
**PLAS COCH CAMPUS:
WREXHAM STUDENT VILLAGES PHASE 2**

**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.
- 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:
- New seven storey student accommodation block (c. 323 units); and
 - Associated public realm landscaping.

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

Legislative and Policy Context

- 1.6 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

- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 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

- 1.9 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 Borough Council 2007);
 - *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);
 - *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.

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 Glyndwr University's wider Plas Coch Campus. This is located off the A541 Mold Road, close to the western edge of Wrexham. The location of the Site is indicated on Figure 1, and photographs looking towards the Site from nearby locations are illustrated on Figure 2.
- 3.3 The campus is bordered by two-storey housing to the south (on the opposite side of Mold Road), by the Racecourse Ground (Wrexham Football Club) to the south-east, by a railway line to the east, and by further two-storey housing off Crispin Lane to the north-east. A footpath runs along the northern boundary, at a lower elevation to the campus and separate from it by a stone wall mounted with a steel security fence. A tennis centre is located north of the footpath. To the west, a series of edge of town commercial/ retail developments are present. The campus comprises a variety of different buildings exhibiting a range of architectural styles. The western and southern frontages are landscaped.
- 3.4 The tallest buildings on the campus are two seven-storey student accommodation buildings, located close to the eastern boundary off Crispin Lane, immediately north of the Racecourse Ground. Other buildings tend to be no taller than three storeys, although some structures do extend above the general roofline (e.g. prominent chimneys).

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- 3.5 The Site itself is located at the southern edge of the campus, immediately south of the existing seven-storey buildings off Crispin Lane, and immediately east of the Racecourse Ground. The Site is currently vacant, comprising hard standing surrounded by perimeter security fencing. A belt of tree planting is located on the eastern side of Crispin Lane, providing a limited visual barrier between the road and Wrexham General Station, which is located beyond the trees.

Landscape Designations

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

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 1 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.

4.0 Assessment of Effects

Construction

- 4.1 Construction would, by necessity, require the use of specialist vehicles and other plant, including cranes, 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.

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- 4.2 Such construction activity would be clearly visible from the adjacent existing student blocks, from Crispin Road and from the Racecourse Ground Car Park. The temporary presence of construction activity would change both the character of the immediate vicinity of the Site and views from adjacent receptors for the duration of the construction phase. This change would result in some adverse effects due to the presence of unmistakably distinctive new elements, which would contrast with existing features. Effects would be temporary and not significant.
- 4.3 Cranes and scaffolding would be more widely visible due to their height, but would be experienced in an urban context where a range of features are visible, and where their presence whilst recognisable, would be unremarkable, having little influence upon the wider scene. As such, construction stage landscape and visual effects away from the Site itself would also not be significant.

Landscape Effects: Operational

Effects on Landscape Fabric

- 4.4 The Site comprises hard standing and security fencing. This existing fabric is low sensitivity and the Site in its present state does not make a positive contribution to the character of the surrounding area.
- 4.5 The introduction of the Proposed Development would replace existing features with a new building, associated external space, new boundary features, and new tree and shrub planting. It is clear that given the lack of sensitivity of the existing fabric, effects would not be significant, and that change is likely to lead to an improvement in the appearance of the Site, i.e. effects would be beneficial. As such, further more detailed consideration is deemed unnecessary.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 4.6 The Study Area has an edge of town centre character, which is slightly atypical due to the presence of the university campus and the football stadium. Major transport routes (road and rail), commercial/ retail development, car parking, two-storey housing, student apartment blocks and academic buildings all contribute to the townscape. The Site itself has a somewhat untidy and neglected appearance, tucked away behind the stadium and the railway station. Susceptibility to change is low. There are no landscape designations covering the Study Area. The main campus building and the station entrance building are both listed, but these are single

buildings located within a diverse urban mosaic of varying style and quality. Value is low to medium. Overall, sensitivity is low to medium.

- 4.7 The Proposed Development would introduce a new, building into the Site, which would be similar in both height and architectural form to the existing student accommodation blocks immediately to the north. As such, its presence would be consistent with established characteristics. The influence of tall buildings would increase locally, and at ground level there would be an improvement in the appearance of the site, with new functional elements introduced in place of a vacant plot. Change would be small to medium in magnitude, and the resulting effect would be minor to moderate and not significant. The existing Site is vacant and unsightly, and its appearance would improve as a result of the Proposed Development. Effects would be beneficial.

Visual Effects: Operational

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 4.8 Visual receptors likely to have views of the Proposed Development include:
- Residents in approximately 6 no. terraced properties on the southern side of Mold Road;
 - Residents in the adjacent student existing accommodation blocks;
 - Users of Wrexham General Station;
 - Users of Crispin Lane;
 - Users of Mold Road; and.
 - People using the Racecourse Ground car park (low susceptibility to change as their presence would be purely to enter/ exit the adjacent stadium).
- 4.9 Residents have a high susceptibility to change in view from their properties. The views in question are not protected by any landscape designation, nor are the existing views of notable quality. Nevertheless, people tend to value the views from their properties, and value is therefore medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is high.
- 4.10 In the case of residents within the student accommodation the fact the individual students are present for a limited period only (typically approx. nine months) brings about a much lower susceptibility to change (indeed only the set of residents present at the time of the change will experience both existing and proposed situations). Again, the views in question are not protected by any landscape designation, nor are

they of notable quality. Susceptibility to change is low - medium as is value. Overall, sensitivity is low - medium.

- 4.11 Passengers at the Station have views towards the Site from the platforms (where these have open views westwards) and from the footbridge that allows access to the more westerly platforms. Susceptibility to change is medium. The viewpoint is not subject to any landscape designations, nor are the views noted for any scenic qualities. Value is low to medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.
- 4.12 Road users, whether in vehicles or on foot, on both Mold Road and Crispin Lane, will be travelling along functional routes. Mold Road is a busy route into the town centre, and the stretch of Crispin Road close to the Site runs past a range of detracting features. Susceptibility to change from these two roads is low to medium. There is little specific value to the views from either road, and value is also low to medium. Overall, sensitivity is low to medium.
- 4.13 Users of the Racecourse Ground car park will in general be present to enter or leave the Stadium, usually in the context of a busy match day crowd or to attend events rather than for any qualities associated with views available. Both susceptibility to change and value are low. Overall, sensitivity is low.

Visual Effects

- 4.14 For the majority of receptors, change in view would be that of incremental change to the quantity of tall residential development in the view, with the two existing blocks already quite prominent. The Proposed Development would introduce a new seven storey student accommodation block, within a currently vacant Site located adjacent to two similar existing buildings. It would add incrementally to the established influence of tall buildings at the south-eastern edge of the Plas Coch Campus. Change in view would be of medium magnitude from the six properties on Mold Road, from Mold Road itself, and from the Station. This would result in moderate effects. Effects would not be significant, as the essential nature of the baseline view across a townscape where a diverse range of structures of varying aesthetic quality are present would not change. It is not expected that the Proposed Development would detract from the view, and as such effects are expected to be neutral or beneficial.
- 4.15 At street level, the Site would be tidied up and would improve in visual quality. This would be particularly apparent from Crispin Road, from the Racecourse Ground car

park, and from the ground level areas adjacent to the existing student accommodation. Change in view experienced by these receptors would be large, due chiefly to the proximity to the new building.

- 4.16 This would result in a moderate effect upon views, which would not be significant. The nature of the existing views would remain similar to baseline (stadium, railway land, student accommodation, other campus buildings, roads, fencing etc), albeit with an additional seven-storey accommodation block present, increasing the influence of the campus upon the views available. The quality of the view from these three receptors would not deteriorate as a result of the Proposed Development, and the improvements to the streetscape would have a beneficial effect.

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 introduce a third block of student accommodation into a currently vacant Site at the south-eastern edge of the Plas Coch Campus, adjacent to two similar existing blocks. As such, there would be an incremental increase in an established influence upon the surrounding area.
- 6.2 There would be a beneficial, but non-significant effect upon the landscape fabric of the Site. The existing hard standing and security fencing would be replaced by the new building and hard and soft landscaping. There be only minor change in the character of the surrounding landscape/ townscape, the improvements to the fabric of the Site would have an equivalent beneficial effect upon character.
- 6.3 Visual effects would be notable but not significant from the adjacent student accommodation and from Crispin Road. There would be clear views of the Proposed Development at close range but these are relatively low sensitivity receptors. The visual improvement to the Site in general would be beneficial. Visual effects upon other receptors within the Study Area would also not be significant.

APPENDICES

FIGURES

