

Landscape and visual technical note

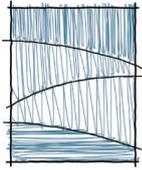
Land off Hook Norton Road, Sibford Ferris

Introduction

- 1.1. Leyton Place Limited (LPL) has been instructed by Blue Cedar Homes Limited (BCH) to consider the landscape and visual effects of its proposals for six bungalows within the land off Hook Norton Road, Sibford Ferris (the site).
- 1.2. This technical note has been prepared in the context of the following publications and in light of the material prepared in respect of site to the south, which was allowed on appeal in 2019¹.
 - Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, LI and IEMA, 2013
 - (GLVIA 3).
 - European Landscape Convention – A Framework for Implementation, October 2007
 - An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (AALCA), October 2014.
- 1.3. GLVIA 3, paragraphs 1.17, 3.16, 6.2 and 6.21 emphasises that the assessment of landscape and visual effects (the scale of the investigation) should be proportionate and appropriate to the project.
- 1.4. In respect of the BCH application, the relevant landscape character, appearance, value, and views have been the subject of extensive scrutiny by the council and the planning inspectorate, with development of a relatively larger-scale² ultimately being consented for the construction of new housing and open space.
- 1.5. Having reviewed the relevant documentation, this technical note is appropriate and proportional to the scale of the proposals.
- 1.6. Notably alongside the construction of 25 new homes, the scheme to the south incorporates substantial new tree planting within the open space west of the new housing. This is relevant to the BCH application as the new tree planting will, over time, filter views from the south and enable visual integration of the new housing with the settlement edge.

¹ OD Parcel 4300 North of Shortlands and south of High Rock, Hook Norton Road, Sibford Ferris, OX15 5QW – appeal Ref APP/C3105/W/19/3229631, application reference 18/1894/OUT.

² Up to 25 new homes and open space.

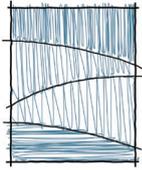


1.7. To determine the scope of this technical report the following text taken from the 2019 appeal decision, is noted in respect of the general landscape context.

“24. Sibford Ferris is a linear village extending northwards along Hook Norton Road before turning east above the Sib valley. The village’s linear character means that its rural landscape prevails with the village being a subservient element. For example, the well treed Sib valley restricts views between the Sibfords reducing the impacts of the settlement pattern on landscape. Over the last 20 years new housing has been integrated into the existing settlement pattern in a sensitive way.

25. The appeal site’s boundaries are formed by hedges on each side apart from the southern edge which is open to the remainder of the arable field. The site sits on top of a broad ridge above the Sib valley and further away, to the south the Stour valley. When viewed from the south and west across both valleys the appeal site appears as an extension to arable fields. The line of trees on the western edge of the Sibford School is a critical boundary to the edge of the settlement. The site has no statutory or non-statutory landscape designations...

...28. Although the site lies outside the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) its landscape context is shaped by this. Furthermore, the site lies in Character Area 13 of the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study defined as an area of ‘Rolling Village



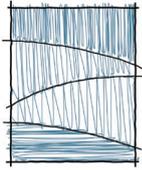
Pastures' and close to another landscape type, 'Wooded Pasture Valleys and Slopes'. The nature of this rolling landscape interspersed with hedgerows and copses means that views into the site from its immediate boundaries are limited compared to those from further away. For example, the proposed area of housing would be difficult to see from Woodway Road due to the slope the land and height of the hedge." (Inspector Wilkinson, APP/C3105/W/19/3229631)

Landscape character

- 1.8. The BCH site comprises a single small field, bounded to the north, east and south by houses and domestic gardens. The field is contained within a well-managed series of hedgerows, with notable mature trees on the southern and western boundaries.
- 1.9. The land falls from the south eastern corner to the north west and occupies a landform below the existing and now consented settlement edge.
- 1.10. Within the council's published landscape character assessment, Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS), the site is located within the 'Rolling Valley Pastures' landscape type.
- 1.11. The key characteristics of the 'Rolling Valley Pastures' landscape type are identified as being:
 - A strongly undulating landform of rounded hills and small valleys.
Small to medium-sized fields with mixed land uses, but predominantly pasture.
 - Densely scattered hedgerow trees.
 - Well defined nucleated villages with little dispersal into the wider countryside.
- 1.12. The lower-lying location (relative to the existing settlement) and naturally undulating landform, context coupled with the domestic gardens, agricultural field boundaries and new scheme of landscape measures to the south, results in a physically and visually contained parcel of land which has a relationship to Sibford Ferris and lies at the transition to the open agricultural land to the west.
- 1.13. OWLS identifies a number of landscape strategy guidelines for the character type. Guidelines considered to be of relevance to the site include:
 - Strengthen the field pattern by planting up existing gappy hedges and replacing fences using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
 - Promote environmentally-sensitive maintenance of hedgerows, including coppicing and layering, when necessary, to maintain a height and width appropriate to the landscape type.
 - Contain the size of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that are appropriate to this landscape type.
 - Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak, ash and field maple.

Landscape value

- 1.14. As accepted by Inspector Wilkinson the site lies within the setting of the Cotswolds AONB. Paragraph 176 of the NPPF (July 2021) states:



Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads

*The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while **development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.** (Emphasis emboldened)*

- 1.15. The landscape itself does not meet the statutory criteria to merit its inclusion within this national designation, its role in the setting of the AONB gives it a higher degree of value than general open countryside in this location.
- 1.16. In the context of this paragraph and considering Inspector Wilkinson's appeal decision it is apparent that development of the appeal site is sensitively located to minimise impacts on the AONB, benefitting as it does from the presence of the existing and consented housing.
- 1.17. Paragraph 174 (a) and (b) of the NPPF are relevant in so far as the consideration of character and beauty and the value, commensurate with the development plan status.

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

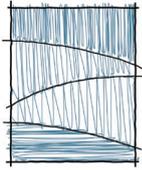
a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland..."

- 1.18. Notably, in respect of the land immediately south of the site, neither in the Council's officer response, committee report or inspector's decision letter no objection is raised in respect of its 'value'.
- 1.19. This technical note proceeds on the basis that NPPF 176 (a) is not an issue for the consideration of the BCH scheme proposals.

View and visual context

- 1.20. Clearly with the construction of the new properties to the south of the site, and the fact that the BCH dwellings are single storey, the area from which the new housing will be visible from, will be over a small geographic area (see **Plan 1**). Furthermore, the extent of visibility will be reduced with the maturation of the new tree and shrub planting to the south.
- 1.21. The locations from which the BCH proposals will be evident in the view are restricted to:



- Those properties and gardens immediately to the north and east which back on to the application site
- A short section of Woodway Road

Consequence of the Blue Cedar Homes proposals

1.22. The scheme proposals have been developed to minimise the landscape and visual effects by incorporating the following features:

- Single storey dwellings
- Locating the development contiguous with the existing settlement edge
- Containing the development within the existing field pattern, retaining the boundary vegetation
- Setting the housing back from the western boundary, maintaining the open setting to Woodway Road
- Provision of landscaped gardens, incorporating new trees within the undeveloped area west of the housing.

Landscape

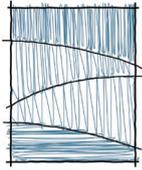
1.23. Recognising the landscape measures contained in the published landscape character area guidelines, the proposals will:

- Reinforce the boundary hedgerows using locally characteristic species such as hawthorn and hedgerow trees such as oak and ash.
- Represent a small extension to the settlement, ensuring containment of the pattern and grain of Sibford Ferris and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that are appropriate to this landscape type.
- Incorporate small-scale planting of deciduous tree groups using locally characteristic species such as oak, ash and field maple.

1.24. The introduction of residential development into the site will not introduce new or incongruent features that are not already components within the local landscape. The application site itself is located immediately adjacent to existing settlement edge and as such, the proposals will be appreciated and perceived within this context. It is considered that alongside the landscaped area the development will be well integrated into the settlement edge and respect the landscape character.

1.25. The BCH application is of a smaller scale than the consented development to the south. In respect of that scheme, Inspector Wilkinson recorded:

“Having visited several of the receptor points and considered the views included in both reports in detail I conclude that potentially the two most sensitive receptor points are from the west from the Cotswolds AONB and from the south. From the former I consider that the integrity of the landscape would not be compromised by this development. This is in part because within the appeal site the dwellings would be set close to existing housing and only marginally extend the pattern of development to just south of Margaret Lane House which forms part of the Sibford School. Furthermore, the line of trees along the boundary of



the Sibford School along Hook Norton Road would still be the dominant landscape feature when the site is viewed from the west. For these reasons I consider that the proposals would not have an 'urbanising effect' on the site and its surroundings as the Council have stated." (Emphasis)

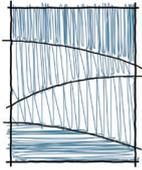
- 1.26. It is considered that the BCH scheme will have similar, albeit smaller effects and will not affect the integrity of the landscape character or urbanise the site and the surroundings. The proposals will not adversely impact on the setting of the Cotswold AONB.

Views

- 1.27. The limited visual envelope of the BCH site means that the locations from which the proposals will be visible is highly localised. The existing vegetation on the site boundaries, the new tree planting to the south and the properties to the east and north provide significant containment.
- 1.28. Views from within the AONB to the west, are currently characterised by the rolling agricultural which dominates the foreground and scattered dwellings set in a dense wooded context on the elevated land rising to the skyline. The BCH will become a component of the view but will be indistinct in the overall composition.
- 1.29. From Woodway Road changes to the view will be seen against the backdrop of the existing settlement edge, whilst the dwellings will be closer in the view, they will not change the overall character and composition of the visual experience.
- 1.30. Overall, the integrity of the landscape character is not compromised by the proposals. The scale and nature of the proposals ensure that visual impacts are reduced. Mitigation will be provided in respect of the open western portion of the site.

Conclusions

- 1.31. The proposed development is located to avoid impacts on landscapes and townscape elements which have a recognised value, such as:
- Those landscapes which benefit from a statutory protection such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their setting.
 - Areas protected by a regional or local designations such as Areas of Great Landscape Value.
 - Not within or near a Registered Historic Parks and Gardens;
 - Not within or adjacent to a Conservation Area;
- 1.32. Furthermore, the landscape associated with the site has been examined at appeal and was not determined to be an NPPF 'valued landscape'
- 1.33. Given the settled context and wooded character of the wider area potential visual effects are limited to a localised area, primarily the immediate environs to the east of the site.
- 1.34. The scheme has been informed by comprehensive, and detailed technical analysis across a range of disciplines. The team's collaborative design approach has responded positively to the environmental requirements.

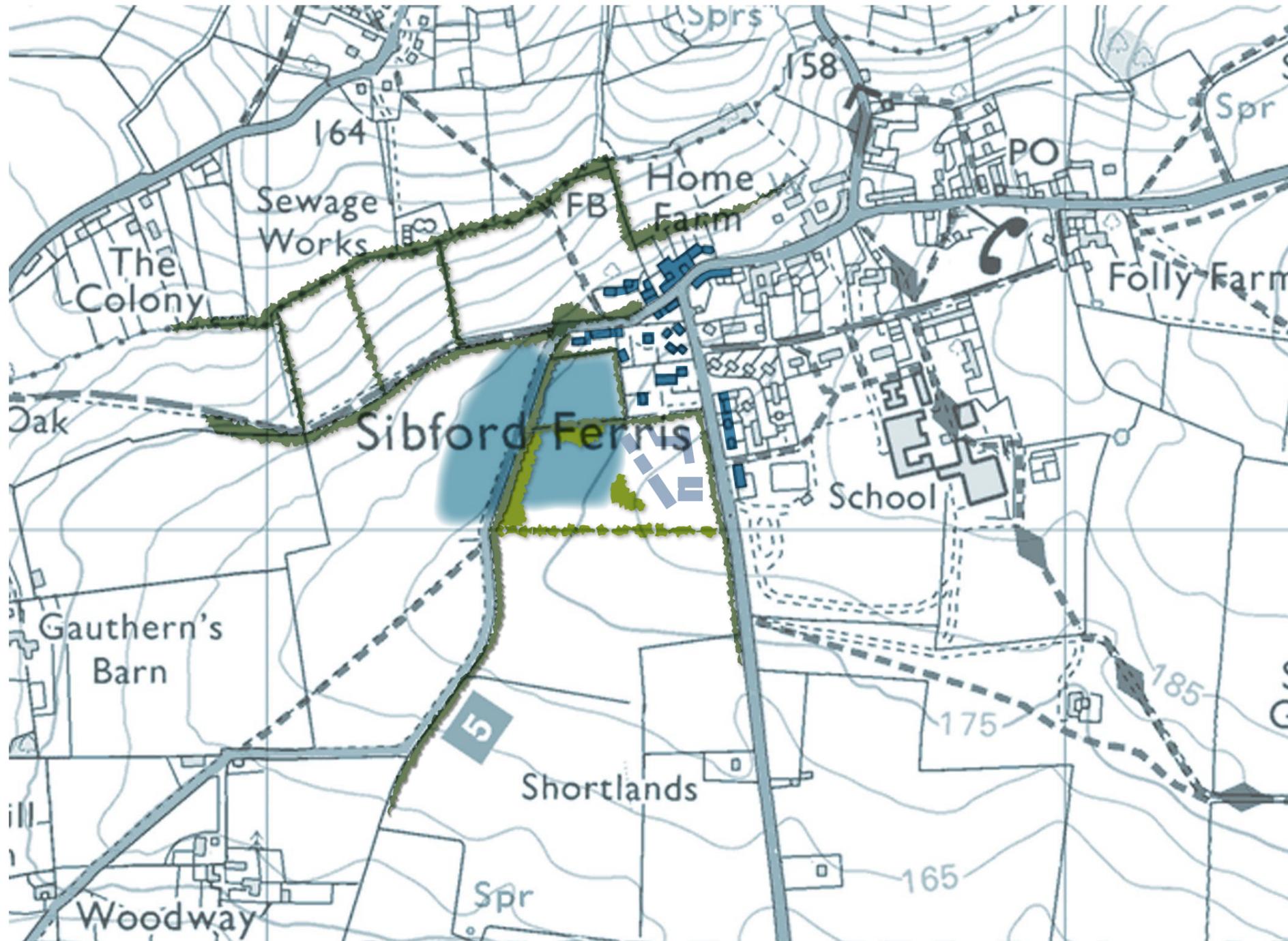


- 1.35. The proposals have sought to minimise the landscape and visual effects through the positioning of the new dwellings in close proximity to the existing properties, and providing single storey dwellings. Landscape open space to the west will enable a feathering of the settlement edge on its boundary with the open countryside.

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22nd November 2021

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Features Limiting Views

-  Existing Vegetation
-  Proposed Tree Planting
-  Existing Built Form
-  Proposed Built Form
-  Visual Envelope

