

8.0 Landscape and Visual

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 This chapter considers landscape and visual matters in relation to the changes to the Proposed Development. The chapter been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design and should be read in conjunction with the Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), which was prepared by FPCR, and presented as Chapter 8 within the 2021 ES which remains extant unless superseded by the content of this addendum chapter. The purpose of the LVIA was to review landscape character and visual amenity, and to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development (i.e., that is presented by the application) on the receiving landscape receptors and visual receptors.

8.1.2 During the planning process comments have been received on the application. Cherwell District Council's Landscape Officer provided the following consultation response.

"LVIA: Comprehensive, and proportionate to the scale of the development proposed. I agree with the judgements set out in the narrative "...

"And the mitigation proposals advocated appear to be proportionate" (1st April 2022)

8.1.3 There has been no request by the Landscape Officer for any additional assessment work in relation to the LVIA.

8.1.4 All of the changes to the Proposed Development have been reviewed, and, in particular, this has included a review of the following specific changes that are considered to be of relevance – to varying degrees - to landscape and visual matters.

- 1) Minor increase to the corridor for the spine road through the site, to accommodate sufficient widths for the carriageway, pedestrian and cycle paths, landscaped verges and swales.
- 2) Allowance for the most up to date design of the SLR, which includes requisite pedestrian and cycle paths, landscaped verges and swales, as discussed and agreed with Oxfordshire County Council.
- 3) Further investigation and amendments to ensure sufficient landscape 'buffers' and offsets are provided to watercourses and hedgerows.
- 4) Relocation of allotments so that they are no longer adjacent to the Burial Ground.
- 5) Removal of a small parcel of residential development to the south of the SLR, northeast of Lords Farm, to provide additional open green space.

- 6) Reduction in the height of the proposed photovoltaic panels to 2.5m.
 - 7) Increase in size of employment area to 0.9ha (from 0.7ha)
- 8.1.5 Taking a proportionate approach, which is engrained within GLVIA3, it is considered that these minor changes do not warrant further assessment from a landscape and visual perspective as they are within the context of the overall parameters of the Proposed Development that has been assessed through the process of LVIA.
- 8.1.6 It is concluded that these minor changes do not change the judgments reached by the LVIA on the level of effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors. The assessment of significant environmental effects is therefore as reported in the 2021 ES.

8.2 Assessment Methodology

- 8.2.1 The FPCR assessment methodology reported within the 2021 ES was prepared using Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (2013, GLVIA3). GLVIA3 remains the latest best practice guidance for LVIAs. It is noted that since the 2021 ES, the Landscape Institute have produced the following Technical Guidance Note: Notes and Clarifications on Aspects of Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, (GLVIA3), August 2024. This supersedes all previous clarification documents and has been produced to interpret aspects of guidance provided in GLVIA3, and should be read alongside GLVIA3. Other than this Technical Guidance Note the assessment methodology reported within the 2021 ES remains up to date and should be referred to.

8.3 Relevant Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

- 8.3.1 Since the submission of the ES, the National Planning Policy Framework has been updated (NPPF Dec 2024). Paragraphs on landscape matters are not considered to be materially different to the previous NPPF considered in the 2021 ES, as the NPPF still seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment.
- 8.3.2 The NPPF sets out Government planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identifies quality in the development plan)*
- b) Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from the natural capital and ecosystem services- including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland: (§ 187)*

"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environment or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries." (§ 188)

Planning Practice Guidance

- 8.3.3 There have been no changes to landscape matters (i.e. conservation and enhancement) since the submission of the application and Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721, Revision date: 21 07 2019, continues to apply.

Emerging Local Plan

Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042

- 8.3.4 Cherwell District Council (CDC) is preparing a new Local Plan. The consultation (Regulation 19) on the draft of the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042 was held between 19th December 2024 and 25th February 2025. The Submission Local Plan was approved by CDC Executive on 1 July 2025 and by Full Council on 21 July 2025, and was submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for independent examination, on 31 July 2025. Officers prepared a Schedule of Proposed Changes and Minor Modifications which they consider would improve and update the draft plan in view of the representations received and updated

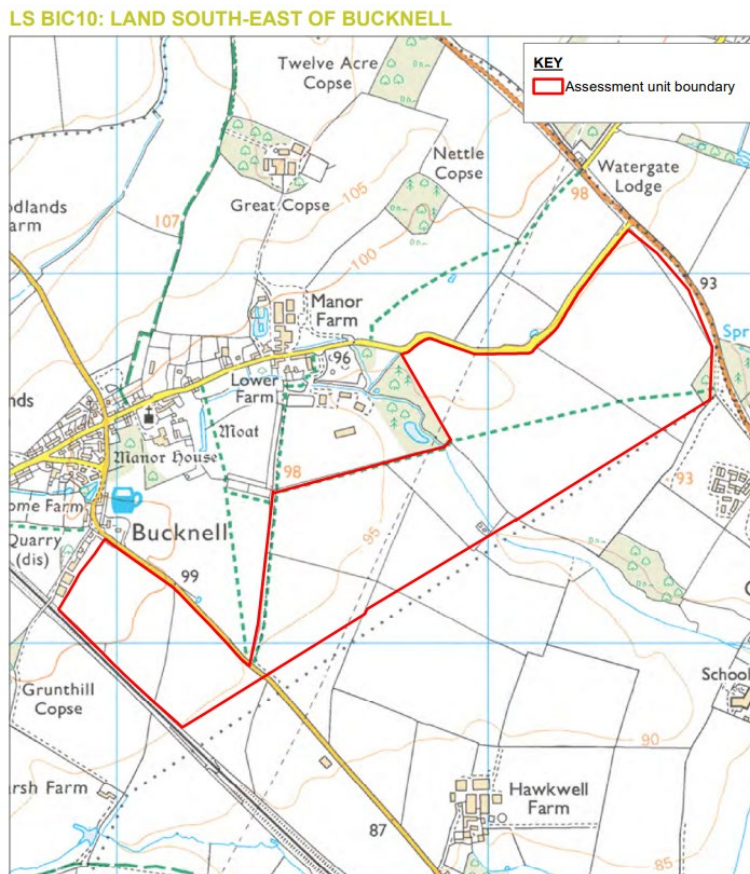
evidence. These will be submitted for consideration by the Inspector at the examination and if appropriate may form the basis for future Main Modifications to the Submission Local Plan as recommended by the Inspector in order to make the plan sound and/or legally compliant. As such, at this time, only limited weight can be attributed to the emerging Local Plan as a material planning consideration.

Local Guidance Evidence Base (updates since 2011)

- 8.3.5 The Council's 'Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy, GBI (November 2022). And 'A Greener Cherwell, June 2023' provide guidance on green infrastructure matters. The former document includes 'Strategic Projects for Bicester's GBI', which in the context of the site comprises the River Bure Green Corridor which forms part of the 'Strategic Project 3: Bicester Green Corridors' (Figure 5.15, Bicester Focus Map). Although both of these documents were published after the submission of the application, the masterplanning approach delivers a comprehensive green and blue framework in line with the principles within these documents. Specific to the Strategic Projects for Bicester's GBI', the development includes a green corridor of natural green space and areas of habitat creation along the River Brue, which crosses the eastern part of the site.

Cherwell Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (September 2022)

- 8.3.6 The evidence base document, Cherwell Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2022), provides an assessment of several land parcels across the district, to include areas around Bicester. The report provides landscape sensitivity ratings for various development scenarios based upon a five-point scale from 'low to high'.
- 8.3.7 Land parcel 'BIC10 Land south east of Bucknell' covers the western part of the site (see below extract taken from the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment). This lies outside of the immediate landscape around Bucknell and covers the northern and western parts of the application. Only 2-3 hectares of this area is being proposed for built development.



8.3.8 The report acknowledges the North East Bicester allocation and the planning application. It states that:

"The central part of the of the assessment unit is proposed for residential development and green infrastructure, the north-eastern part for ground-mounted solar photovoltaics and the western part as a burial ground as part of outline application 21/04275/OUT (to be determined)."

8.3.9 The report considers six topics and provides a sensitivity rating for each. For "Physical Character; Natural Character; Cultural and Historic Associations; Views and Visual Character" the report concludes that these are all "Low-Moderate" landscape sensitivity. For the remaining topics of "Perceptual & Scenic Qualities; and Settlement Form & Edge" the report concludes these to be "Moderate" sensitivity.

8.3.10 Under the topic of "settlement edge and form", the report concludes that:

"The existing settlement edge of Bucknell is well-integrated into the landscape through tree and woodland planting. In the context of the North-West Bicester Eco-Town allocation the assessment unit provides a separation role between Bicester and Bucknell."

8.3.11 In terms of landscape sensitivity it concludes that:

"The assessment unit has moderate sensitivity for residential¹...The sensitivity to formal recreation² is moderate...Sensitivity to informal recreation³ is low and this could be accommodated within the existing field pattern".

8.3.12 When considering "Views and Visual Character", the report states that:

"The assessment unit has a semi-enclosed character because of existing boundary tree belts and hedgerows. Visibility is generally confined to views along existing agricultural access points and Public Rights of Way which pass through the assessment unit".

8.3.13 The report states that this land parcel is of "low" landscape value.

8.3.14 The report provides 'Guidance and Recommendations' for development. It states that:

"Any new development should:

- Retain the pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees forming enclosure to fields.*
- Retain the sense of separation between settlements to protect their distinct identities.*
- Plan for successful integration of development in the landscape through sensitive design and siting, including use of appropriate materials and landscape mitigation in keeping with landscape character.*
- Consider enhancing the railway line as a wildlife corridor, providing ecological connectivity to Bicester and surroundings."*

8.3.15 Whilst this guidance was published after the application submission, it is considered that the Proposed Development responds positively and proactively to the above guidance as part of its masterplanning approach and its green infrastructure strategy. This includes, for example, retaining the site's hedgerows and trees within green corridors and spaces, and expands upon these features with extensive areas of green infrastructure within and around the site. This includes a new Community Park within the western part of the site between the proposed built development and Bucknell.

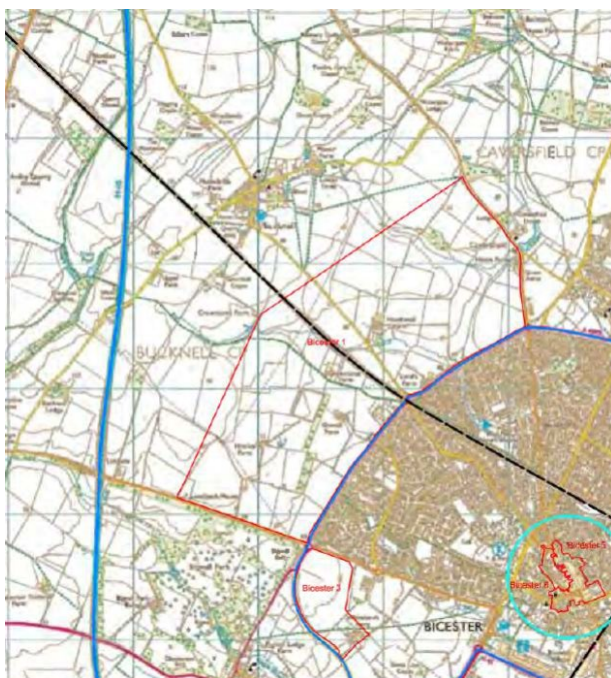
¹Defined by the report as "Residential development includes dwellings of up to 3 storeys with associated access and infrastructure, including lighting and public open space, at a density of no less than 30 dwellings per hectare (dph)".

² Defined by the report as "Formal open space means sports pitches and courts including land remodelling, associated car parking, club house facilities and flood lighting"

³ Defined by the report as "Informal open space includes areas of public open space, similar in nature to a country park, accessible on foot and with limited car parking provision"

Bicester Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Assessment (September 2013, WYG)

8.3.16 This considers North West Bicester, and other sites around Bicester, based upon their landscape sensitivity and their capacity to accommodate development (residential, employment, recreation and woodland). The application lies within part of Bicester 1, which covers the North West Bicester allocation in the adopted Local Plan. (see below extract taken from the report).



8.3.17 In summary, the report concludes that:

*"The combined landscape sensitivity of the site is considered to be medium" and that
"There is a medium – high capacity for residential development within the site area as the land use would be in keeping with the adjacent residential area to the south east and not significantly alter the overall landscape character of the wider area"*

Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment (September 2024, LUC)

8.3.18 This is an updated report to replace the earlier Cherwell District Landscape Character Assessment (1995). The wider landscape to the north and west of Bicester lies within the extensive Character Area of "LCA-7 Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands". The report describes the landscape characteristic of this area and considers valued qualities and forces for change. In its Landscape Strategy and Guidance, it states the following:

- *"Preserve the tranquillity and strong rural character of locations remote from transport infrastructure and urban edges.*

- *Retain the traditional character of the area's villages.*
- *Woodland cover should continue to provide a strong sense of enclosure, and contribution to parkland character and ecological value within an otherwise arable landscape."*

8.4 Baseline Conditions

- 8.4.1 The baseline conditions assessed in 2021 have been reviewed. An updated site visit was undertaken in November 2023. Other than the continuation of built development at Elmsbrook, to the north east, there have been no substantive changes to the baseline conditions across the site and the immediate area.

8.5 Potential Effects

Construction stage

- 8.5.2 The potential effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors as concluded and reported within the 2021 ES remain as reported therein.

Post-completion stage

- 8.5.3 The post completion stage level of effects for landscape receptors and visual receptors as concluded and reported within the 2021 ES remain a reported therein.

8.6 Mitigation Measures

Construction stage

- 8.6.1 The mitigation measures for the construction stage, as concluded and reported within the 2021 ES, remain as reported therein.

Operational on completion of the development (year 1) and in the longer term (15 years after completion), Post Completion stage

- 8.6.2 The mitigation measures for the operational and post completion stage, as concluded and reported within the 2021 ES, remain as reported therein.

8.7 Residual Effects

Construction stage

- 8.7.1 No changes to any of the constructional effects identified in the 2021 application has been identified. The residual effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors remain as concluded within the 2021 ES.

Operational on completion of the development (year 1) and in the longer term (15 years after completion), Post Completion stage

Operation & post-completion stage

- 8.7.2 No changes to any of the operational effects identified in the 2021 application has been identified. The residual effects on landscape receptors and visual receptors remain as concluded within the 2021 ES.

8.8 Cumulative Effects

8.8.1 No changes to the cumulative effects have been identified and hence no change to the assessment in the 2021 ES is reported.