood parks should facilitate a range of different activities and interests, including access to nature (which would enable the design of such spaces to tie positively into the landscape edge e.g. at Claypits Wood). The potential neighbourhood park at Claypits Wood is shown as being larger than

Natural England's minimum 2 hectare area, as the aim here has been to secure a good level of landscape and townscape integration. Green 'fingers' extend into the development edge, and use the existing field boundary structure as a template both for park and development parameters.

- I.40 With regard to design and management aspects of the pylon way leave, the points made at paragraphs I.15-I.16 all apply to the two eastern neighbourhoods.
- I.41 Other components of the green infrastructure network for the two eastern neighbourhoods are the primary and local greenway links. Primary links are the Hertfordshire Way which crosses the Tilekiln-Warrens Green neighbourhood and the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path which crosses both neighbourhoods. The opportunities presented in paragraphs I.18 to I.19 are equally applicable to the design of the routes as they cross these neighbourhoods.
- I.42 The existing green lane network in the north eastern part of SNAP and to the west of Halls Green should be conserved as part of the local level green infrastructure network. Through conservation, restoration and reinforcement this historic network can provide not only access, but other functions such as enhanced habitat provision and a landscape setting to development which responds to historic character.

#### ***Distributor road***

- I.43 One option has been presented for the two neighbourhoods, as shown on the landscape opportunities map. Key points are to:
- Conserve existing landscape structure as far as possible and to minimise disruption to these features;
  - To run the road layout 'with the contours' wherever practical, particularly within the minor valley to the south of the woodland at Newberry Grove.
- I.44 In terms of how the road meets the existing settlement edge to the south east, two variants have been shown on the landscape opportunities map – around the outside of Box Wood, and to the south of Great Ashby Country Park. Visual impact is likely to be an issue if the road was routed around the outside edge of Box Wood. The latter variant has the advantage of visual containment in relation to the wider landscape, but would result in localised woodland loss to the edge of Box Wood near the existing roundabout and may create severance issues with regard to access between the Country Park and the nature reserve at Box Wood – need for careful design and placement of crossing points to avoid this, and for additional landscape planting to enhance habitat creation opportunities along the route. Both variants would result in an additional source of movement and activity in views from the 'mount' within Great Ashby Country Park.

#### **General points**

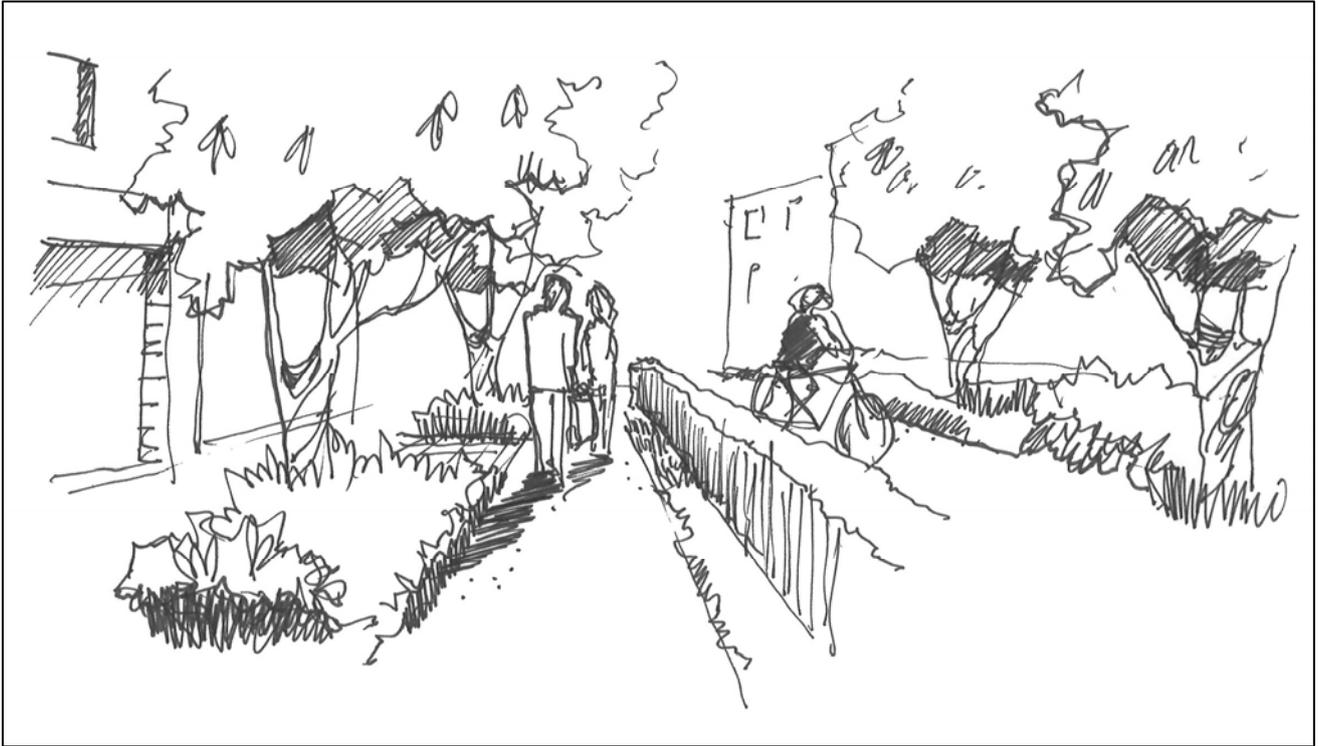
##### ***Delivery and management implications – options to consider***

- I.45 Development phasing should ensure that the landscape and green infrastructure opportunities are realised in parallel with development, to

provide 'quick wins' wherever possible and to ensure that the landscape contributes to the quality of life and fabric of the community, from the start. In addition, consideration should be given to advance planting before the earliest phases of development, notably to the northern, eastern and southern settlement edges and to the edges of the green lung, to provide landscape and visual mitigation.

- I.46 A number of potential landscape projects delivered as part of SNAP north could benefit from Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) funding (e.g. the setting of the Scheduled Monument at St Etheldreda's Church, parkland restoration and creation, restoration of characteristic habitats such as lowland chalk grassland which is a nationally important Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, and restoration/re creation of features of the historic landscape – green lanes). As such this could potentially form a source of funding for certain landscape works, over and above Community Infrastructure Levy/developer contributions, or any bid that may be made to the Regional Infrastructure Fund in relation to the large scale development proposed in SNAP north. The Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant scheme will also contribute to the planting of new woodland, to provide additional funding for both new planting and woodland management.
- I.47 A number of different models may be viable for ongoing management, depending on land ownership and future land assembly. These include a trust, or a private management company controlled by the development company/companies. The applicability of these would be to a large extent dependent on land ownerships, and these broad options are discussed below. For example a trust in relation to Chesfield Park is likely to be of limited viability due to the extent of the land owner's land holdings at Chesfield and the issue of separate land ownerships. Alternatively Chesfield Park may continue in private ownership with some public access in exchange for some development on land within the estate. Potential commercial (and possibly residential) development on land within the SNAP may provide rental income to be reinvested in management of green infrastructure (endowment funding).
- I.48 A simpler option may be a private management company set up by the developer/development consortium, and funded through a service charge.
- I.49 Clearly, sustainable and resourced ongoing management of the landscape and green infrastructure framework of SNAP north will be critical to its success.





Above: Primary greenway link. Showing tree lined boulevard which may be appropriate for routes such as the Hertfordshire Way, within the settlement. Attractive routes which provide urban greening and link key points of focus – a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Garden City



Above: Local level green link, using idea of green lane network as the circulation framework. Provides historic link and enables retention of landscape structure, but can still be permeable and safe

Below: Idea of using new wooded settlement edges as basis for multi use corridors – local footpath links to connect landscape and townscape

