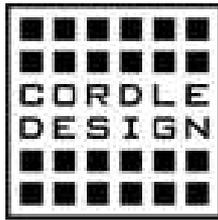


# Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment & Tree Report [Update]



**Bicester Gateway, Phase 1B**  
Bicester, Oxfordshire

December 2019



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# **Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment & Tree Report [Update]**

**December 2019**

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## Executive Summary

- This assessment has been carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition. 2013. [GLVIA3].
- The Visual and Landscape Impacts are assessed against the background of the Cherwell Local Plan 2016 within which the proposed development occupies an allocated site.
- The Visual Impact associated with the proposed development is assessed as **Slightly Adverse**.
- The Landscape Character Impact associated with the proposed development is also assessed as **Slightly Adverse**.
- Any moderately adverse visual impacts are mostly confined to locations where changes to the visual appearance of the site are experienced at very close, "point blank" range, and where visual mitigation is not possible owing to the immediate proximity of the viewer.

Planning permission was granted for the development of Phase 1B in 2017.

The current proposals are broadly consistent with that previously consented scheme, both in terms of massing and in terms of their overall height and associated visibility within the surrounding landscape.

As a result of the revised scheme it continues to be the case that, there is also a range of positive landscape effects associated with the landscape design and management proposals associated with the development, which will deliver a high quality landscaped gateway site and create a prestigious sense of arrival to Bicester from the south-west (A41 / M40).

The tree-lined entrance avenue of Vendee Drive creates an attractive and impressive central access feature that serves all of the phases of the development adjacent to Wendlebury Road.

In addition, the internal landscape of Phase 1B is transformed by the new landscape design proposals that compliment the built form and make the spaces between the buildings both pleasant and useable. This is a marked improvement over the dense car parking arrangement that dominated the landscape design of the previously consented scheme.

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## **Introduction**

*Bloombridge LLP have engaged Cordle Design to update the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for Phase 1B of the Bicester Gateway site due to proposed design changes that may alter the landscape and visual impacts brought about by the revised proposals.*

*Paul Cordle is a Landscape Consultant with over 20 years experience in Landscape Design and Arboriculture. Paul has been a freelance design consultant for 7 years, having previously worked for The National Trust and The Forestry Commission. Cordle Design's clients include The Woodland Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust for a range of projects that include large scale woodland creation and landscape restoration as well as sustainable recreation and access work. Cordle Design has also worked with Bloombridge LLP to deliver a number of high quality housing, infrastructure and hybrid schemes in sensitive landscapes nation wide.*

*Cordle Design carried out the LVIA for the previously consented scheme upon the site. This report constitutes an update to the previous LVIA and Tree Reports based upon the proposed changes to the design and layout of the consented scheme.*

## **Scope**

*The scope of this assessment is very similar to the scope of the original study.*

*The study area remains the same as the extent remains appropriate to the scale of the site and, moreover, enables easy comparison of the previously consented scheme with the new development proposals.*

*In order to enable comparison this update employs the same ranges of landscape receptors (LRs) and visual receptors (VRs) as the original LVIA study in 2016 / 2017.*

## **Description of Revised Proposals**

*The revised design is mixed use with a higher proportion of public open space, whereas the previously consented scheme was for four large office buildings with associated ground level car-parking and landscaping.*

*The replacement scheme includes various features that increase the sustainability of the site both passively, such as more tree cover and better landscaping, and actively, such as active solar power generation.*

*The replacement scheme includes public amenity and recreation spaces that are well integrated with the proposed development.*

*The previous consented scheme was for four office buildings that fronted the A41 dual-carriageway with a large area of car parking arranged between and behind the buildings. This scheme concentrated most of the height of the built form close to the western boundary of the site where it was most visible from the A41. The buildings were designed to be impressive from the "gateway" approach, and although there was some planting and screening included within the consented scheme, this was primarily directed at the occlusion of the parked cars. The buildings themselves were designed to be seen and the roadside vegetation was laid out in order to provide a viewing aperture through which the principal elevation of each building could be clearly seen and any signage or company logos could be clearly read.*

*These high profile "statement" elevations are a desirable feature in business premises. However, where a percentage of the developable area is to be turned to residential use, it is more desirable to exclude the road corridor. Therefore, the opportunity exists to implement a more robust screen of trees and shrubs, and potentially even some additional bunding or acoustic fencing.*

*The denser landscaping will serve the dual purposes of shielding the residential areas of the proposed development from the road whilst also reducing the visual effects exerted upon receptors within the busy road corridor and further to the west.*

*In order to facilitate better connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, it will be necessary to remove a short section of the boundary hedgerow in the very north-west corner of the site. This will also entail the removal of three medium sized Ash trees from within the site boundary.*

## Updated Baseline Study

*The most widely felt changes to both the landscape and visual baselines derive from the addition of the large hotel on the immediately adjacent plot, Phase 1A, on the opposite side of Vendee Drive. The top height of the hotel makes it visible over a wider area than any of the other buildings within the previously consented scheme.*

*The previous LVIA in 2017 identified 28 VR locations (VRs) that were found to be representative of the most significant views towards the development site. This update to the LVIA utilises the same range of VR locations and considers whether the visual effects exerted upon each one are greater, lessened or remain the same in relation to the proposed revisions to the site design of Phase 1B.*

*In visual terms, the adjacent hotel in Phase 1A, exerts effects upon the views into the proposed development site from the north, including parts of the A41 and Wendlebury Road. The hotel does not entirely occlude views from these areas, but limits them considerably. However, as the bulk of the hotel is confined within its own plot, there are sight lines past the building from the north, on both the eastern and western sides. These sight lines are not altered, but the quality and sensitivity of the views to change is somewhat diminished, although only through this narrow range of angles.*

*As well as minor changes to the availability and quality of the visual aspects of the proposed development site, the hotel brings new visual prospects also. These are all from within the curtilage of its own grounds or from within the building itself. The land remains privately owned and the available viewing locations are therefore at best only semi-public. Due to the transient nature of the majority of the inhabitants, the sensitivity of these receptors is less than for permanent residents. Although the enjoyment of a view is part of the attraction of some hotel experiences, that is less the case in this landscape than it would be in a location where the view comprised a significant component of the offer, such as may be the case in a coastal resort or within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Furthermore, due to the orientation of the building, the principal views from the hotel rooms are either towards Graven Hill (east) and Kingsmere (west).*

*The previous LVIA in 2017 identified the 12 most characteristic Landscape Receptors (LRs) within the site and the surrounding locale. These are broadly grouped into landscape qualities, distinctive landscape features and discrete landscape elements. It is considered that there has been no change to the characterisation of the landscape since the original study, and therefore, for the purposes of this update to the LVIA, the same range of LRs has been employed.*

*In landscape terms, the changes to the internal landscape of the site from low-grade agricultural to built form and hard surfacing is marked. However, these changes are predicted and in line with the strategic allocation of the land uses for the area within the Cherwell Local Plan and Bicester Gateway Phase 1B is a continuation of this. Therefore, it should be remembered that the proposed development is situated within an area of land that has been specifically identified for economic and housing growth to the south of Bicester.*

# Updated Landscape Impact Assessment

## Landscape Qualities

### Overall Sense of Place / Genus Loci

The previous LVIA identified that the landscape around Bicester Gateway is a "landscape in transition" with comparatively rapid landscape change owing primarily to the development of land for a wide range of planned and allocated land uses. During the interval between the approval of the previously consented scheme in 2017, and the proposed changes to the development, the surrounding landscape of the growth area to the north and west of the site has continued to develop. The overall sense of place continues to be that of a landscape in transition.

The changes that have occurred have been within the context of the planned development of the growth area and its environs. There are no unplanned or unpredicted changes to the landscape qualities in the locale.

### Tranquillity

The proposed development offers some enclosed public spaces within the centre of the development that will be shielded from the constant disturbance of the A41 by the perimeter buildings themselves. This is an improvement to the previously consented scheme where almost the entire landscape plan was designated for car parking areas.

Due to the mixed-use nature of the proposed development, the minor loss of tranquillity in the locale associated with the proposed development will potentially be extended later into the evening than might have been the case with a single-use office development.

Tranquillity in the interior of the site is predicted to be improved due to the occlusion of the adjacent dual-carriageway by the new buildings along the western boundary. It is beneficial that this sheltered space is available for public use within the new development proposals.

## Landscape Features

The landscape features associated with the proposed development site are:

Hedgerows; Hedgerow Trees; Small to Medium Sized Field Pattern; Well-Wooded Landscape; Small To Medium Sized Well-nucleated Villages; Densely Tree-lined Streams and Ditches;

Within the previous LVIA in 2017, these important features of the local landscape were found to receive few landscape effects from the previously consented development and this situation has not changed in relation to the present revised proposals.

Hedgerows and hedgerow trees are the two landscape elements that receive minor landscape effects from both the previously consented and the revised proposals. However, the magnitude of the effects remains the same between the consented and revised schemes.

The creation of a new pedestrian and cycle access to the site that will link up with the pavement and cycle route alongside the A41 will require the removal of a three Ash Trees as

well as a short section of the site boundary adjacent to the dual-carriageway. This is a small increase in the amount of hedgerow and tree removal that will be required in order to implement the improved scheme.

The benefit in terms of pedestrian / cycle connectivity outweighs the loss of the short section of hedgerow boundary. The trees to be removed are all Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and as such are under severe threat of the virulent Ash-Die Back disease, which has been recorded locally since 2017. The trees are considered to be of intermediate landscape value rather than having intrinsic value of their own in terms of form, culture or place-making. Therefore, it is expected that the replacement stocks that will be established to frame the new pedestrian / cycle opening will develop to perform the same landscape function but with superior selected form and without susceptibility to sudden death from a devastating and now widespread disease.

## **Landscape Elements**

The LVIA identified four discrete areas of potential landscape sensitivity in relation to specific landscape elements. These were all historic or archaeological in nature and there is no change to the landscape baseline in relation to any of these receptors.

The previous assessment identified that there would be no impact at all upon the setting of the Alchester Roman Town Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) or upon the Chesterton Village Building Conservation Area. The Grade II listed buildings within the wider landscape were considered too distant from the area of the proposed development to receive any adverse landscape effects. Only in relation to Wendlebury Road did the assessment find that there would be a slight adverse landscape effect due to the urbanising influence of the development upon the land adjacent to the road.

Although Wendlebury Road is a historic Roman road, it is not considered to be in particularly good condition due to previous treatments of the carriageway itself and preceding adjacent developments.

As previously, there will be a slight adverse effect upon Wendlebury Road that cannot be fully ameliorated by improvements to the field boundaries.

This update to the LVIA finds that the situation in relation to these specific landscape receptors is unchanged.

Overall, the landscape effects associated with the proposed development remain unchanged in terms of substance and amount.

## **Updated Visual Impact Assessment**

*The Landscape Receptors identified within the original desk study and ground survey have not changed and represent the best set of receptors for the assessment of the predicted impacts of the revised design.*

*The original LVIA consisted of a visual assessment against a very large set of 28 VR locations from a wide range of points at varying distances from the site. The updated predicted visual effects are as follows:*

**VR1:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less. The adjacent hotel is much taller than the proposed redevelopment.*

**VR 2:**

*There will be no visual impact upon viewers in the vicinity of VR2. The buildings within the proposed development are not tall enough and the viewing location is not elevated enough for them to be seen over the intervening buildings and trees.*

**VR 3:**

*The visual magnitude will be the same or less than the previously approved hotel scheme. At the time of the previous LVIA VR 3 was not a public location. However, the land received planning approval for development during the period of the Bicester Gateway application and it is possible that there will be some glimpsed public and residential views from within the layout of the proposed estate of new houses. This will slightly increase the sensitivity of the visual receptors in and close to this location.*

**VR4:**

*The visual magnitude will be the same or less than the previously approved hotel scheme. At the time of the previous LVIA VR 4 was not a public location. However, as with VR3, the land received planning approval for development during the period of the Bicester Gateway application and it is possible that there will be some glimpsed public and residential views from within the layout of the proposed estate of new houses. This will slightly increase the sensitivity of the visual receptors in and close to this location.*

**VR5:**

*There will be no view of the proposed development.*

**VR6:**

*There will be no view of the proposed development.*

**VR7:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR8:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR9:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR10:**

*There will be no view of the proposed development.*

**VR11:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR12:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR13:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

*VR 13 is from within the temporary transitional landscape of the A41 corridor and views from here are expected to change fundamentally as the area of land between the Kingsmere Development and the dual-carriageway is developed for use as a school and other land uses.*

**VR14:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR15:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR16:**

*The visual impact will be reduced as there will be no view of the proposed development. VR 16 only focuses upon the hotel portion of the previously consented scheme.*

**VR17:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less. VR 17 is not a public view.*

**VR18:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less. VR 18 is not a public view.*

**VR19:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR20:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

*The portion of the hotel site that has been developed will not occlude any part of the proposed development within this view.*

**VR21:**

*The visual impact will be less. This VR focuses upon the already consented scheme for the hotel and associated parking. The predicted visual impact of the proposed development is confined to a very small proportion of the remaining view along Wendlebury Road.*

**VR22:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR23:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less. Only a tiny glimpse of the foreground landscaping will alter the existing view at VR23, which is focused upon the previously consented scheme.*

**VR24:**

*VR 24 focuses upon the previously consented hotel site.*

**VR25:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*

**VR26:**

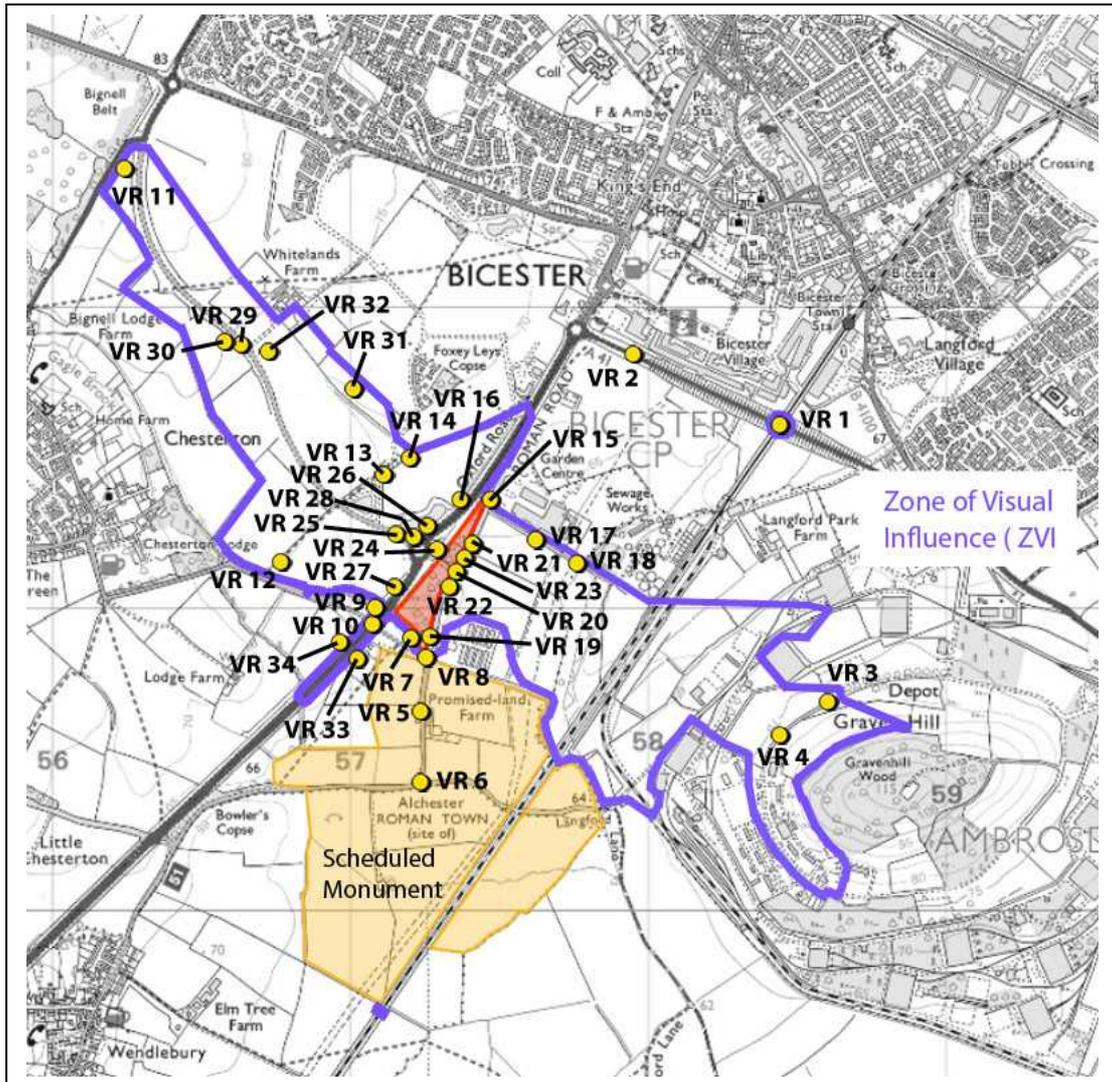
*The visual impact will be reduced as there will be no view of the proposed development. VR 26 focuses upon the previously consented hotel site in Phase 1A.*

**VR27:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less. This will depend upon the detail of the proposed landscaping for the scheme along the boundary and roadside. If the previous intention to maintain open viewing windows of the building frontages is reduced then the magnitude of the visual change will be less.*

**VR28:**

*The visual impact will be the same or less.*



**Figure 1 - The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) has reduced due to the omission of the hotel from the visibility assessment.**

## Visual Summary

The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) is considerably reduced owing to the fact that the proposed buildings within Phase 1B of the development are significantly lower in height than the hotel contained within Phase 1A. This is shown by the reduced ZVI map at figure 1, above.

There were 28 VR locations in the original submitted LVIA report. Of these, 9 focused either solely or primarily upon the visual effects associated with the hotel in Phase 1A, and as such there is no change predicted as a result of the proposed alterations to the design of the adjacent business park.

There are 19 VRs that were previously employed to assess the visual effects exerted either by Phase 1B or by Phases 1A & 1B together. All of these visual responses are predicted to receive visual effects which are either the same as put forward under the previously

consented scheme or which are reduced as a result of the design revisions set out in the revised proposals.

Whilst the predicted visual effects associated with the revised proposals for the development either remain the same or are reduced across the full range of visual receptors, there is additional opportunity for screening and visual mitigation that were not possible within the previously proposed scheme owing to larger volume of trees and the green walls included within the site design.

There is a clear opportunity for improving the ecological and landscape value of the hedgerow boundaries and associated trees via the application of up to date urban forestry techniques that can help to ensure the wellbeing of the newly planted stocks. It is possible to mitigate unpredictable and extreme weather events by channelling and collecting surface water run off into cisterns that can then be used to alleviate drought conditions. The predicted effects of climate change will make such resilience planning within landscaping schemes essential over the coming years.

There are a lot of trees surrounding the sit, but very few of any notable landscape value and none of individually noteworthy character. The landscape design should increase the amount and variety of trees within the locale using species that can future proof the design. A wide variety of non-native species are available that are well suited to the predicted changes in the urban climate over the next 100 or so years. There are comparatively few native species that have an assured future over that period, largely due to virulent diseases and vulnerability to voracious, prolific pests. By no means should the existing stock be felled in order to facilitate wholesale replanting. The scheme should allow for a sensitive success led transition, where the available gaps are planted in the first instance. Weak, damaged or trees with characteristics that are likely to result in future hazard such as low forks with included bark, should be thinned out in order to create additional planting spaces. The best character trees from the remainder should be remedially pruned in order to give them the best chance of recovering a superior form.

Overall, it is considered that the revised proposals are very similar to the previously consented scheme in terms of visual effects exerted upon the surrounding landscape. However, the effects upon the external views adjacent to and very near the site, as well as those within the interior of the site are markedly improved.

## Tree Report Update

### Background

During the winter of 2016/17, a full tree survey was carried out upon the entire of the proposed development site by Mark Harrison, Senior Arboricultural Consultant at CBA Trees. The survey report concluded that:

*All of the trees to be removed are of low quality with little future potential. The remaining trees are either not impacted by the development or can be protected from damage. A landscape design including replacement trees would mitigate the removals.*

*Since 2017, the site has been partially developed by the construction of the adjacent hotel, and the extent and scope of this update is reduced so that it now only pertains to the southern part of the site, Phase 1B, on the south side of Vendee Drive.*

*The proposed alterations to the layout of the previous scheme are primarily in response to changes in local demand for a more mixed-use development. However, the alterations bestow a number of other advantages such as additional public open space and access, improved sustainability and a more substantial opportunity to include ecologically and climate sensitive landscaping, including the addition of some high quality tree stock to improve the appearance of the local landscape and adjacent road corridor.*

*Although there have been three growing seasons since the original survey, the overall situation has not changed substantially in the interim. The quality of the individual trees identified within the survey remains predominantly poor with the same few specimens achieving fair quality. It also continues to be the case that, the majority of the trees on the site are of arboricultural / ecological value only and have limited landscape value.*

*There remain a small number of Ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) that due to their prominent location upon the roadside boundary have a degree of landscape value. However, the future of this entire species is currently severely threatened by the voracious Ash Die-Back disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and as such the longevity of these specimens cannot be assured. Forestry Commission data last updated on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019 shows that *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* has been recorded within local ash tree populations around Oxford and Bicester, starting from around 2017.*

*This review concurs with the findings of the previous survey and a visual examination finds that there has not been sufficient change upon the site to merit a full re-survey. Because the site has already been accurately mapped and no new stocks have been introduced over the intervening period, the best time to carry out any additional survey work would be in the mid to late-spring of 2020 when it will be possible to determine the presence and / or extent of Chalara Ash Die-Back Disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). As the disease has only been detected within the local Ash Tree population since the original 2016 survey, this is likely to be the most significant potential change to the overall condition of the existing trees upon the site.*

*It continues to be the case that, overall, the quality, condition and landscape value of the existing trees upon the site is mostly poor. Furthermore, there are no trees upon the site that are of such arboricultural, ecological, landscape or cultural value that they could not be removed and replaced with superior stocks as part of the development proposals. However,*

there are a few trees of intermediate quality and intermediate landscape value that it would be preferable to retain and incorporate within the revised scheme for the proposed development if possible. These are the same trees as identified previously by Mark Harrison during the original CBA survey.

The hedgerows contain a large number of trees that have been treated as bushes and shrubs and routinely flailed and pruned as such. These trees have not been identified individually, but treated as groups.

There is a tree belt of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees along the southern boundary of the site that were also treated as a large group of indistinct mass planting during the original survey. This roadside boundary planting is too dense and under-thinned, having never been revisited since the day it was planted. Many of the trees have been irreparably damaged by the ties and shelters that were intended to nurse and support them at the outset, only due to the fact that the aftercare of the planting has been so poor. As a landscape unit, the belt is of limited landscape value since it is enclosed by the local topography and adjacent to a closed off road that is seldom used. It may be possible to carry out a late thinning operation in order to remove any trees that are in terminal decline and pose a hazard, whilst also creating some lateral space to allow the strongest specimens to recover their form. However, this is by no means assured of success and is highly dependent upon the level of deformity, stresses and wind-loadings of the individual trees. The belt is too congested to carry out a meaningful detailed survey of the extents of the tree canopies. This failure of a generic roadside mix to be maintained demonstrates the need for a critically selected designed outcome with a specified schedule of care during the establishment phase and a long-term subsequent plan for the correct re-spacing in order to achieve a superior permanent landscape outcome.

There is ample opportunity for a much better planting scheme that can be superior to the existing stocks against all measures from landscape to ecological value. However, consideration needs to be given to the volume of the existing planting and the time that it will take for new stocks to attain a similar stature and volume. Advanced stocks may be part of the solution to this, however, very large stocks frequently experience a check in growth as a result of root disturbance, and often do not out-perform feathers or even whips over the longer term.

There are two stretches of boundary hedgerow that are denser due to better long-term management. They are more species diverse and are of improved landscape value due to the visual screening function that they perform. These sections of hedgerow are referred to as groups G2 and G5 in the tree survey.

The numbering of the survey trees and areas is sequential such that trees numbered from T1 to T15 are potentially going to be affected by the revised Phase 1B proposals. Trees numbered from T16 to T32 are upon the northern part of the site, Phase 1A, which is already developed and the proposed re-designed proposals will have no effect upon these trees.

Owing to the high density of trees and shrubs in some areas of hedgerow and scrub, the original survey dealt with areas of abundant, multi-stemmed or suckering growth as groups. As with the individual trees, the southern part of the site was surveyed first and as such the lower numbered groups, from G1 to G6, are those which may be affected by the revised proposals for the site. Groups G7 to G10 are no longer pertinent to the consideration of these development proposals.

*It is not considered that there has been sufficient change within the existing tree and hedgerow stocks upon the site for this re-application to require a full re-survey of the site. This revised and updated arboricultural statement is sufficient to interpret the minor changes that have occurred between Month, Year and Month, Year.*

*The original survey identified the following baseline:*

*There were 0 category A trees.*

*There were 8 category B trees (No.s T1, T4, T6, T7, T9, T13, T18, T29) plus groups G2, G4, G7, G8 and G10.*

*There were 24 category C type trees.*

*There was 1 U type tree requiring immediate attention due to the hazard that it posed.*

*Of the 8 category B trees identified in the survey, 1, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 13 are associated with this phase. T18 and T29 are upon the previously developed part of the site.*

*All of the trees upon the site are included within the site boundaries and there are no trees within the interior of the site itself.*

*Several of the larger trees upon the site (most notably the Ash trees) are self-set, and yet have performed better than the hedgerow stock plants that were deliberately planted. This is particularly the case where self-set ash trees have bolted through the hedgerows, which is a habit particular to the competition strategy of the species.*

*The future of native ash trees is uncertain with the sudden prevalence of Ash Die-Back Disease, (*Hymenoscyphus Fraxineus*), and as such the longevity of any stock of this species should be treated with some scepticism. There is a likelihood that in order to ensure the safety of pedestrians and the adjacent highway, any trees showing moderate signs of infection will need to be removed as a precautionary measure. Although in seasons that do not favour the infection, Ash trees have been observed to put on spurts of healthy growth and show some recovery, once infected there is generally a steady progression towards the death of the tree, even if this is not a straight decline and marked by erratic flushes of healthy regrowth.*

*All of the B category trees are native Ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with the single exception of T13, which is Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus Robur*). Notably, the Oak T13 is categorised as B1 and not B2, meaning that its function is predominantly arboricultural/ ecological rather than as a landscape asset. This acknowledges the importance of mature or semi-mature stocks within the hedgerows and canopies both for habitat and invertebrate food sources.*

*The original survey agrees with my general observation that although the majority of the trees and shrubs on the site are in poor to average condition, the overall landscape effect that they contribute is fair.*

*The report encapsulates this in several places as "Individuals are of low to average quality, categorised C, but provide high landscape value as a whole, hence B group category." This observation is repeated across the site in areas where hedgerow boundaries have remained dense and vigorous due to management.*

Hedgerow trees have been poorly managed in many places and simply lopped and flailed where they have become problematic for the adjacent road. This has caused wound sites that are often the seat of infection and decay.

## **Updated Development Proposals**

The proposed redevelopment will require the removal of three medium sized Ash Trees from within the boundary at the north west corner of the site, in order to create a gap in the site boundary to create a public access for pedestrians and cyclists.

The trees in question are two of landscape value and one of ecological value only. Due to the threat posed to the species as a whole by Ash Die-Back Disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), it is no longer possible to say that the trees can be expected to have a longevity of forty years or more. Since the trees are vulnerable to the infection which has been recorded locally, and because of the large percentage of ash trees upon the site, it is sensible to allow the removal of these three boundary trees and replace them with some high quality landscape stocks in suitable adjacent locations. This will diversify the species mix of trees upon the site and within the site boundary. As well as being under threat from fast-spreading disease with a very high mortality rate, Ash is a poor screening tree for a roadside location. It is the last of the native trees to come into leaf by a period of three or four weeks and its foliage, whilst attractively light and airy is seldom an effective, dense screen. Therefore, the landscape plan for the site proposes to replace these trees with a mixture of native trees and selected cultivars that will leave the site better prepared for the challenges of climate change and resultant ecological stresses. The revised site design allows for improvement of the existing hedgerow boundaries through reinvigoration and restocking to create larger, healthier and denser hedgerows around the site perimeter.

## **Tree Survey Summary**

The original survey correctly identified the species of all of the trees upon the site. These include a high proportion of ash, many of which are self-set trees that have established themselves within the hedgerow boundary.

The original survey correctly identified the quality of the tree stocks upon the site and found no trees of high quality (Category A). There were 8 trees of medium / fair quality (Category B) and of these 7 were Ash trees and one was found to be Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*). The majority of the remaining trees upon the site were of low quality (Category C), either as individual trees or as groups. There were 24 individual Category C trees found, comprised of few species, predominantly ash and oak. In addition, all of the trees with the groups G1 to G6 were of Category C, although the report notes that in several cases the total landscape effect is greater than the sum of its parts. From a landscape point of view, there are no trees that are of sufficient individual aesthetic merit that they cannot be removed, coppiced or replaced as part of the proposed re-development scheme. Because it is clear that the hedgerows and hedgerow trees are a landscape asset more than they are fine specimens, it is entirely possible to maintain and enhance the landscape asset with superior stocks as part of an improved planting and management plan.

Trees pose a range of hazards to cars from being simple obstacles to manoeuvring to roosting sites for birds. Honeydew secreted from insect pests can be a nuisance, as can the

fruits and seeds of the trees themselves. Car parks (and the traffic islands within them) are also quite stressful environments for the establishment of tree stocks, with impeded drainage, poor water retention during drought, baking surface temperatures and toxic run off including salts, oils and exhaust deposits. As a result, car parks incorporating trees seldom give rise to sizeable tree stocks, and species / cultivar choices are limited to a handful of tough but sterile miniature hybrids with limited ecological value. The alterations to the internal landscaping of the proposed site and the reduction of the car parking areas gives rise to a succession of much more inviting spaces with greatly improved prospects for the long-term health and success of the stocks themselves.

From a disease / future climate point of view, care should be taken to choose species that are suited to the harsh roadside environment, that are capable of with-standing periods of drought. There are very few native trees that are able to perform well under such challenging environmental and climatic variations. Therefore, a balanced species palette should be chosen that includes a range of native species, cultivars and robust (but not invasive) non-natives in order to give the overall landscape of trees the best chance to thrive, even where some individual species may struggle over the medium to long-term.

At this point, the original winter 2016-17 survey provides enough detailed data upon the existing tree stock on the site to enable the critical design decisions to be made. There is no need to re-survey at this time. The correct time to carry out a supplementary survey would be in April / May 2020 in order to ascertain the extent of infection of the Ash trees with *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* and upon the basis of this survey identify any trees for retention or replacement.

## Summary and Conclusions

*The landscape effects associated with the proposed development remain unchanged in terms of substance and amount. A small length of hedgerow will need to be removed in order to facilitate improved pedestrian and cycle network access. Three trees will also need to be felled within the same section in order to facilitate the access route. The trees are of intermediate landscape value and live under severe threat of disease. It is predicted that replacement trees in the adjacent hedgerow will have improved form and character, disease resistance and suitability over the self-set trees to be removed.*

*In terms of visual impact, it is considered that the revised proposals are very similar to the previously consented scheme in terms of visual effects exerted upon the surrounding landscape. However, the effects upon the external views adjacent to and very near the site, as well as those within the interior of the site are markedly improved.*

*The landscape design is an improvement upon the previously consented scheme because:*

- ◆ *The trees are larger, have more potential to grow to maturity without the need for restrictive pruning.*
- ◆ *The area for car parking has been significantly reduced whilst the area available for pedestrian and recreational uses has been greatly increased.*
- ◆ *The proposed landscape design includes a larger number of more mature trees and these subdivide the internal landscape of the site in a way that creates more visual interest than the highly regular car-park layout of the previous scheme.*
- ◆ *The planting of new standard trees, such as oak (*Quercus robur*) and other site native species, in keeping with the local Landscape Character, in order to provide future veteran boundary trees of the type that are prevalent in the locale but absent from the site.*

*The use of stainless steel climbing frames and wires will soften the external faces of the buildings and increase the appearance of green space and naturalness. The green walls will provide a natural backdrop to the tree avenues, and together the avenue and green wall features create an internal landscape that is dominated by natural elements rather than being limited by the rigid spaces between sheer building faces.*

*The outside spaces around the buildings are much more useable and inviting than around the building exteriors of the previous scheme.*

*The revised schema continues to provide for an impressive entrance avenue of trees on either side of Vendee Drive.*