Purpose of Document

This document has been prepared on behalf of CALA Homes in response to the launch of the final (pre-submission) version of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 for consultation by West Oxfordshire District Council.

It provides a consultation response from a professional landscape perspective to the proposed strategy for the expansion of Chipping Norton, and in particular the proposed approach to the mitigation of landscape impacts to the east of the town.

Executive Summary

The Land East of Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area proposes the construction of 600 dwellings on this site. The character of the site and its setting is pastoral plateau farmland with frequent tree belts and incised river channels.

The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan indicates a ‘landscape buffer’ occupying the south-eastern quarter of the allocated site, to preserve the character of the town and its setting. The Local Plan evidence base indicates that the extent of this buffer is not consistent with the desired number of dwellings and range of uses on the site.

It is our conclusion that a narrow ‘buffer’ area combined with the retention of existing vegetation features will be sufficient to reduce landscape impacts to an appropriate level, and that the open space provision within the development should be used to enable a green infrastructure-led landscape design process with green corridors permeating the entire development. This can be addressed at the masterplanning stage.
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1. INTRODUCTION

West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

1.1. Following the standard issues and options consultation processes, the final (pre-submission) Local Plan was issued for a 6-week consultation on 27th March 2015.

1.2. The emerging Local Plan sets out an overarching vision and area-wide policies before setting out policies for strategic growth within a number of Sub-Areas, including Chipping Norton.

1.3. The Chipping Norton Sub-Area is covered by Section 9.4 of the emerging Local Plan. Two policies are presented: Policy CN1 for the East Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area, and Policy CN2 for the overall Chipping Norton Sub-Area Strategy.

Document Structure

1.4. This report will cover the following aspects:

- Description of the landscape context of East Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area
- Response to the ‘Landscape Buffer’ shown on Figure 9.12 of the emerging Local Plan
- Proposal for a structured, green infrastructure-based mitigation strategy to address potential landscape effects
2. LANDSCAPE SETTING OF EAST CHIPPING NORTON STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AREA

Existing Landscape Character Assessment: National Character Area

2.1. Natural England’s National Character Assessment places the Strategic Development Area (SDA) within the Cotswolds National Character Area, and it is notable that the boundary of the Cotswolds AONB lies to the west of the SDA.

2.2. The key characteristics of the National Character Area are briefly summarised as follows, with those particularly represented by the SDA (or parts thereof) highlighted in bold text:

- A dramatic limestone scarp rising above adjacent lowlands with steep coombes, and outliers illustrating the slow erosion of escarpments.
- Open and expansive scarp and high wold dipping gently to the south-east, dissected by river valleys.
- Arable farming dominates the high wold and dip slope while permanent pasture prevails on the steep slopes of the scarp and river valleys.
- Drystone walls define the pattern of fields of the high wold and dip slope. On the deeper soils and river valleys, hedgerows form the main field boundaries.
- Ancient beech hangers line stretches of the upper slopes of the scarp, while oak/ash woodlands are characteristic of the river valleys. Regular blocks of coniferous and mixed plantations are scattered across the open high wold and dip slope.
- Large areas of common land, important for unimproved calcareous grassland, are characteristic of the scarp and high wold around the Stroud valleys and along the crest of the scarp to Cleeve Hill.
- The majority of the principal rivers flow south-eastwards forming the headwaters of the Thames with the exception of rivers in the west which flow into the River Avon and then the Severn Estuary.
- Rich history from Neolithic barrows, iron-age hill forts and Roman roads and villas to deserted medieval villages, grand country houses, cloth mills and Second World War airfields. The field patterns largely reflect both the medieval open field system, with fossilised areas of ridge and furrow, and later planned enclosures.
- Locally quarried limestone brings a harmony to the built environment of scattered villages and drystone walls, giving the area a strong sense of unity for which the Cotswolds are renowned.
- Prominent natural and built features in the landscape include the City of Bath WHS, Brailes Hill, Broadway Tower, Cleeve Hill, the Tyndale monument, Freezing Hill, Kelston Round Hill and Blenheim Palace WHS.
Existing Landscape Character Assessment: Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study

2.3. The most recent assessment of landscape character at a local level is the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, undertaken in 2004.

2.4. This study places the SDA within the Farmland Plateau Landscape Type. This is identified by the following characteristics, again with those relevant to the SDA highlighted in bold text:

- Level or gently rolling open ridges dissected by narrow valleys and broader vales.
- Large, regular arable fields enclosed by low thorn hedges and limestone walls.
- Rectilinear plantations and shelterbelts.
- Sparsely settled landscape with a few nucleated settlements.
- Long, straight roads running along the ridge summits.

2.5. This Landscape Type is subdivided on a more local scale into geographically specific Local Character Areas (LCAs). The site and study area falls with the Chipping Norton LCA, which is defined by the following statement:

"The area is characterised by large, regularly-shaped arable fields, and rectilinear mixed and deciduous plantations and shelterbelts. Thinnly scattered hedgerow trees of oak and ash are also a unifying feature throughout the area, particularly to the east of Great Rollright. Localised pockets of semi-improved grassland, used mainly for pony-grazing, are found near Heythrop, Gaginwell and to the east of Great Rollright. The field boundaries consist mainly of hawthorn hedges and stone walls, with the latter being particularly prominent to the southeast of Chipping Norton. Some species-rich hedges are found around the estate at Glympton. Hedges are generally low and gappy, and stone walls are often in poor condition and overgrown with hawthorn scrub."

Immediate Setting of the Strategic Development Area

2.6. This description should be read in combination with the photographic record at Appendix 1, which was taken from both ground level and at approximately 75m altitude via a camera mounted upon an unmanned aerial vehicle.

2.7. The immediate setting to the east of the SDA strongly reflects the local characteristics, although the dominant land use is pastoral as opposed to the more characteristic arable use. Chipping Norton Golf Course is also located to the east of New Chalford Farm, and does not share a landscape relationship with the SDA.

2.8. The local topography is that of a gently rolling plateau, incised by the River Glyme, which rises at Glyme Farm to the east of the SDA, and its tributaries. Woodland planting is frequent, with most views across the plateau terminating in trees and the SDA screened from most points in the landscape. There are occasional points where wider views of the falling land to the east can be obtained, including to the east of the SDA boundary as illustrated in Photograph 10 at Appendix 1.

2.9. Field boundaries comprise a combination of drystone walls and hedgerows, the latter being in variable condition.
3. RESPONSE TO PROPOSED LANDSCAPE BUFFER

Chipping Norton Sub-Area

3.1. Section 9.4 of the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 covers the strategy for the Chipping Norton Sub-Area. It identifies Chipping Norton as a characteristic, historic and prosperous town sitting high in the landscape above the 185m contour.

3.2. The Sub-Area strategy recognises the requirement of Chipping Norton to grow to serve future needs, and recognises that this growth needs to be in the region of approximately 1,800 dwellings from a range of sources. This requirement for growth is balanced with the recognised value of the Cotswolds AONB landscape to the west of the town, and it is therefore stated that land to the east of the town offers the only opportunity for significant urban expansion.

Land East of Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area

3.3. The Sub-Area strategy proactively addresses this requirement through the allocation of the Land East of Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area (SDA). It anticipates that the SDA can support some 600 new dwellings along with associated employment and infrastructure uses without undue landscape harm, subject to appropriate mitigation. Furthermore, the strategy advocates a landscape-led approach to the siting, layout, mass and scale of the development to demonstrate that no undue landscape and visual harm will be caused.

3.4. The intention for this land to be developed is captured in Policy CN1, which establishes the principle of residential development in this location and sets out a number of requirements to ensure that it makes a positive contribution to the wider town.

3.5. The boundary of the SDA and its relevant designations is presented on Figure 9.12 on page 169 of the emerging Local Plan, and is reproduced at Appendix 2 for convenience.

Landscape Buffer

3.6. Figure 9.12 shows an area occupying approximately one quarter of the southern part of the SDA to be designated as a ‘landscape buffer’, shaded in green, the implication of which is that this part of the site is unsuitable for development on landscape grounds. Its northern boundary bears no relation to physical features on the ground and occupies the lower part of the SDA site, sitting entirely below the 220m contour but with no obvious relation to the contour line.

3.7. This designation on Figure 9.12 is the only reference to a ‘landscape buffer’ within the policy document and no further explanation or definition is given, either to its reason for designation or its level of constraint upon development.

3.8. Policy CN1 makes no reference to this buffer and simply requires “the provision of appropriate landscaping measures to mitigate the potential impact of development”.

3.9. Other area designations shown on Figure 9.12 are the Conservation Area, Cotswolds AONB and Conservation Target Area, which are comprehensively covered in the emerging Local Plan in Policies EH7, OS4 and EH2 respectively.

Local Plan Evidence Base

3.10. As part of the Local Plan evidence base, a Landscape and Visual Review of the SDA site was undertaken by Kirkham Landscape Planning in May 2014.

3.11. This document advocated the restriction of development to the plateau area above the 220m contour, avoiding the steeper slope to the south and east. We understand that this was to maintain the hill top character of Chipping Norton.
3.12. The report also made a number of other recommendations, including a green infrastructure based approach to the masterplanning of the site, the protection of the setting of the Shakespeare’s Way long distance recreational route to the south of the site, the protection of views to the south and east across open countryside, the retention of all existing vegetation and the use of tree belts to connect to local features.

Consultation Response

3.13. Whilst it is acknowledged that Chipping Norton is a hilltop settlement, the delineation of this given within the Sub-Area strategy is the 185m contour, which the SDA site sits well above, even at its lowest point. Indeed, the SDA site will not extend Chipping Norton any further downslope than the existing mid-20th Century development of Cotswold Crescent and adjacent earlier ribbon development along Burford Road i.e. circa 210m AOD.

3.14. As identified within the evidence base Landscape Review and on site, the new residential development upon the former Parker Knoll site is well screened by establishing woodland, as illustrated on Photograph 7 at Appendix 1, and this is an appropriate solution for reducing residential development impacts in this location.

3.15. As indicated on Photographs 5 and 9 at Appendix 1, there is a very well-established hedgerow in the south-eastern part of the SDA site and this provides effective separation with the surrounding landscape, in particular when the SDA site is approached along the Shakespeare’s Way.

3.16. It is therefore our recommendation that the proposed ‘landscape buffer’ be removed from Figure 9.12 and that the small area of land to the south and east of this well-established hedge line be kept free of built development as part of the wider development masterplanning process, subject to subsequent more detailed landscape and visual assessment. To further ensure that impact upon the landscape setting of the SDA site is minimised, we recommend that the green infrastructure network of the proposed development should include a 30-50m width belt of new woodland established along the southern and eastern boundaries of the site. This will provide a characteristic feature which will integrate the proposed development with its landscape setting whilst enabling the desired number of dwellings to be built within the site.

3.17. We agree with the recommendation in the evidence base Landscape Review that a green infrastructure approach should be taken to the design of the site. The development should be permeated with multi-functional green corridors utilising existing features which provide local connectivity, character and structure (including landscape screening) along with natural functions rather than concentrating open space provision in one part of the site resulting in the need to locate additional development space elsewhere in Chipping Norton. This approach will be more likely to meet the requirements of Policy CN1 than a ‘landscape buffer’ occupying the south-eastern part of the site.

3.18. With regard to the management of the rural-urban interface, the creation of a peripheral woodland belt combined with the retention of existing features and the careful landscape-led masterplanning of the site will enable the development to maintain an effective relationship between Chipping Norton and its countryside setting. The use of local building materials in key locations will maintain this characteristic within the landscape, and characteristics such as drystone walling can be reinforced through the treatment of the development edge.
3.19. In terms of the accessibility of the local countryside, the creation of a green infrastructure corridor along the eastern edge of the development, connecting with an effective network through the site will result in an overall improvement of accessibility, in particular connecting the existing public footpath within the site and the development on the former Parker Knoll site with the Shakespeare's Way long distance recreational route.
Appendix 1: Photographic Record

Ref: 15-0042
Aerial photographs taken from unmanned aerial vehicle at 75m altitude

1. View towards site from south-east with Glyme Farm in centre of view.
2. View towards site from north-east with Parker Knoll development to right of view.
3. View towards site from east along River Glyme corridor including characteristic woodland belts.
4. View to north across site from southern boundary.

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Title: Photographic Record (23.04.15)
Client: CALA Homes (Chiltem) Ltd
Reference: 15-0042 v1
Date: 06.05.15
Produced by: Victoria Sherbourne
Checked by: Ian Dudley
Aerial photographs taken from unmanned aerial vehicle at 75m altitude

5. View to south from site with strong south-eastern hedgerow in foreground and proposed buffer area beyond.

6. View to east from site illustrating character of landscape setting and frequency of woodland belts.

7. View to Parker Knoll development from site illustrating edge landscaping.

8. View to south from site illustrating character of landscape setting.
Photographs taken from ground level

9. View towards site from east along Shakespeare's Way with proposed buffer area in centre of view.

10. View to east from site boundary illustrating landscape setting.

11. View to north across site from southern boundary with strong south-eastern hedgerow to right of view.

12. View to north across site from southern boundary illustrating rising topography.