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# **REGENT STREET CAMPUS REDEVELOPMENT**

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## **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 of 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)<sup>1</sup> and adopts an approach proportionate to the likely significant effects of the Proposed. 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.
- 1.5 An assessment of effects upon heritage assets and their settings is included in the Cultural Heritage Assessment. The LVIA and Cultural Heritage Assessment, whilst sometimes considering effects upon the same receptors, deal with different environmental effects, using different methodologies.

### ***Description of the Proposed Development***

- 1.6 The Proposed Development is described in the Planning Statement. The principal elements are summarised below:
- Removal of existing ancillary buildings;

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

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- New four storey extension to the rear of the existing buildings;
  - New single storey workshop with sedum roof;
  - Associated landscaping.

### ***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*

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);
- *Wrexham LANDMAP Supplementary Planning Guidance* (published by Wrexham County Borough Council 2007);
- *Local Planning Guidance Note 4. Conservation Areas* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 1993, updated 2009);
- *Local Planning Guidance Note 7. Landscape and Development* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2003);
- *Local Planning Guidance Note 19. Wrexham's Town Character Areas* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2001);

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- *Local Planning Guidance Note 30. Design* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2009).

## **2.0 Methodology**

### ***Current Guidance***

- 2.1 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***

- 2.2 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***

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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***

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

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### ***Limitations***

- 2.6 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.

## **3.0 Baseline**

### ***Data Collection***

- 3.1 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*

- 3.2 The Site is located within central Wrexham, in the eastern half of an island of land formed by the A541 Regent St (to the north), the A5152 Bradley Road, (to the east) and Central Road (to the south and west). The Site comprises the historic former Wrexham Infirmary and adjacent detached house (both Listed), together with a series of functional ancillary buildings to the south-west (on Central Road). Functional utilitarian buildings are located to the west of the Site, within the same island of land. 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.
- 3.3 The surrounding context is strongly urban, with a range of relatively recent commercial buildings, older office/ commercial buildings, a church and a fire station, all located on the opposite side of the surrounding roads. The roads themselves form part of the principal routes through central Wrexham and, as might be expected, are subject to heavy use by traffic and by pedestrians

#### *Landscape Designations*

- 3.4 The Site is not covered by any landscape designations at either a national or local level.

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- 3.5 The Site overlaps the southern boundary of the Wrexham Grosvenor Road Conservation Area. The Conservation Area extends north-east of the Site for approximately 800m.
- 3.6 Conservation Areas are cultural heritage designations and effects upon these are considered in the Cultural Heritage Assessment (as are effects on Listed Buildings). A Conservation Appraisal document<sup>2</sup> has been prepared by Wrexham County Borough Council. This identifies that the former Infirmary Building is an important landmark building, and identifies important key views along Regent Street looking outwards to Esclusham Mountain, and along the axes of the long straight roads at Grosvenor Road, Grove Road and King Street (all of which are located north-east of the Site and do not have a line of sight towards it).

#### *Landscape Character Assessment and Related Studies*

- 3.7 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).
- 3.8 The Proposed Development would be located within the Urban landscape type and within LCA 10: Wrexham Town. LCA 10 is further divided into sub-character areas (SCA), based on work undertaken in 2001 (which is also available as a separated SPG document referenced in Section 1 above). The Proposed Development would be located in SCA 5: Mixed Non-Residential. An extract from the SPG relating to LCA 10 and SCA5 is included as Appendix 2 to the LVIA.

#### *Future Landscape Change*

- 3.9 In the absence of the Proposed Development, it is assumed that the Site would continue in its current use.

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<sup>2</sup> Wrexham County Borough Council. 2009. *Grosvenor Road Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan*

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## 4.0 Assessment of Effects

### ***Construction***

- 4.1 Refer to the Planning Statement for a description of the construction stage of the Proposed Development.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 In the context of the Study Area, where a range of features are already visible, including passing traffic and various functional buildings and structures, the temporary presence of construction activity would be unremarkable, and indeed such activity is not unusual in urban areas. It is clear that construction stage effects would not be significant, and as such, further consideration is not deemed necessary.

### ***Landscape Effects: Operational***

#### *Effects on Landscape Fabric*

- 4.4 The Site chiefly comprises hard standing and built features. These are low sensitivity features, and the Proposed Development would clearly result in an improvement to the fabric of the Site. Existing trees on the Regent Street frontage would be retained as part of the proposals. As such, no further assessment is considered necessary.

#### *Effects on Landscape Character*

- 4.5 The character of the Study Area is typical of a town centre location. Buildings and roads dominate, and there is a strong sense of movement due to the volume of passing traffic. Architectural styles vary, with historic buildings present (including the Regent St frontage of the Site), and with many functional and contemporary structures (such as along Central St to the rear of the Site). Susceptibility to change is low to medium. There are no landscape designations covering the Study Area. Historic interest is evidenced by the two listed buildings at the Site, and by the presence of the more extensive Conservation Area. Value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is medium.

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- 4.6 The Proposed Development would result in the removal of existing ancillary buildings at the rear of the Site (on Central St), and their replacement with a new contemporary extension. At four storeys, this would be taller than many of the nearby existing buildings, but would be similar in height to the buildings on the northern side of Regent St. The historic buildings within the Site would not be directly affected by the new structures. The nature of the existing urban character would remain largely unchanged. There would be localised improvement to the streetscape of Central Street. Change would be small in magnitude, and the resultant effect would be minor to moderate and not significant. The improvements to the streetscape on Central Street would mean that the change experienced would be beneficial.

***Visual Effects: Operational***

- 4.7 The Proposed Development would be visible to users of the surrounding road network (both in vehicles and on foot). These people have a medium susceptibility to change. The listed former Infirmary at the Site is recognised as a landmark building in the Conservation Area Appraisal<sup>3</sup> and as such views towards it do form an important part of this heritage designation. Nevertheless it is unlikely that people are likely to congregate in the vicinity of the Site purely to appreciate the views available. Value is medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.
- 4.8 The Proposed Development would remove the existing functional buildings at the rear of the Site, and replace these with a new, well-designed contemporary four-storey structure. This would be taller than some, but not all nearby structures, and as such would be noticeable, but would not appear out of place in the context of the existing views. The redeveloped Site would present a new frontage onto Central Street, which would represent an obvious change from the existing buildings. Change would be permanent. The Proposed Development would not intrude upon any of the key views identified within the Wrexham Grosvenor Road Conservation Area.
- 4.9 Change in view would be medium in magnitude from Central Street, resulting in a moderate level of effect. Elsewhere, change would be small in magnitude, and the resultant effect would be minor. Change in view would not be significant, with the existing urban nature of the view, including a range of different styles of building, remaining. The improvements to the Site frontage with Central Street would be

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

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beneficial. Elsewhere the quality of the view would neither improve nor deteriorate, and as such, effects would be neutral.

## **5.0 Mitigation**

- 5.1 As the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development would not be significant, no mitigation measures are proposed.

## **6.0 Residual Effects and Conclusions**

- 6.1 The Proposed Development would be located within an urbanised context in central Wrexham and would result in limited change to an already developed Site. Existing functional ancillary buildings on Central Street would be replaced with a well-designed, contemporary structure, and as such, the streetscape in this area would improve. Elsewhere change would be wholly unremarkable. The frontages of the historic buildings at the Site with Regent Street and Bradley Street would be unaffected. Landscape and visual effects would not be significant.

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## APPENDICES

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## FIGURES