
GATEWEN ROAD HOUSING SCHEME

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

June 2018



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was undertaken by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), with more than ten years post-qualification experience the landscape and visual assessment of development projects. The LVIA was directed and overseen by a second CMLI with over twenty years similar experience.
- 1.2 The LVIA follows good practice guidance set out in *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (the GLVIA)¹ and adopts an approach proportionate to the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The conclusions of the LVIA have been determined through application of professional judgement, supported by reasoned justification. A detailed methodology is set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Landscape and visual effects are separate, although closely related and interlinked issues. Landscape effects are caused by physical changes to the landscape, which may result in changes to the distinctive character of that landscape and how it is perceived. Visual effects are changes to what can be seen by people as a result of what is proposed. A visual assessment assesses the change in visual amenity undergone by people (either individually or in groups) that would arise from any change in the nature of views experienced.
- 1.4 It should be noted that the landscape (including the context in which views are experienced) is dynamic, i.e. it is affected by social, economic, technological and climatic changes, all of which can influence patterns of land use, land cover and land management. As such, the baseline context for the Appraisal is not static.

Description of the Proposed Development

- 1.5 The Proposed Development is described in the Planning Statement. The principal elements are summarised below:
- 109 no. new houses;
 - Associated access roads; and
 - Associated public realm landscape treatments.

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 3rd edition 2013. *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. Routledge: Abingdon.

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- 1.6 The landscape proposals are illustrated on drawing 102, and include the retention of existing mature and semi-mature trees within the Site, and the planting of new trees, hedges and ornamental planting along the internal boundaries between properties and access road and along the western boundary of the Site. A row of tall specimen trees set within a 2m wide belt of evergreen shrubs would be planted on the outer side of a site boundary fence along the southern boundary of the Site

Legislative and Policy Context

- 1.7 Full details of the planning and policy background for the proposal, including an appraisal of effects on relevant landscape-related policies, as set out in the adopted Statutory Development Plan, are included in the Planning Statement. Key legislation and policy documents relevant to the LVIA are summarised below.

European Landscape Convention

- 1.8 The UK Government is a signatory of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), which became binding in March 2007. The Convention is aimed at the protection, management and planning of all landscapes and raising awareness of the value of a living landscape. It relates chiefly to public bodies and to the policies, plans and programmes produced by these.
- 1.9 The LVIA is a development specific process which accords with Article 6C. The LVIA is informed by extant Landscape Character Assessment studies (described in Section 3 below), which more directly relate to the provisions of Article 6C.

Planning Policy

- 1.10 Full details of relevant planning policies are set out in the Planning Statement. Relevant documents include:
- *Planning Policy Wales*, edition 9 published in November 2016; and
 - *Wrexham Unitary Development Plan* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2005);
 - *Local Planning Guidance Note 7. Landscape and Development* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2003);
 - *Local Planning Guidance Note 30. Design* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2009).

1 Methodology

Current Guidance

- 1.1 As noted in Section 1, this LVIA has been based on the published good practice guidelines set out in the GLVIA, and is proportionate to the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development.

The Study Area

- 1.2 The Study Area for the LVIA has been determined following a site visit to ascertain the surrounding context into which the Proposed Development would be introduced. This confirmed that due to the nature of the Site and its surroundings, and the type of changes proposed, that the influence of the Proposed Development would be very localised, and as such the study area covers the Site and its immediate vicinity only.

Significance of Effect

- 1.3 In the case of development (such as that proposed) that does not require Environmental Impact Assessment, there is no requirement to state whether an effect is significant or not. However, it is considered likely to be of assistance to the decision-maker if such a statement is included in the LVIA.
- 1.4 Not all landscape and visual effects arising as a result of a particular proposal will be significant. Furthermore, where likely significant environmental effects are predicted, this does not automatically mean that such effects are unacceptable. The acceptability of landscape and visual effects is a matter to be weighed in the planning balance alongside other factors. What is important is that the likely environmental effects of any proposal are transparently appraised and described, in order that the relevant determining authority can bring a balanced and well-informed judgement to bear as part of the decision-making process. The judgement made will depend on the specific circumstances being considered.

Consultation

- 1.5 Refer to the Planning Statement for details of consultations undertaken.

Limitations

- 1.6 The field visit to inform the LVIA was carried out in May 2018, when deciduous vegetation was in leaf. Where relevant to its conclusions, the LVIA has regard to likely seasonal change in visibility.

2 Baseline

Data Collection

- 2.1 Baseline data for the LVIA has been gathered by both desk and field based surveys. These have included review of extant landscape character assessment studies (see below) and field visits to gain an understanding of the landscape and visual context of the site.

Baseline Conditions

The Site and its Surroundings

- 2.2 The Site is a roughly triangular piece of land, located immediately north of the B5433 Gatewen Road at New Broughton. It is currently used as horse pasture, and is predominantly grassland, with two small copses also present. The landform slopes downhill from south-east to north-west. The location of the Site is indicated on Figure 1, and photographs looking towards the Site from nearby locations are illustrated on Figures 2a-b.
- 2.3 To the north and east, the boundary of the Site is defined by a linear belt of mature tree cover. Along the southern part of the eastern boundary, a steep bank is located on the eastern side of the tree belt, with a public footpath running along the foot of the bank. There is a recently completed housing development further to the east. Views into the Site from both the footpath and the housing are well screened by the aforementioned trees. Further north, the bank tapers out, and views from the footpath and housing in this area are sometimes clearer, where there are localised gaps in tree cover. By reference to Wrexham County Borough Council's online mapping², the public right of way does not extend along the northern boundary of the Site, with the path in this area seeming to be permissive only. Some of the housing north of the Site can be seen from Gatewen Road to the south, as the trees are less tall along sections of the northern boundary.

² http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/leisure_tourism/prow/definitive_map.htm

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- 2.4 The southern boundary of the Site with Gatewen Road is defined by a post and rail fence towards the west and by a belt of mature trees towards the east. Two-storey terraced properties are located on the southern side of the road, and these have clear views into the Site over the fence. Properties to the south-east benefit from the screening provided by the tree belt.
- 2.5 The Site is bordered to the west by an area of public open space, which includes a children's play area. The boundary is defined by a low post and wire fence. A belt of mature trees runs along the western boundary of the public open space, and largely screens views from the properties on Mossvalley Road beyond. There are access points into the public open space, from Gatewen Road to the south and from the permissive path to the north.

Landscape Designations

- 2.6 The Site is not covered by any landscape designations at either a national or local level.
- 2.7 Whilst the Site is located within an area defined in the local plan as a Green Barrier, this is not a landscape designation. Green Barriers are not intended to protect landscapes or other environmental features. They are local planning designations concerned solely with the use of land. The implications of the Proposed Development in respect of its Green Barrier location are addressed in the Planning Statement.

Landscape Character Assessment and Related Studies

- 2.8 LANDMAP is the formally adopted methodology for landscape assessment in Wales and, as such, forms the baseline for this assessment. The *Wrexham LANDMAP Supplementary Planning Guidance* (adopted 2007) subdivides the Borough into a series of four broad landscape types and twenty-seven geographically distinct landscape character areas (LCA).
- 2.9 The Proposed Development would be located within the Rural/Urban Villages landscape type and within LCA 7d: West Wrexham Ridges and Valleys. An extract from the SPG relating to LCA 7d is included as Appendix 2 to the LVIA

Future Landscape Change

- 2.10 In the absence of the Proposed Development, it is assumed that the site would continue in its current agricultural use.

3 Assessment of Effects

Construction

- 3.1** Construction would, by necessity, require the use of specialist vehicles and other plant, some of which would be readily apparent by virtue of their colour, size or movement. In addition to the presence of these abnormal items, the very presence of construction activity on site, would change the appearance of parts of the Site, whilst this activity is ongoing.
- 3.2** Measures would be put in place to protect retained trees from construction damage, and such measure would accord with the requirements of *BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations*, and any associated surveys and assessments.
- 3.3** Such construction activity would be clearly visible from the properties on Gatewen Road to the south, and from the public open space to the west. Some elements of construction are also likely to be visible in views from the footpath to the north. The temporary presence of construction activity would change both the character of the study area and views from nearby receptors for a period of approximately eighteen months.
- 3.4** Whilst temporary, this change is likely to result in some short term significant adverse effects due to the presence of unmistakably distinctive new elements, which would contrast with existing features.

Landscape Effects: Operational

Effects on Landscape Fabric

- 3.5** The landscape fabric of the Site chiefly comprises pasture grassland, together with two small copses, and the remnants of a brick structure. The grassland and trees are commonplace both locally and nationally. Grassland can easily be recreated via new seeding. Tree cover can also be recreated via new planting, but this takes time to grow, and like-for-like replacement on an immediate basis is not possible. Susceptibility to change is medium. The fabric of the Site does not include any rare or protected features. It does however makes a positive contribution to the local character. Value is medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.

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- 3.6 The Proposed Development would result in the loss of the existing grassland cover within the Site and its replacement with new houses, private gardens and boundary features, public realm landscaping, and internal access roads. This change would be permanent. The two copses would be retained and incorporated into the masterplan for the Site. There would be a large magnitude of change in the landscape fabric of the Site, which would result in a moderate level of effect as only the relatively lower sensitivity grassland would be lost to accommodate development. The more sensitive tree vegetation in the two copses at the Site would be retained, and effects would not therefore be significant. The net loss of vegetation cover within the Site would mean that effects would be adverse.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 3.7 The character of the landscape of the Study Area is urban edge/ suburban, with recent new housing development evident to the north of the Site, and older terraced housing present to the south. The use of the Site itself for horse pasture is a typical urban fringe land-use, and the dense tree belt to the north and east, provides some amenity value in views. The susceptibility of the landscape to change is medium. No landscape designations extend over the Study Area. The adjacent playing field has an amenity/ recreational function. Value is medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.
- 3.8 The introduction of the Proposed Development would result in the loss of the existing land cover within the Site and its replacement with new two-storey housing with private gardens, new public realm landscape treatments, new access roads, and a new junction onto Gatewen Road. This change would be permanent. Change would be medium in magnitude, resulting in a moderate level of effect. The Proposed Development would continue a trend towards increased suburbanisation, and would incrementally alter the balance of landscape characteristics albeit maintaining an overall composition of housing set within tree cover. Effects would not be significant. The increase in built footprint and loss of undeveloped land would be adverse.

Visual Effects: Operational

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 3.9 Receptors with views of the Proposed Development would comprise residents in properties along Gatewen Road, residents in other properties to the west, north and east of the Site, users of the footpath that runs along the eastern and northern perimeter of the Site, users of the public open space west of the Site, and users of Gatewen Road.
- 3.10 Residents have a high susceptibility to change in view from their properties. The views in question are not protected by any landscape designation. Nevertheless, people tend to value the views from their properties, and thus value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is high.
- 3.11 Footpath users (whether on foot or cyclists) have a high susceptibility to change. Not all of the path is a public right of way, but the whole path appears to be well used and is easily accessible from nearby properties. Value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is high.
- 3.12 The users of the playing field will be aware of changes in their surroundings, but are more likely to be focused upon the activity they are pursuing. Susceptibility to change is medium to high. The playing field is not the subject of any landscape designations, but does have a clear recreation/ amenity function. Value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is medium to high.
- 3.13 Road users, whether in vehicles or on foot, have a medium susceptibility to change. There is little specific value upon the views available from Gatewen Road, which simply present a typical suburban/ rural edge scene. Value is low to medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.

Effects of the Proposed Development

Properties on Gatewen Road

- 3.14 From approximately 30 properties on Gatewen Road, clear views northwards to the Proposed Development would be available. The road itself would continue to occupy the immediate foreground of the view, but the new houses and associated boundary features would be visible beyond this at short range. In recognition of the effects upon views from these properties, a belt of screening vegetation is proposed at the

southern boundary of the Site. This would consist of tall specimen trees set within a 2m wide planted belt of evergreen shrubs to the rear of a wide grass verge. This would provide a green, vegetated foreground screen in views towards the Site, which would provide a continuation of established roadside vegetation further east, and which would partially screen the development beyond. This vegetation would become increasingly effective over time as it becomes more established. There would be permanent change in direct views from the frontages of the properties. A medium to large magnitude of change would occur, resulting in a moderate to major level of effect. The view would change from one looking across an open field to distant tree cover, to one where built development is more evident, but located behind a strong landscape screen provided by boundary vegetation, and where this vegetation would restrict views of housing increasingly over time. Visual effects would be significant initially, but would reduce to non-significant levels as vegetation becomes established.

- 3.15 From approximately 7 no properties further west on Gatewen Road, views would be more oblique. Foreground views across the playing field would remain, with new housing visible beyond this. Change would be medium in magnitude, and the resulting effect would be moderate. Whilst change in view would be clear, the existing foreground would remain. Effects would be adverse, but would not be significant.
- 3.16 From properties to the south-east, the existing tree belt would continue to screen views into the Site. At worst, filtered views of new properties at the south-eastern edge of the Site would be available in the winter months. Change in view would be small to medium in magnitude at worst, resulting in a minor to moderate adverse effect, which would not be significant.

Other Properties

- 3.17 Views from properties to the west, north and east of the Site would continue to be well screened by retained mature tree cover. The presence of the Proposed Development would be glimpsed through breaks in this vegetation, and would be more apparent during the winter months when foliage is absent. Clear visibility is unlikely to be available, however. Change in view would be permanent, and would be small to medium in magnitude, resulting in a minor to moderate adverse level of effect which would not be significant.

Footpath

- 3.18 Views from the public right of way/ permissive footpath that skirts the eastern and northern boundaries of the Site would typically be well screened by vegetation. From the east, the rising landform west of the path would provide further screening, and clear views are unlikely to be available, with glimpses in winter at worst. From the north-east and north, the landform is relatively flat and there are more gaps in the vegetation. As such, there would be intermittent narrow clear views of new houses from the route. Existing properties to the east of the footpath would remain more clearly visible. Change in view would be permanent, and would be small to medium in magnitude, with the resultant effect being minor to moderate. The established influence of housing development upon views from the footpath would increase, but the visibility of new properties would be intermittent. Effects would be adverse, but would not be significant.

Playing field

- 3.19 Views from the playing field would be of the new properties at the western edge of the Site, including any boundary features. The presence of the Proposed Development would therefore shorten the extent of eastward views and introduce new buildings into these, replacing existing vegetation. The new properties would be less well screened than properties to the north and west, and would be closer to much of the playing field than properties to the south. Change in view would be permanent. A medium magnitude of change would occur, resulting in a moderate level of effect. Whilst change in view would be obvious, the essential nature of the view across a playing field in a suburban landscape/ townscape would not change, and effects would not be significant. Effects would be adverse.

Road users

- 3.20 From Gatewen Road, transient views of the new properties at the southern edge of the Site would be available, along with the new junction. Additionally, properties along the western boundary of the Site would be visible in eastbound views from that stretch of the road adjacent to the playing field. Such change would be notable, but unremarkable in the context of any journey, where housing, mature vegetation and open spaces are already relatively common. Change in view would be permanent, and would be small to medium in magnitude, resulting in a minor to moderate adverse level of effect, which would not be significant.

4 Mitigation

- 4.1 The landscape scheme for the Proposed Development includes measures to reduce the visual effects experienced by properties south of Gatewen Road, via the provision of a strip of tree and shrub planting along the southern boundary of the Site.
- 4.2 The strip of land in front of this vegetation (alongside the road) is in the ownership of Wrexham Council, could potentially also be planted up to provide a denser degree of screening of views from the properties south of the road. The land in question varies in width between approximately 7m and 13m, and would provide ample space for a belt of screen planting, subject to agreement with the Council. The provision of such planting would further reduce visual effects upon the properties south of Gatewen Road.

5 Residual Effects and Conclusions

- 5.1 The Proposed Development would introduce new housing into a currently undeveloped Site. Similar housing has recently been built to the east and north of the Site, and older housing is present to the south and west. The presence of the new housing would continue this trend towards increasing suburbanisation.
- 5.2 Existing tree cover within the Site would retained and incorporated into the masterplan for the Proposed Development. As such, effects on the landscape fabric of the Site would not be significant. The character of the landscape would not be significantly affected, with existing trends and influences retained, although that of housing would increase somewhat.
- 5.3 Visual effects would be significant from properties south of the Site along Gatewen Road, which would have clear views of the new housing at short range in place of open views across fields. These effects would be mitigated by a proposed screening belt of vegetation and would reduce to non-significant levels in a relatively short time period. Further mitigation could be provided with off-site planting along the road verge subject to agreement with the council. Visual effects upon residents in other nearby properties, upon footpath and road users, and upon users of public open space would not be significant.

APPENDICES

FIGURES