**HBBC Conservation Officer informal opinion about redevelopment of Mulberry Farm and surrounding land, Stoke Golding**

**Site context and significance**

The site is wholly located within the area of the Registered Battlefield of Bosworth (1485) and the Stoke Golding Conservation Area and is within the setting of two listed buildings (the grade I listed C13 Church of St Margaret and the grade II listed The Birches).

*Battlefield*

The Battle of Bosworth (Field) is one of the most important battles and an iconic event in English history and the deciding battle of the Wars of the Roses. The proposed development site is located upon Crown Hill, which was almost certainly the site of Henry VII’s field coronation and is the location of the final act of the battle. This area is therefore key to the significance of the battlefield as a whole. Recent research has provided a detailed understanding of the battlefield area and has led to the amendment of its designation, reinforcing the evidential basis on what that boundary was determined, and affirming the clear significance accorded to the area of the battlefield in which the proposed development lies (see Bosworth Battlefield: The Way Forward – Conservation Plan (CP) (2013)).

The CP focuses upon the revised registered battlefield boundary and the significance of its landscape (also including its wider landscape), with patterns seen today being a reflection of the geology and productivity of the land but also of the area’s evolution, resulting in historic patterns of lanes, woodland, parkland and villages which collectively form a quintessentially English landscape. The CP includes a local-scale landscape character assessment with the application site falling with the Dadlington and Stoke Golding Hills Landscape Character Area (LCA). Key characteristics of this area include that are pertinent to the proposed development site and its setting include:

* Gently undulating hills (including Crown Hill) that appear prominent from lower lying areas to the west and north (this includes views from Ashby Canal (which is a designated conservation area in its own right)
* A small scale field pattern defined by hedgerows and significant numbers of hedgerow trees (as in situ along the northern, western boundary and internal field boundaries on the proposed development site)
* The evolution of the landscape which reflects early and piecemeal enclosure, although in most cases the underlying character is one of openness (the Enclosure Map of 1845 indicates the shape of the two fields comprising the proposed development site had been formed as the result of earlier enclosure). There also appears to be some evidence of ridge and furrow across the site which indicates the use of pre-enclosure agricultural practices
* Significant views across to the north and west from edge of hills, including across Redemore Plain (views to the north and west towards the Plain are currently offered from the proposed development site). Redemore Plain was the location for key events during the course of the battle
* Churches (including the Church of St Margaret) which act as local landmarks in the landscape

These key characteristics provide the landscape with a special quality and contribute to the significance of the battlefield. In addition, views across the battlefield and features associated with the battle enable an appreciation and understanding of the evolution of the landscape and events of the battle; these are therefore highly significant in themselves.

*Conservation Area*

The Stoke Golding Conservation Area Appraisal (SGCAA) (2013) recognises the historic interest associated with the village’s connection to the battle and in particular Crown Hill. The SGCAA also identifies that the character of the conservation area is primarily derived from the agricultural origins of the settlement with strong visual links to the countryside. There are important views identified in the SGCAA from Ashby Canal over the countryside towards to St Margaret’s Church that can be appreciated both due to its ridge top location (on Crown Hill) and gaps in the built form. Such views also reinforce the rural nature and agricultural origins of the settlement and provide the impression of the countryside extending into the historic core of the village. Due to these key characteristics listed above the undeveloped areas of the proposed development site make a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area.

Mulberry Farmhouse (the two storey range) is evident on the 1845 enclosure map. The single storey ranges are evident on the 1885 OS map. This range of buildings are of historic and architectural interest and they contribute positively to the significance of the conservation area. As such they are identified as important local buildings within the SGCAA.

It is acknowledged that the cluster of c.1950s buildings at Mulberry Farm detract from the character of the conservation area and the battlefield, with this site being identified as an ‘improvement area’ that offers the opportunity for enhancement in the SGCAA.

*Listed buildings*

Due to the current undeveloped nature of the parts of the proposed development site and the siting of the intervening built form there are views of the spire of the grade I listed Church of St Margaret from upon the site, it is therefore considered to fall within the wider setting of the church. There are also clear views of the church tower and spire from the Ashby Canal looking over the application site; such views have a largely rural character particularly when looking directly southwards. There is a visual relationship between the proposed development site and the church, this being apparent from numerous vantage points, which demonstrates the importance of the church within the wider largely rural landscape and from within which the architectural and historic interest of the heritage asset and the character of its surroundings can be clearly appreciated. The proposed development site is therefore considered to make a positive contribution to the significance of the church.

Views between the proposed development site and the grade II listed The Birches are morel limited and there appears no known other relevant relationship between the site and this listed building, however it is acknowledged that the cluster of c.1950s buildings at Mulberry Farm situated along the western boundary of The Birches do detract from its immediate setting.

**Likely impact from any proposed development (based on the site including the farm building and its two associated fields)**

*Battlefield and its associated landscape*

The proposed development would affect the significance of the battlefield in a key area of the course of the battle itself (Crown Hill).The demolition and redevelopment of the cluster of c.1950s buildings at Mulberry Farm does offer the opportunity to enhance the character of the area, however its redevelopment with standard residential development (in terms of scale, layout, design etc.) would not be considered to respond to the site context with the character of the site and area generally being rural and agricultural. If this part of the site were to be redeveloped I would expect to see a design that reflects this context, such as a range and complex of converted agricultural buildings. It is therefore possible in my opinion that the principle of a well-designed redevelopment of the ‘improvement area’ (based on the footprint of existing development) can be established, subject to other material considerations such as an archaeological survey, and such a redevelopment would have a positive impact that would enhance the significance of the battlefield.

Any development beyond the footprint of the existing development (such as to the north incorporating the two fields) would be an encroachment on to the battlefield area, the character of which is currently open and undeveloped. Due to the siting of the proposed development it would be clearly visible in views of Crown Hill from Ashby Canal. Consequently the proposal would result in the loss of the visible appreciation of the clear boundary to the battlefield and would adversely impact upon key landscape features, the characteristics of which currently contribute positively to the significance of the battlefield. It is highly likely that there is the potential for the presence of significant archaeological remains within the site, with any archaeological remains here that might be associated with activity relating to the battle would of course be of particular significance. Any progress with a development proposal would require a full understanding of the archaeological implications of this development at an early stage with an Archaeological Impact Assessment likely being required (further advice would be provided by Leicestershire County Council Planning Archaeology). However the key aspect to note, as described above, is that the significance of the battlefield comes from its landscape character as well as it’s known and potential archaeological resource, therefore the encroachment of the proposed development on to the battlefield is considered to have a considerable adverse impact and would cause a level of harm to its significance. The adverse impact caused by the encroachment is considered to be greater than the positive impact of redeveloping the 1950s buildings therefore the overall net impact of the proposal upon the significance of the battlefield is considered to be adverse.

*Conservation Area*

As identified above a well-designed redevelopment of the ‘improvement area’ would have a positive impact that would enhance the significance of the conservation area. Limiting development to this area would not have any adverse impact upon the countryside views beyond the Zion chapel from High Street as identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

The conservation area has significance due to the historic interest associated with the village’s connection to the battle and in particular Crown Hill, and therefore the adverse impacts upon the significance of the battlefield, as identified above, are also relevant with the any proposed development adversely impacting upon the conservation area for these reasons should the development boundary extend beyond the improvement area. For any quantum of units proposed there will be a requirement to provide certain levels of visibility at the access on to High Street, however it should be determined if any of the northern ranges of Mulberry Farmhouse need to be demolished to achieve the required visibility. The loss of these important local buildings would have an adverse impact upon the significance of the conservation area.

*Listed buildings*

As identified above a well-designed redevelopment of the ‘improvement area’ would have a positive impact that would lead to a minor enhancement to the setting of The Birches.

The visual relationship between the proposed development site and the church is apparent from numerous vantage points, particularly in views from Ashby Canal. Due to the siting of the church on a ridge top and the height of the tower and spire these features would remain prominent in the landscape following the proposed development, however any extension of the built form caused by developing beyond the improvement area would alter part of the largely rural landscape from within which the interest of the church and the character of its surroundings can currently clearly be appreciated. Any development beyond the improvement area is considered to result in an introduction of new, unrelated built form upon the site that detracts from the setting of the church and consequently reduces the appreciation of its significance. For these reasons it is considered the proposal would cause a level of harm to the significance of the grade I listed Church of St Margaret.

**Summary**

It is clear that any proposed development would provide some gains towards the goal of achieving sustainable development (such as the provision of housing), however in my opinion the significant adverse impact from the proposed development on the historic environment would not achieve the goal of sustainable development, so overall the proposed development is not sustainable. Without pre-determining the outcome of any plan-making process it is highly likely there will be other sites within and around the settlement that could better achieve the goals of sustainable development without having the same level of adverse impact that this proposed development would have on the historic environment. This selection process should be guided by the results of the recommended Strategic Environment Assessment.

If a planning application was to be submitted for the whole site then as required by Policy DM11 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD and paragraphs 193-196 of the NPPF the harm caused by the proposal should be weighed against the public benefits. The proposed development would provide some public benefits (such as the provision of housing) but in my opinion, however, when taken as a whole the level of the public benefits demonstrated by the proposal would be wholly insufficient to outweigh the harm caused to the affected heritage assets, both individually and cumulatively, and therefore any proposal would fail to comply with national and local policies. In completing this balancing exercise great weight would be been given to the conservation of these designated heritage assets as required by paragraph 193 of the NPPF and the statutory duties of Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Again this is my informal opinion which is not intended to pre-determine any application should it be submitted and there may well be other material considerations for the planning balance.

It should also be noted that there have been some other recent decisions regarding development within the battlefield in Stoke Golding that may provide some further context and have relevance for this proposal. This includes an application for one dwelling at 36 Station Road which was refused and dismissed at appeal due to the adverse impact of the development on the battlefield (reference 13/00956/OUT) and the recently withdrawn proposal for six dwellings on land to the rear of the White Swan (to the south of the Mulberry Farm site) which received the same opposition for many of the same reasons as identified in the impact section above. Any proposal in the battlefield will also require the involvement of a number of statutory consultees, including Historic England, who always clearly point out that the battlefield is an irreplaceable resource as a heritage asset of national significance.

Therefore in my opinion it clear that there would be considerable barriers to developing this site and I do not believe there is any possible mitigation or negotiation to achieve an appropriate development other than focusing solely on redeveloping the ‘improvement’ area.