



Matter F: Landscape and Visual Technical Advice Note

Introduction

- F.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design has been requested to provide an addendum to the Landscape and Visual Technical Advice Note (TAN) produced in May 2019, in order to reflect the findings of the various technical studies subsequently procured by the Borough Council.
- F.2 These changes have resulted from the wider project technical design team, including the landscape planning and design team, to inform the refinements to the emerging masterplan. This consultation comprised a landscape-led approach to the masterplan design to ensure that the future Garden Village continues to respond to its landscape setting in a sensitive and positive way and seeks opportunities to protect, restore and enhance the local landscape features as part of an integrated multi-functional green and blue infrastructure network.
- F.3 Key changes to the masterplan from that included within the 2019 Vision Document are as follows:
- Removal of proposed motorway junction (M20) and revised access to be provided with two roads extending south from the A20 resulting from technical advice (RSK Transport and Highways England).
 - Provision of green pedestrian/ cycle route and bus way to Lenham Rail Station.
 - Relocation of the proposed Country Park from the west to the south of the M20/HS1 corridor and connection with circular walks and with new development in the area previously shown as country park.
 - Movement of District Centre north to create a new Town Park to east of Royton Manor
 - Exploration of potential for future development to the north of the mainline railway and south of the A20.

- F.4 This Technical Advice Note (TAN) Addendum addresses the landscape and visual implications of the changes set out above, in particular impacts upon landscape and visual sensitivity and the setting of the AONB and the justification in supporting these proposed changes.

Removal of Proposed Motorway Junction and Revised Access from A20

- F.5 Further to consultation with the borough councils' technical consultants (and Highways England) the proposals no longer presently include a new motorway junction. Access to the Site will, instead, be obtained from two access points from the A20 east and west of New Shelve Farm which extend southwards in a sympathetic topographical alignment flanking and screened/ softened by existing landscape features including hedgerows, tree belts and woodland.
- F.6 The removal of the motorway junction would negate the need for a large physical intervention in the landscape, including bridges, slip roads and associated lighting. Roads extending south from the AONB are characteristic of the area and would not be out of context, being in keeping with the prevailing grain of the landscape. Care would be taken, however, regarding the design of the A20 junctions, particularly in relation to lighting, due to their proposed location on the edge of the AONB, and in terms of any sensitive landscape mitigation required to accommodate them as discreetly as possible into the landscape.
- F.7 The proposed access roads will extend through Kent County Landscape Character Area 6: Hollingbourne Vale, and area described as being "***unusually open***" to the east of Lenham. The landscape character of this area is described as 'poor', due to the extensive loss of landscape features, and the sensitivity is described as 'low', due to few distinguishing features, unremarkable topography, and moderate visibility. This loss of historic landscape features is marked in the area south of New Shelve and Old Shelve Farms, between the A20 and the mainline railway.
- F.8 Within the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment (2013), the proposed access roads would be passing through LCA 17: East Lenham Vale. This assessment assesses the landscape sensitivity as high and as an area which contains open views.
- F.9 The proposed access roads would be routed alongside existing field boundaries, bordered by native hedgerows on both sides with native trees to prevent visual intrusion into the views from the AONB and to restore and enhance the landscape structure within an area that has been subject to the removal of such features.

Moving of Country Park to South of M20/HS1 corridor and Extension of Residential Development to West

- F.10 Due to the removal of the motorway junction from the masterplan design, residential development to the south of the M20/HS1 corridor would result in a fragmented settlement with poor vehicular connection. This area is subsequently less suited for residential development.
- F.11 In addition, although both areas are currently identified in TAN Figure 5: Landscape and Sensitivity Plan as being of medium sensitivity, the land in the west of the Site, previously shown as a Country Park in the 2019 Vision Document, is allocated for minerals extraction. This extraction process will result in the loss of landscape features and integrity, resulting in a landscape of low sensitivity. The logical solution and opportunity that derives from this, therefore, is to place the Country Park on the medium (and thus higher) sensitivity landscape to the south of the motorway and the residential development on the lower sensitivity landscape to the west, thus protecting the existing landscape features south of the M20/HS1 corridor and incorporating them into the integrated green-blue infrastructure along the route of the Great Stour River.
- F.12 This area of development in the west of the Site will bring the Garden Village edge closer to Lenham and strong consideration will be given to the treatment of the western edge of the Garden Village and the physical, visual and perceptual separation from Lenham. This can be achieved through extensive native planting in the west, creating characteristic landscape features, restoring Green Infrastructure in this area and connecting other more isolated landscape features to aid in providing enhanced green corridors for both amenity and habitat enhancement value.

Movement of District Centre North to Create New Town Park East of Royton Manor

- F.13 The area to the east of Royton Manor has been identified as an area of significant archaeological interest. In addition, as shown on the TAN Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan, this area contains a number of footpaths, and provides slightly elevated panoramic views out of the Site towards the AONB to the north and the Greensand Ridge to the south. The creation of a Town Park will protect the archaeological remains, the setting of the footpaths and the views out, providing a strong visual and physical context to the Garden Village whilst connecting into the green and blue infrastructure along the route of the Great Stour River.

Exploration of Area to North of Mainline Railway and South of A20 for Potential Future Development

- F.14 The provision of access from the A20, provides the opportunity to explore the land north of the Mainline Railway for potential future development and landscape restoration. As addressed above, the landscape north of the Mainline Railway and south of the A20 is situated within Kent LCA 6: Hollingbourne East and Maidstone LCA 17: East Lenham Vale (see 2019 LV TAN for more information).
- F.15 The Kent Character Assessment assesses LCA 6 as being of low sensitivity due to the extensive loss of landscape features south of the scarp slope of the Downs. As set out in the 2019 LV TAN, guidance notes for this LCA include the creation of woodland and re-introducing cross-contour shaws to link the existing streams. Analysis of the historic OS maps demonstrates significant loss of landscape infrastructure in the area south of the A20, particularly to the south of Old Shelve and New Shelve Farms.
- F.16 The MBC Character Assessment assessed LCA 17 as being of high sensitivity due to its visual openness. Suggested actions for this LCA include the preservation of the undeveloped foreground of the AONB, the restoration of the historic hedgerow and shaw pattern and the planting of new standard oaks in hedgerows.
- F.17 The two character assessments appear contradictory in their findings but stem from similar issues, i.e. the historic loss of landscape features on the land south of the AONB escarpment. The land south of the Mainline Railway is generally of lower visual sensitivity due to its strong network of landscape features, particularly hedgerows, trees and woodland. Development is visible but is seen set within this strong landscape framework. The landscape to the north of the Mainline Railway is generally more open, with fewer landscape features providing strong infrastructure, due to their historic removal.
- F.18 The North Downs Way/Pilgrims' Way is bordered by vegetation for much of the distance between the War Memorial at Lenham and the settlement at Highbourne, but expansive open views are available from the stretch west of the memorial (see LV TAN Site Photograph 26), to the east of Highbourne (see LV TAN Site Photograph 28) and from the viewpoint at Great Pivington Farm (see LV TAN Photograph 27).

- F.19 Photograph 27 demonstrates how the settlement of Lenham integrates sensitively into the landscape and views, due to careful choice of materials and the setting within a strong landscape infrastructure. Further to the west, the Marley Works site demonstrates how strong landscape infrastructure can make development almost disappear from view. Conversely, Ashford Business Park at the junction of the A20 and the Old Ashford Road, demonstrates how a lack of vegetation can create a visually detracting feature within the landscape.
- F.20 The potential for future development north of the Mainline Railway provides the opportunity for macro-scale landscape restoration, reversing historic landscape decline in this area. The success of development north of the Mainline Railway, therefore, depends on the re-creation of a strong landscape infrastructure, including native hedgerows and trees alongside roads, new areas of woodland and shaws, and the provision of space within the development for canopy trees, and the use of materials and housing styles that respond to the local vernacular in tone and colour. The provision of such a landscape infrastructure would result in the restoration of historic landscape features and the enhancement of local landscape character, whilst preserving the openness of the foot of the North Downs escarpment north of the A20, in line with the Maidstone Landscape Character Assessment.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

- F.21 The landscape led masterplan design has evolved from a robust understanding of the baseline conditions and context of the Site, in particular its landscape and visual context, and opportunities for improved sustainable transport links. The design is arranged around the retention and enhancement of the existing green-blue infrastructure, anchored on the proposed Royton Manor Town Park, the proposed Country Park south of the M20/HS1 corridor, and the route of the Great Stour River. The latter feature has been provided with twice the recommended landscape buffer, providing a linear green park through the development. These areas of green space will connect to the existing right of way network and landscape features, such as areas of woodland in the north and south of the Site and connecting to a new pedestrian /cycle route and bus way to Lenham Station.
- F.22 Any proposed potential development north of the mainline railway line would also be anchored in a robust landscape framework, resulting from the restoration of the historic landscape and the enhancement of local landscape character in line with the published landscape character assessments.

- F.23 The planting of a robust linear tree / woodland belt on an east-west alignment, set at the most topographically elevated point of this area, along the northern edge of such a development together with strategically located additional tree planting flanking the southern side of the A20 would significantly reduce the visual impact from the elevated Pilgrims' Way / North Downs Way and would result in a development characteristic of the locality whilst restoring historic landscape features. Keeping such potential future growth to the south of New Shelve Farm, would enable the protection of the open character of the A20 in this area in line with the published landscape character assessments. It is therefore recommended that such planting be established as early as practicable, to maximise any beneficial effects on views.

Summary and Conclusion

- F.24 The proposed changes to the masterplan layout from those shown in the 2019 Vision Document have been informed by the landscape led approach together with consultation with other professionals and based on a robust understanding of the Site and its context. These changes provide additional opportunities for wholesale landscape restoration and integration, restoring landscape features in an area that has historically seen substantial losses, particularly to the north of the mainline railway, and in the west of the Site, the latter of which will be further degraded through future minerals extraction. These existing and restored landscape features will be integrated into a connected green blue infrastructure network, providing improved opportunities for access and recreation, biodiversity enhancement and visually containing the development whilst anchoring it sympathetically within its landscape context.