

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Land at Appleton

December 2014



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1.0 Introduction

LDA Design was appointed by planning consultants McLoughlin Planning to undertake a landscape appraisal of approximately 4ha of land (the site) to the north west of Appleton, Oxfordshire to support representations to the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 Publication Version November 2014.

The site has been subject to previous representations by McLoughlin Planning on behalf of the landowner the Gow family (September 2014) which set out the planning case for release of the site from the Green Belt and the overall suitability of the site as a location of residential development meeting local housing needs.

1.1. Purpose of this report

This report considers the landscape character and visual context of the site to determine if there are any significant constraints that would preclude or significantly limit the development potential of the site. It considers in addition, the conclusions of the Council's own studies regarding the importance of the Green Belt around Appleton and specifically, the potential of the site for Green Belt release.

The report is informed by the following:

- Desk based studies of published information in relation to landscape and heritage considerations;
- A landscape survey of the site to confirm the current land uses and the extent of tree and hedgerow vegetation;
- A preliminary visual appraisal of the site including consideration of potential views from a range of receptors.

The location and extent of the site considered by this report is illustrated on Figure 1. This includes land within the ownership of the Gow family excluding the existing farm buildings directly north of the Site which will be retained.

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2.0 The existing Site and its context

Reference should be made to Figure 1: Site Location and Aerial View as well as to Figure 2: Site Photos.

2.1. Site Location

The Site lies at the north western edge of the village of Appleton, within the district of the Vale of the White Horse. Surrounding settlements are Eaton and Cumnor to the north, Northmoor to the west, and Bessels Leigh and Henwood to the east. To the south, large plantations and woodlands such as Tubney Wood, Collier's Copse and Appleton Common cover large areas in the local landscape. The A420 runs to the east of the site in a north-south direction.

2.2. Description of the Site

The Site comprises two fields, one is an approximately 3.3 ha large field in arable use and the second is an approximately 0.7ha smaller field that is currently rough grassland and/or used as spoil site, and lies directly to the south of the farm buildings and barns (see Photo A on Figure 2).

There is also a stand of 5 coniferous trees located within the smaller field along the southern boundary.

Vehicular access to the Site is gained via a field gate off Eaton Road which leads to a car parking area in front of the farm buildings and barns. A track from the car parking area then leads to the smaller field and serves access to the Site (see Photo C on Figure 2). A second access is located off Eaton Road in the south eastern corner of the field (see Photo B on Figure 2).

A third field gate is located in the south western corner of the larger field connecting to the neighbouring field (see Photo D on Figure 2).

The Site is well enclosed by mature native hedgerows to the eastern, southern and western boundaries. The northern boundary of the Site consists of a fence line separating the fields from the farm curtilage (see Photo A on Figure 2).

The clipped hedgerow along the eastern boundary with Eaton Road is approximately 1.7m high and contains occasional individual trees (see Photo E on Figure 2). The southern boundary is an approximately 3 to 5m high hedgerow with trees that also forms the boundary to the rear garden and front drive of a private property along Eaton Road (see Photo F and B Figure 2). The western boundary is again an approximately 3 to 5m high hedge with occasional trees. There is also a small woodland copse directly adjacent to the western field boundary (see Photo G on Figure 2).

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3.0 Landscape and Heritage Considerations

3.1. Landscape Designations and Policies

Landscape designations relevant to the Site have been considered against the saved Policies set out in the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan (adopted July 2006)¹ and the Draft Adopted Policies Map of the Local Plan 2031² (November 2014).

3.2. Green Belt

The Site is located within the Oxford Green Belt. A review of the Green Belt was undertaken on behalf of the Council in 2014 the conclusions of which are set out within the Vale of White Horse, Green Belt Review report (February 2014)³. The principal purpose of the Green Belt review was to assess the extent to which land within the Vale of White Horse administrative area met the five purposes of the Green Belt as stated in paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The village of Appleton is included in a Study Area and Land Parcel 3 (Farmoor and Eaton) as illustrated on Figure 1 (page 18) of the Green Belt Review. The edge of settlement analysis for Area 3C (edge of Appleton, Eaton Road) concludes that very small scale development within the confines of the woodland and vegetation boundaries on the edge of the village which did not extend the settlement footprint might be possible without harm to the Green Belt. The report notes in Table 4 (page 49f) that the land to the north west of Appleton including the Site is contained by barns and the westerly extent of the existing village. It recommends a further review of the village edge at Appleton the conclusions of which are set out in the Green Belt Review Phase 3 Report⁴.

The Phase 3 report considers and recommends “*alterations to the boundaries of the Green Belt in those areas that are not considered, in light of the tests set out in the Phase 2 report, to meet the purposes of the Green Belt.*” The Site is identified within the Phase 3 report as an area of land recommended for release from the Green Belt with the area proposed for inclusion within the inset boundary of the settlement.

3.3. North Vale Corallian Ridge

The Site lies within an area of land identified on the Draft Adopted Policies Map of the Local Plan 2031⁵ and by saved Policy NE7 as the North Vale Corallian Ridge. The North Corallian Ridge covers an extensive area of the district and stretches across the most northern area of the Local Plan in an east-west band from Faringdon to Abingdon.

¹ Vale of White Horse District Council (2006): The Vale of the White Horse Local Plan 2011. July 2006.

² Vale of White Horse District Council (2014): Local Plan 2031. Draft Adopted Policies Map. Abingdon on Thames and Oxford Sub Area. November 2014

³ Vale of White Horse District Council (2014): Green Belt Review. Final Phase 2 Report. February 2014. Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd. / Terra Firma Consultancy.

⁴ Vale of White Horse District Council (2014): Green Belt Review. Phase 3 Report: Amendments to boundaries of the Green Belt around inset villages and new inset village at Farmoor. November 2014. Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd.

⁵ Vale of White Horse District Council (2014): Local Plan 2031. Draft Adopted Policies Map. Abingdon on Thames and Oxford Sub Area. November 2014

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The North Vale Corallian Ridge is described as

“The water meadows of the River Thames above Oxford, along with the east west ridge of high ground between Wytham and Buscot, constitute a distinct northern landscape zone. Most of the woodlands in the Local Plan area are to be found in this zone, including a considerable amount of ancient woodland. Country houses in parkland take advantage of fine views to north and south. On this ridge, formed of corallian limestone, the local coral rag has been widely used as a building material for houses, barns and walls.”

The Local Plan 2011 further makes reference to the Planning Advisory Notes⁶ that contain more detailed description of the Thames Valley and Corallian Ridge along with design guidance for new residential developments.

Policy NE7 aims to protect the visual qualities and character of this landscape and states that:

“Development which would harm the prevailing character and appearance of the North Vale Corallian Ridge, as shown on the Proposals Map, will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need for the development and all steps will be taken to minimise the impact on the landscape.”

Development within the Site given its limited scale, location and context would have no significant effect on the prevailing character and appearance of the North Vale Corallian Ridge. The scale, height, massing and layout, as well as the choice of materials of any proposed development within the Site could be satisfactorily addressed through a future planning application in consultation with the Council to ensure development would be in keeping with the character of the local landscape and the village of Appleton.

Furthermore, the introduction of new planting such as native woodland and hedgerows that are typical to the local landscape as part of a development strategy for the Site would provide the opportunity to strengthen and enhance the local landscape character, adding to the qualities of the landscape character area (also see section 3.2 Landscape Character).

3.4. Local Plan 2031

The Local Plan 2031, Part 1⁷ includes district wide policies with regards to landscape.

Core Policy 44 is aimed at the “*protection of key features that contribute to the nature and quality of the Vale of White Horse District’s landscape from harmful development and where possible enhanced*”. Key features include:

- *“features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies*
- *important landscape settings of settlements*
- *topographical features*
- *areas or features of cultural and historic value*
- *important views and visually sensitive skylines, and*

⁶ Vale of White Horse District Council (2006): Planning Advisory Notes. Adopted 20 July 2006.

⁷ Vale of White Horse District Council (2014): Local Plan 2031. Part 1 Strategic Sites and Policies. November 2014.

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- *tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.*"

The policy further states that:

"Where development is acceptable in principle, measures will be sought to integrate it into the landscape character and/or the townscape of the area. Proposals will need to demonstrate how they have responded to the above aspects of landscape character and will be expected to:

- *incorporate appropriate landscape proposals that reflect the character of the area through appropriate design and management;*
- *preserve and promote local distinctiveness and diversity and, where practical, enhance damaged landscape areas."*

The Local Plan 2031 makes reference to several landscape studies that will be referred to when applying Core Policy 44. These include Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) (see section below on Landscape Character), Vale of White Horse Landscape Strategy 2006, and Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation, as well as the Council's Design Guide SPD.

3.5. Landscape Character

Reference should be made to Figure 3.

The Site lies within the landscape type of 'Rolling Farmland' as defined within the Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS)⁸. This landscape is characterised by a *"prominent rolling landform and distant views from hillsides and across the surrounding low-lying vale. It is associated with large open arable fields and localised blocks of ancient woodland"* (OWLS).

Further key characteristics are:

- *"Prominent rolling landform.*
- *Large, geometric arable fields enclosed by a weak hedgerow pattern.*
- *Thinly distributed hedgerow trees.*
- *Locally prominent blocks of ancient woodland.*
- *Small to medium-sized villages."*

Within this landscape character type, there are several sub-divisions of local landscape character areas (LCA). The Site lies within LCA E Appleton and is described as follows:

"The area is dominated by large, geometric arable fields and some large fields of improved grassland. They are enclosed by hawthorn and elm hedges. Towards the north, where the land slopes steeply into the Upper Thames Vale, some of the fields with semi-improved grassland are bounded by small blocks of ancient woodland and overgrown hedges. Hedgerow trees of oak, ash and dead elm are thinly scattered throughout the area, and where hedges have been removed they are the only structural elements remaining in the landscape. They are denser along parish boundaries. Discrete large blocks of ancient woodland, such as Pusey Common Woodland and Appleton Upper Common, are locally

⁸ Oxfordshire County Council: Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study (OWLS), <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/>

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prominent. Significant parts of these woods have been planted with conifers. Occasionally, small deciduous and mixed plantations add structure to an otherwise open landscape. There is also a dense corridor of willows and some oak bordering the stream at the eastern boundary of the area. The field pattern is generally in a poor condition, with hedges frequently low, fragmented and in many places removed altogether. This results in a large-scale, open landscape with views which are confined locally by the large woods and rolling landform". (OWLS)

Guidelines given for enhancing and restoring landscape character in this area are as follows:

- *“Strengthen the field pattern by planting up gappy hedges 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.*
- *Enhance and strengthen the character of tree-lined watercourses by planting willows and ash and where appropriate, pollarding willows.*
- *Promote the sustainable management of existing ancient semi-natural woodland to safeguard its long-term survival.*
- *Promote small-scale planting of deciduous woodland blocks using locally characteristic species such as oak and ash.*
- *Conserve the surviving areas of permanent pasture and promote arable reversion to grassland, particularly on land adjacent to watercourses.*
- *Minimise the visual impact of intrusive land uses with the judicious planting of tree and shrub species characteristic of the area. This will help to screen the development and integrate it more successfully with its surrounding countryside.*
- *Maintain the nucleated pattern of settlements and promote the use of building materials and a scale of development and that is appropriate to this landscape type. This includes limestone or limestone and bricks and clay roof tiles in the Midvale Ridge, and red bricks and clay tiles in the Vale of White Horse and North Wessex Downs.” (OWLS)*

The Site and its immediate surroundings display typical features that are characteristic to the local landscape, such as intact native hedgerows and small clumps of deciduous woodland.

Development within the Site given its limited scale, location and context would have no significant effect on the prevailing character and appearance of the Rolling Farmland landscape type or the LCA E Appleton. The scale, height, massing and layout, as well as the choice of materials of any proposed development within the Site could be satisfactorily addressed through a future planning application in consultation with the Council to ensure development be in keeping with the character of the local landscape and the village of Appleton.

Development within the Site provides the opportunity to enhance the local landscape character by further strengthening the field boundaries and by structural planting and tree planting within the Site which would screen and integrate development within the local landscape reflecting the relevant priorities set out in the Landscape Character Guidelines.

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3.6. Ancient Woodland

Ancient woodlands are a characteristic feature within the local landscape (see section above). There is no ancient woodland within the Site. The nearest ancient woodland is Hengrove Wood located approximately 100m to the north of the Site. Further ancient woodlands in the locality are Collier's Copse to the east, and Holt Copse to the south.

Development within the site would not result in the loss of any Ancient Woodland or adversely affect Hengrove wood which would be retained.

3.7. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

There are no Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas within the Site.

The nearest heritage assets are located within Appleton village and comprise a number of Listed Buildings and a Conservation Area as illustrated on Figure 4: Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

The setting of any listed buildings and the setting of the Conservation Area will not be adversely affected by development within the Site due to the lack of inter-visibility between the Site and these heritage assets.

3.8. Public Rights of Ways Network

Reference should be made to Figure 5: Public Rights of Way.

There are no public rights of ways (PROWs) crossing the Site.

There is a network of local and national PROWs within the locality and in the vicinity of the Site, most notably these comprise:

- Thames Path National Trail, located approximately 700m to the west of the Site;
- Footpath no 5 connecting Eaton Road / Appleton Road at Hengrove House and near Hengrove Wood to the village of Eaton, located approximately 250m to the north of the Site;
- Footpath no. 4 connecting Appleton church yard to the Besselsleigh parish boundary, located approximately 400m to the south east of the Site;
- Bridleway no. 10 connecting Appleton village centre to the river banks of Northmoor Lock, located approximately 300m to the south of the Site.

The above listed footpaths or any other footpaths within the local area will not be directly affected by development within the Site. Existing views from PROWs may be partially affected by development within the Site and are considered further in Section 4.0.

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4.0 Visual Appraisal

A preliminary visual appraisal of the Site has been carried out with reference to OS mapping and aerial photography and through a site survey visit carried out in December 2014. The conclusions are presented below. Further and more detailed studies would be carried out to support a planning application subject to the Council's decision on release of the land from the Green Belt.

4.1. Site Context

The Site lies on a local plateau at the edge of the wide valley of the River Thames at an approximate elevation of 90 to 95m AOD. The site is enclosed to the east by existing residential development along Eaton Road in Appleton and partly to the south by Appleton village. Hengrove Wood affords a degree of enclosure to the north. Views out from the Site towards the west over the Thames Valley are generally open and extensive.

4.2. Views from settlement edges

Views from settlement edges towards the Site are limited to locations within Appleton village. There are no views toward the Site from the settlements of Eaton, Cumnor, Bessles Leigh or Northmoor.

Properties along Eaton Road and the isolated property at Hengrove are the only houses with views towards the Site (see View 1 on Figure 6). These views are interrupted and partially screened by the established hedgerow along Eaton Road. It should also be noted that the majority of the properties on Eaton Road with potential views to the Site are single storey. Most of the properties also have vegetation and hedgerows along the boundary of their front garden / front drive, which are sometimes over 2m high. These further limit views from private properties towards the Site.

4.3. Views from Public Rights of Ways

Views from Public Rights of Ways are limited to the local area and confined to footpath no. 5 near Hengrove Wood to the north of the Site. Views towards the Site are limited to short sections of the footpath and are otherwise screened by intervening landform or boundary vegetation (see View 2 on Figure 6). Where views to the Site exist, it should be noted, that the Site forms part of a much broader view and is not a prominent feature within the view.

There are no views from the bridleway no. 10 towards the Site. The bridleway is aligned by mature hedgerows with trees to both sides and is also slightly sunk so that views out are not possible. A rider on a horse may have views out and the Site may be visible. However, views will be intermittent and partially screened by other vegetation along field boundaries. Where views towards the Site are possible, the Site will not be a prominent feature as it forms part of a much wider view.

There are no views from the Thames Path National Trail due to riparian vegetation along the river intercepting views (see View 3 on Figure 6). However, there are open views from the access road that leads to the Northmoor Lock. It should be noted, that this road is not a public right of way. The road is mostly aligned to both sides by tall hedgerows limiting views out. To the western section of the road, views towards the Site are possible due to gaps

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in the hedgerows and the Site is visible on the wooded ridgeline of the Thames Valley (see View 4 on Figure 6). The Site is part of a broader view and does not form a prominent feature.

There are no views from footpath no. 4 towards the Site due to intervening vegetation and screening effect of housing in Appleton.

4.4. Views from local roads

Views from local roads towards the Site are limited to Eaton Road directly adjacent to the Site (see View 5 on Figure 6). There are otherwise no views from local roads, nor from the A420 towards the Site.

Views from Eaton Road are short distance but are interrupted and intermitted by the hedgerow along the road. There are no views of the Site from roads within the centre of Appleton.

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5.0 Summary of Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Recommendations

5.1. Overall Site Suitability and Constraints

The key conclusions of the landscape and visual appraisal are summarised below

- The site is not affected by any landscape planning designations which would present an overriding constraint to the principle of development.
- The site is not significant in relation to the purposes of the Green Belt and has been recommended for release from the Oxford Green Belt through the Council's Green Belt Review process.
- The site lies within the built envelope of Appleton village and would form a logical village extension along Eaton Road with development contained within the western limits of the village.
- The site is not affected by any heritage designations and development within the site would have no impact on any Listed Buildings within Appleton or the Appleton Conservation Area.
- The site is not affected by any public rights of ways and there will be no loss or diversion of any rights of way as a consequence of development.
- The site contains no tree or hedgerow vegetation within the internal field areas. There are no areas of woodland which would limit, or be otherwise affected by development.
- The hedgerows and trees along the site boundaries are characteristic features of the site and local landscape. These features do not present a significant constraint to development and can be retained and successfully incorporated within a development layout. The mature hedgerow along the southern boundary of the site should be retained and protected.
- The landscape character is that of the North Corallian Ridge, which is protected under policy NE7 of the Local Plan. Any development on the Site is of such scale that the landscape character will not be adversely affected given the appropriate scale, massing and layout of any new development. With any new development, opportunities should be realised to enhance and strengthen the character of the North Corallian Ridge by the introduction of new woodland and hedgerow planting that is typical to the area.
- The site lies within the landscape character type 'Rolling Farmlands' and more locally in LCA E Appleton. Any development on the Site is of such scale that the landscape character will not be adversely affected given the appropriate scale, massing and layout of any new development. New development has the potential to enhance typical features that are characteristic to the local landscape, such as intact strengthening native hedgerows and introducing small clumps of deciduous woodland planting.
- The site is visually well contained from views from the north, south and east from local roads, public rights of ways and nearby properties due to the screening effects of existing boundary vegetation. This vegetation should be retained and reinforced where appropriate. Where views do exist, these are generally from a short distance, only partial and intermittent and new structure planting can be incorporated within any

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new development to further minimise the visual impact of development and to integrate into the local landscape.

- The western edge of the Site is more open and prominent due to its location at the valley ridge, and development would be potentially visible from the Thames Valley, albeit only forming a small portion of the overall view. Improving screening along the existing western hedgerow through additional planting would provide a robust edge for new development.

5.2. Landscape Strategy Recommendations

The conclusions of the preliminary appraisal have informed recommendation for landscape mitigation. These principles should be taken forward and incorporated as part of any future development proposal. Three principal areas for new native woodland planting and tree planting are recommended to reflect the character of the local landscape and the associated Landscape Character Guidelines, and to help integrate development and minimise visual impacts.

These areas are:

- Native woodland or additional native tree planting along the western edge of the Site, strengthening the existing hedgerows and linking to the existing woodland clump to the west of the site. This planting will help create a wooded and treed ridgeline when viewed from the Thames Valley.
- Individual tree planting, tree groves and structural planting within the Site as an integral part of potential residential development to help integrate development within the landscape and provide a high quality and attractive setting for new development.
- Additional tree planting within the hedgerow along Eaton Road to soften the impact of development from the adjacent residential properties.

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6.0 Conclusions

This report has considered the landscape and visual character and context of the land at Appleton in order to inform consideration of the suitability of the site for residential development.

The appraisal has concluded that there are no significant or overriding landscape, visual or heritage constraints which would preclude the principle of development within the site or would significantly limit the potential of the site for residential development.

In conclusion, the land at Appleton is considered to be an acceptable location for residential development in landscape and visual terms. Development brought forward in accordance with the landscape strategy and mitigation recommendations set out within this report would ensure development would not give rise to an unacceptable level of impact on the character or qualities of the wider landscape or affect the separate identity of surrounding settlements. Development would not give rise to significant or widespread adverse visual effects and could be successfully integrated into the existing village edge within well defined boundaries.

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7.0 Figures

Figure 1: Site Location and Aerial View

Figure 2: Photo Panels, Site Photos

Figure 3: Landscape Character and Ancient Woodland

Figure 4: Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

Figure 5: Public Rights of Ways

Figure 6: Viewpoint Location Plan

Figure 7: Photo Panels, Photographic Views