

WHLANDSCAPE Consultancy Ltd.
CHARTERED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

CHIPPENHAM EASTERN EXPANSION AREA

INITIAL LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL REVIEW

On behalf of
TYTHERTON LUCAS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

October 2015

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WHLANDSCAPE Consultancy Ltd. has been commissioned by Tytherton Lucas Residents' Association to produce an Initial Review of the likely landscape and visual issues relating to the Indicative East Chippenham Strategic Site and the much larger site proposed by Chippenham 2020.

WHLANDSCAPE Consultancy Ltd. has an established track record of appraising development proposals in the countryside. The Practice has considerable experience in the field of landscape and visual assessment and uses tried and tested techniques developed and recognised by the Landscape Institute, Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, and Natural England.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides an initial review of the potential landscape and visual impacts associated with the Indicative East Chippenham Strategic Site and the much larger site proposed by Chippenham 2020. The site area takes in the A4 boundary to the south of Chippenham, at the western end of the site; Abbeyfield School ; Harden's Farm; and New Leaze Farm to the east. The northern development boundary is proposed to follow the River Avon flood risk area, and to the south the area extends across lowland agricultural fields to an area south of Stanley Lane. In terms of the Indicative East Chippenham Strategic Site (Site C), the eastern site boundary is on the north-west facing slope to the west of New Leaze Farm. The Chippenham 2020 site extends further to the east to include land bordering the River Marden flood risk area, a short distance from the historic village of Tytherton Lucas, extending north to the River Avon and south-east to include arable fields and pasture associated with New Leaze Farm. In general the site exhibits mature hedged field boundaries, with the former railway route (Sustrans Route 403 - North Wiltshire Rivers Route Cycleway) containing mature native trees along much of its length.

1.2 Apart from a small section of minor road (Stanley Lane) at Gate Farm to the southern corner, there are no roads crossing the site. There is a well-used public footpath crossing from Tytherton Lucas in a south-westerly direction passing New Leaze and Harden's Farm before reaching Chippenham. A spur from this path crosses the fields to the east of New Leaze Farm. The most actively used route crossing the site is the North Wiltshire Rivers Route Cycleway which connects Chippenham with Calne along the former railway track bed. It is a very popular rural cycle and walking route with no motorised vehicle access, and also provides access to the countryside for disabled persons.

1.3 Although this report does not constitute a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment it is important that the concepts of landscape and visual sensitivity are understood. The process is based on the following guidance:

- *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. 3rd ed. - The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013)
- *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland* - The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage (2002).

1.4 Landscape impacts relate to changes in the character and qualities as a result of the development and can be Positive, Adverse or Neutral. Visual impacts relate to the appearance of the development and can also be Positive, Adverse or Neutral. The visual impacts affect the visual amenity, which is the value of area and what can be seen. Of particular importance in this case are:

- The impacts on landscape resource and character.
- The impacts on visual amenity and the perception of the landscape.

2. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACTS

2.1 The assessment of landscape and visual impacts describes the significance of changes in character and quality of the landscape and visual resources resulting from the proposed development. The landscape impact assessment addresses changes (effects) in the fabric, character and key characteristics of the landscape. The visual impact assessment addresses changes in views, and the significance of those changes on visual receptors. To be consistent, the prediction of magnitude and the assessment of significance of the landscape and visual impacts have been based on pre-defined criteria. Below are examples of Magnitude and Sensitivity grading, although it should be noted that the terminology used may vary from assessment to assessment.

Table 1a: Magnitude of Change of the Landscape Resource

Level of Magnitude	Definition of Magnitude
Substantial	Total loss or alteration of key elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline condition (predevelopment).
Moderate	Partial loss or alteration of one or more key elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline condition, such that the predevelopment condition will be partially changed.
Slight	Minor loss or alteration of one or more key elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline condition, such that the baseline condition will

	be similar to the predevelopment circumstance.
Negligible	Very minor loss or alteration to one or more key elements, features, and characteristics of the baseline condition, such that the changes are barely distinguishable.

2.2 Sensitivity of landscape is a function of the susceptibility of the landscape receptor to change and the value of the landscape receptor. It should be noted that high value receptors do not necessarily mean that there is a high susceptibility to all types of change.

Table 1b: Sensitivity of Landscape

Level of Sensitivity	Definition of Sensitivity
High	Important landscape components susceptible to small changes.
Medium	Moderately valued landscape tolerant of some change.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape tolerant of change.
Negligible	Degraded landscape tolerant of major change.

2.3 Visual receptors are people and visual effects have been assessed using the following thresholds in order to evaluate the significance of impact. The magnitude of impact of the view is based on the overall extent of the visibility. Factors such as distance from the development, duration of impact, screening, angle of view, backdrop to the development and extent of other built development are considered in respect of the magnitude of view.

Table 2a: Magnitude of Visual Change

Level of Magnitude	Definition of Magnitude
Substantial	Fundamental or very obvious change in the character, make-up and balance of the view. The proposals would prominent or even dominant. The nature of the existing view would change.
Moderate	Moderate changes in the character, make-up and balance of the view, with the proposals noticeably distinct. This may lead to an overall change in the nature of the view depending upon the type and nature of change.
Slight	The proposals would be visible as a new feature. Change would be limited and would be unlikely to affect the nature of the existing view as a whole.
Negligible	Virtually imperceptible change in the view. Whilst theoretically visible, the proposals would be faint, not legible and difficult for the viewer to discern.

2.2.7 Visual sensitivity depends upon the extent to which attention is focused on views and visual amenity and receptor susceptibility to changes in view. Certain views that are experienced may have

a value attached to them. Such views may be specifically recognised through planning designations or in relation to heritage assets, or may be indicated on maps or in guidebooks. Below is a typical matrix used for defining receptor visual sensitivity:

Table 2b: Definition of Receptor Visual Sensitivity

Level of Sensitivity	Definition of Sensitivity
High	Users of strategic rights of way, cycle paths, etc; important cultural, physical or historic features; views from beauty spots, picnic areas and principal settlements and residential properties. Places where the attention of the user may be focussed on the landscape.
Medium	Other public rights of way; views seen by people passing through the landscape e.g. by train or car.
Low	People engaged in outdoor activities other than for the appreciation of the landscape.
Negligible	Views from industrialised areas.

3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

3.1 The two landscape character assessment of primary importance are:

a) North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2004) Landscape Character Area 11 Avon Valley Lowlands, the key characteristics of which are:

- *Low lying river landscape on river terrace between 30m and 70m AOD;*
- *Dominant presence of water in the form of ditches, streams and river with related riparian vegetation and structures;*
- *Intact and predominantly well managed hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees;*
- *Areas of high quality arable agricultural land throughout the area;*
- *Shelterbelts of poplar act as significant vertical elements in the horizontal landscape;*
- *Rural and isolated feel to more remote parts of the character area;*
- *Strong rural sense of place, which begins to break down around Chippenham;*
- *Green valley floor through Chippenham;*
- *Broad expansive skyline, frequently unbroken by development; and*
- *Significance of electricity transmission lines.*

b) Wiltshire County Landscape Character Assessment (2005) Landscape Character Area 12b Avon Open Clay Vale, the key characteristics of which are:

- *level land form with wide open skies and views to ridges and downs*
- *pastoral land use with some arable*
- *Large scale geometric fields with hedgerows or open drainage channels defining boundaries.*
- *Presence of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies.*
- *Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).*
- *Floristically rich hay meadows.*
- *Settlement pattern varies from large towns and small scattered villages to sparse farmsteads.*
- *Buildings in varied materials of brick, render and stone.*
- *Crossed by major transport corridors, and a network of minor roads linking settlements.*
- *Historic use for transport evident in canals.*

3.2 The Chippenham Landscape Setting Assessment undertaken by TEP for Wiltshire Council in December 2014 has drawn together the existing character assessments and visual qualities and has deduced the following in respect of East Chippenham (Strategic Area C):

- *Strong visual connection between River Avon and limestone ridge to the south east;*
- *Enclosed character to slopes of floodplain created through mature hedgerows and linear woodland contrasting with open character to the floodplain;*
- *Wooded and rural character to the North Wiltshire Rivers Route a long distance footpath and cycleway;*
- *Long distance views across the River Avon flood plain towards Bencroft Hill (limestone ridge);*
- *Long distance views towards Chippenham characterised by a wooded edge, most of the settlement screened except pockets of housing nestled in trees and occasional industrial building. The spire of St Paul's Church is a feature of the skyline;*
- *Wide open views across flat arable farmland with low hedgerows and infrequent hedgerow trees (present close to the River Avon);*
- *Limestone ridge forming a prominent backdrop to views throughout the landscape;*
- *Strong wooded eastern edge to Chippenham;*
- *Countryside has a strong sense of separation from Chippenham through strong wooded edge to the settlement;*
- *Separation between Chippenham and Tytheron [Sic] Lucas.*

3.3 The Landscape quality assessment categorises the area as: *'Attractive and Peaceful and consistent with the wider judgements on landscape character. In summary the landscape is predominantly rural in character and either side of Stanley Lane and to the north of the North*

Wiltshire Rivers Route Cycleway. South of the Cycleway there are views across less intact boundaries to the urban edge of Chippenham, which considerably dilutes the remote, rural character and creates more of an urban fringe landscape.'

3.4 The visual quality assessment categorises the Visual prominence as 'Moderate to High' with a '*Soft well vegetated [sic] urban edge limited views of principally rooflines/partially visible urban edge*'. Primary views into the area are from the North Wiltshire Rivers Route Cycleway. In an arc from the south west to the north-west these include Abbeyfield School and the urban edge as far as Monkton Park, seen across meadows and filtered by trees. To the north and east rising ground and views of the limestone ridge to the south-east are of importance and give a rural context to the Cycleway.

3.5 It is important that the landscape sensitivities and qualities as highlighted in the Landscape Character Assessments are safeguarded. Of particular concern to Tytherton Lucas and Bremhill Parish residents are the following:

- *Remote rural character of the land to the north of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route characterised by large arable fields bounded by tree lined watercourses and onward views over the expansive river floodplain flanked by the wooded limestone ridge to the east;*
- *Remote character of Tytherton Lucas with the edge of Chippenham appearing generally distant and wooded;*
- *Riparian character to views along the River Avon and River Marden;*
- *Trees and hedgerows which combine with riparian trees along watercourses to provide a strong landscape structure and wooded setting to views across the landscape;*
- *Rural character of small scattered settlements and with distinctive vernacular using local stone.*

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 In order to ensure that the sensitivities and qualities of the landscape are to be adequately protected through any development site allocation, the capacity of the landscape to absorb development must be ascertained. In terms of the above sensitivities and qualities (**3.5**) it is necessary to ensure that development does not encroach upon the higher ground along the north-west to south-east ridge at New Leaze Farm, where it will be a prominent intrusion into the tranquil, rural landscape, and will be visible breaking the skyline from a considerable distance to the north,

south and east. It will appear remote from Chippenham and will adversely impact upon the landscape setting of the Tytherton Lucas Conservation Area and the tranquil rural landscape.

4.2 Additionally, the riparian character of views along the River Avon and River Marden should be protected. This can be partially achieved by keeping development out of the flood plain, but would be seriously compromised by the Chippenham 2020 proposals to develop up to the confluence of the two rivers, and the proposals by both Chippenham 2020 and Wiltshire Council to construct a road bridge across the River Avon and flood plain, between New Leaze Farm and Rawlings Farm. The Chippenham 2020 proposal is for a bridge near the confluence of the rivers and the Wiltshire Council one for a crossing closer to the existing urban edge. However, both options will result in significant disruption to views along the rivers and the rural character and tranquillity of the area. This will not only be a day time problem, but night-time light spill from street lighting from both the bridge and proposed Eastern Link Road will form a significant disruptive element in the landscape. Therefore, the construction of the road bridge and linking roads will have a significant adverse impact on the character and visual amenities of its route and the surrounding countryside.

4.3 Although not covered by any statutory landscape designations the river corridors and the surrounding countryside, particularly to the north of the cycle route, are of considerable landscape value, being located in a tranquil and complete rural landscape and providing the landscape setting for the Tytherton Lucas Conservation Area. This is highlighted by the proposed designation of the River Marden and its environs, within the Bremhill Parish boundaries, as a Local Green Space in the Bremhill Neighbourhood Plan (draft). This area has a low capacity and is susceptible to development. It is considered to have a High/Medium sensitivity and the magnitude of change will be Substantial, which will result in a Major to Major/Moderate adverse impact on the landscape resource, which cannot readily be mitigated. The current proposals by both Wiltshire Council and Chippenham 2020 both indicate at least some development and a river crossing north of the cycle route, which is considered unacceptable in both cases in landscape terms. This will not be adequately off-set by the suggested undergrounding of the HT power lines, although there is no indication as to how the crossing of the River Avon would be achieved.

4.4 To the south of the cycle route the landscape value is marginally lower and the susceptibility to change, although remaining in the Moderate adverse category, is also lower. Development would therefore have a lower adverse significance, than the area north of the Cycleway, due to a higher level of containment, a closer relationship with the urban edge of Chippenham, and a less intact

receiving landscape with a diluted rural and remote character. However, despite this the landscape impacts of development in this area will remain significant and adverse.

4.5 Visually, the highest sensitivity receptors are users of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route, which follows the route of the former Chippenham to Calne railway and is an extremely popular tranquil and rural cycle path. It cuts through the northern part of the Indicative East Chippenham Strategic Site and almost cuts the Chippenham 2020 site in half. At present users of the cycle route pass through a rural back-water until they reach the bridge over the River Avon. Over the years the embankments and track sides have become dominated by native shrub growth and mature native trees, which form a semi-natural landscape boundary. Development as per both schemes will result in the visual character of the cycle route changing from rural tranquil to urban. Visually this will result in a Substantial adverse change to the view in which the nature of the existing view would change entirely. The North Wiltshire Rivers Route has a High receptor sensitivity, which indicates that the proposals will have a Major adverse impact on users of the cycle route. Users of other Public Rights of Way and residential properties in the vicinity will experience impacts in the range of Moderate/Major to Moderate/Minor adverse. This does not represent a full assessment of visual impacts of the indicative East Chippenham Strategic Site or Chippenham 2020 site, but gives an important insight into the visual impact issues which will be encountered. Although development to the south of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route will have a slightly lower visual significance than the area to the north, there will remain a significant change to views from the cycle route and from the limestone ridge to the south and other local public rights of way, as well as residential views out over the countryside from Monkton Park.

4.6 This preliminary appraisal confirms the comments in the Landscape Setting Assessment document at paragraph 6.25, which states:

'The open character and strong association with the rivers and floodplain are important characteristics to safeguard. The generally remote character of the north of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and at the eastern end of Stanley Lane is important to conserve.'

The Inspector at the Initial Appraisal has expressed some concern with the allocation of the East Chippenham Strategic Site when he states at paragraph 19:

The matter of concern here is that the Plan is over-allocating in both housing and employment land requirements, specifically in an area which the evidence base suggests is environmentally sensitive and the least attractive in terms of flood risk.

4.7 It is therefore recommended that unless there is no alternative to an allocation for housing in East Chippenham, the Chippenham East Strategic Site should be deleted. If on the other hand there is a requirement for development it should be located to the south of the North Wiltshire Rivers Route and to the north and west of Abbey Field School. Careful consideration to the areas suitable for employment must be given, as the currently indicated location will have significant adverse landscape and visual impacts and is unacceptable. All development proposals must incorporate substantial strategic and structural landscape proposals, commensurate with the development being located within a sensitive rural location and to create a strong planted boundary to the urban form. Development within the flood risk areas or settings of the Rivers Marden and Avon will not be acceptable. The extensive Chippenham 2020 proposals will have significant adverse landscape and visual effects and are not acceptable and should be rejected.

4.7 The current locations for the Eastern Link Road bridge over the River Avon are unacceptable in both landscape and visual terms and should be rejected. An alternative may be feasible, but as yet a route which outweighs the landscape and visual harm is not available. Therefore, if a strategic allocation is to be made, it is recommended that proposals for the Eastern Link Road are deleted.

References

North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment – White Consultants June 2004

Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment – LUC December 2005

Chippenham Landscape Setting Assessment – TEP December 2014

Chippenham Site Allocation Plan, Pre-submission draft plan – Wiltshire Council February 2015

Independent Examination of Wiltshire Council's Chippenham Site Allocation Plan – Planning Inspectorate September 2015

Bremhill Parish Neighbourhood Plan (draft) – Bremhill Parish Council September 2015

Chippenham 2020 website - www.chippenham2020.com