

Landscape Report		17th May 2016
From: HCC Landscape Officer, Natural Historic and Built Environment Advisory Team		To: HCC Planning Officer, Spatial Planning
Application No.	8/1254-15	
Location:	Pynesfield, off Tilehouse Lane, Maple Cross, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire	
Proposal:	Application for mineral extraction, processing and importation of sand and gravel and reclamation materials for Denham Park Farm with restoration to agriculture and a small wetland area	

Landscape Policy & Guidelines¹

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF² promotes the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and good design, ensuring that developments respond to local character and are visually attractive as a result of good landscape design.

Minerals Local Plan

Minerals Policy 12 - Landscape

All mineral extraction and related development proposals will be required to take account of existing and, where appropriate, historic landscape character and maintain its distinctiveness. Planning applications may be refused where there is significant local landscape intrusion and loss of important landscapes or distinctive landscape features.

Development proposals will be expected to:

- i. respect landscape character both during operations and in proposals for reclamation;
- ii. ensure that any distinctive landscape features are protected from the impact of development;
- iii. be accompanied by landscape conservation, design and management measures that both strengthen the character and enhance the condition of the landscape.

The County Council will have regard to the visual impact of proposals (including any proposed mitigation measures to minimise visual or other intrusion) on sensitive landuses, including areas of public access.

Particular regard will be had to the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy in assessing proposals.

¹ The policy and guidance listed is not exhaustive, refer to NPPF and relevant Local Plans

² National Planning Policy Framework (7 Requiring Good Design & 11 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment)

Submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) dated April 2012

The following comments are given with reference to the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) dated April 2012. On reviewing the assessment, several limitations have been identified and are summarised below for clarity:

- The assessment has not been carried out in line with current best practice guidance. The assessment was carried out in line with Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 2002 that was superseded in 2013 by the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition.'
- The assessment is based on development within the '*flat low-lying part (of the site) below 40m adjacent to the A412*' (para 7.1). This may be a typing error, however, it should be clarified that the development actually covers the area up to the 45m contour.
- There is no distinction between the landscape/visual effects at each stage of the development lifecycle. Landscape and visual effects as a result of the enabling works stage (access, haulage road and ancillary facilities), the operational stage (extraction/importation activity), and the restoration stage (implementation of landscape strategy) should be assessed separately.
- There is no reference to the cumulative effects of the development in combination with similar development at Denham Park Farm, or HS2.
- The visual baseline does not include a plan clearly showing the 'zone of visual influence' (the area from which the development is potentially visible). This has resulted in the omission of potential views from receptors, for example the property on Chalfont Lane.
- In making judgements there is a lack of clarity and consistency in statements of magnitude/sensitivity that combine to give an overall measure of significance.
- The LVIA is based on a previous scheme that included a power plant. The current proposal does not include a power plant and it is suggested that the omission of this significant industrial element, that is several meters high, is likely to affect the findings of the assessment.

Landscape and Visual Assessment³

Reversibility & Duration

In determining the significance of landscape and visual effects the reversibility and duration of the development is a key consideration.

With regards reversibility, on completion of the development it is proposed to return the site to its original land use as agriculture.

With regards duration, from the submitted 'Revised Development Proposals for Mineral Extraction and Restoration' the actual proposed timescale for the development is not clear, however, it is stated that restoration should be completed by December 2018 for the commencement of HS2.

Based on the above, the reversibility and duration of the proposed development is considered temporary and short term.

Cumulative Effects

The site lies within the 'Maple Cross Slopes' landscape character area⁴ that is under continuing pressure from widespread land use change. In determining the landscape and visual effects of the proposed scheme at Pynesfield, the cumulative effect of the development in conjunction with other development should be considered.

Denham Park Farm

The cumulative effect of the proposed development in combination with the similar existing development at Denham Park Farm is a consideration. (Refer to comments under *landscape effects* and *visual effects*.)

HS2

Where the Local Planning Authority deems that it is 'reasonably foreseeable'⁵ that HS2 will go ahead, then the cumulative effect of the proposed development in combination with the development of HS2 (due to commence in 2018) is a consideration.

The proposed route of HS2 crosses the southern and western corner of the site, the scheme comprises the introduction of a high-speed railway and associated structures, and extensive land-raising restored to 'Country Park'.

HS2 is a significant national infrastructure project that is likely to result in permanent significant landscape and visual effects. HS2 (in combination with the existing M25) is likely to detract from the amenity of views and change the landscape character, to one dominated by linear transport infrastructure.

³ Comments are given in line with current best practice guidance "Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental management and Assessment" (GLVIA3)

⁴ Southern Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment, The Landscape Partnership 2001

⁵ "Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third edition, Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental management and Assessment" (GLVIA3)

Landscape and Visual Effects - Enabling and Operational Stage

The landscape and visual effects of the enabling/operational stage of the development are discussed below and include the following elements:

- **Enabling and Operational Stage**

- Advanced planting*

- Haulage roads and ancillary facilities (office/weighbridge/carpark)*

- Soil screening bunds*

- Subsoil storage areas*

- Extraction / Importation activity (Noise, dust and artificial light)*

Landscape Baseline

The Pynesfield site lies within the 'Maple Cross Slopes' landscape character area as defined within the relevant local Landscape Character Assessment.⁶ The area is described as *'An area of strong east-facing slopes that ease down towards the level valley of the River Colne. A series of dry tributary valleys extend westwards into the plateau area of the Chilterns dip slope. Large open arable fields characterise the area. The impact of 20th-century development at Maple Cross and other adjacent areas is a significant impact on the otherwise open landscape.'*

The area has a weak strength of character and is in poor condition, therefore the strategy for managing change in is to **reconstruct**. In order to achieve this, the following guidelines should help shape the proposed development:

- Promote hedgerow restoration and creation throughout the area to provide visual and ecological links. Pattern to follow minor roads, rights of way, green lanes, county boundaries, e.g. Old Shires Lane, or historic field boundaries
- encourage effective management along transport corridors to ensure thinning, selective felling and replanting is undertaken to achieve a varied age structure and locally indigenous species mix

Landscape effects

The site is well contained within a single field unit, helping to maintain the existing field pattern and sense of scale. The introduction of new planting along field boundaries, highways and public rights of way, should provide a landscape enhancement in the long term.

Despite the above, the proposed development results in negative landscape effects due to the introduction of an intrusive industrial activity into an agricultural landscape. The presence of utilitarian ancillary facilities/haulage roads/contrived storage bunds and extraction/importation activity are in stark contrast to the characteristic landcover of arable fields.

The cumulative effect of the proposed development and the existing similar development at Denham Park Farm results in the more widespread fragmentation of local landscape character.

⁶Southern Hertfordshire, The Landscape Partnership 2001

Visual Baseline

The submitted LVIA does not include a plan showing the 'zone of visual influence'⁷ (ZVI), the area from which the development is potentially visible. The ZVI is an important tool that should help guide the identification of visual receptors and representative viewpoints that require assessment.

Based on a brief survey of the site, the ZVI appears to be relatively well contained by the sloping landform to the north-west, and the existing vegetation associated with Durdent Court to the south. In addition to the viewpoints identified in the submitted LVIA, it is suggested that there are potential viewpoints from the property on Chalfont Lane to the north, and additional views from across the Colne Valley to the east.

Visual effects

Overall views of the site are relatively well contained due to the screening effect of the sloping landform, existing vegetation and proposed screening bunds, with the exception of some short distance elevated views across the site from Tilehouse Lane, some potential medium distance views from the property at Chalfont Lane, and potential longer distance views from across the Colne Valley to the east.

Visual mitigation

With regards visual effects it should be noted that any proposed planting will provide limited visual mitigation in the short term. New hedgerow/tree planting generally takes 3-5 years to become established and provide an effective screen to views. In this case it is proposed to work and restore the site in less than 3 years *before* the planting has time to become established and provide an effective screen.

Rights of Way

The most sensitive views of the development are from users of recreational routes, as their focus is on the enjoyment of the countryside.

From the **bridleway to the north**, views of the site are generally well screened by the sloping valley sides. The bridleway is currently used as a haul route between Denham Park Farm and the A412. It is proposed to use the haul route to transfer restoration materials between Denham Park Farm and Pynesfield. The cumulative effect of lorry movements (up to 200 HGV movements per day), and associated noise/dust/erosion, continues to detract from views and the amenity of the route.

Old Shire Lane is an important historic route; from here views of the development are generally screened by the bunds along the southern site boundary. The opportunity to restore and enhance the vegetation along Old Shire Lane should be taken in order to foreshorten views and improve the amenity of the footpath.

Highways

Tilehouse Lane is considered to be of moderate sensitivity due to its historic rural character, it is also likely to provide a link for walkers/horse riders within the wider network of public of rights of way.

⁷ Area from which the development is visible

From the lane there are clear views into/across the site. Due to the elevated nature of views, the soil screening bunds provide limited visual mitigation.

The **Denham Way A412** is considered to be of low sensitivity due to the transient nature of drivers, passing at speed and focused on the road ahead.

From here views are well screened by the existing roadside vegetation and the screening bunds beyond.

Views from across the Colne Valley to the east

The submitted LVIA acknowledges that there are views from across the Colne valley to the east; however in the absence of a ZVI, and an assessment of any representative viewpoints, it is difficult to establish their significance.

In particular it would be beneficial to understand whether there are any views from along Park Lane, Breakspear Road, Hillingdon National Trail and the area of open access land adjacent to (Mount Pleasant). In particular Hillingdon National Trail and the area of open access land are highly sensitive receptors, due to their recreational function.

Overall, views are likely to be partial, of the western portion of the site, due to the screening effect of the vegetation in the foreground associated with the existing waterbodies.

There are potential viewpoints from which both the Land at Pynesfield and the existing minerals development at Denham Park Farm are visible within a wider panorama of the valley. The sites are highly visible due to the area of exposed ground, contrasting with the muted colours of the surrounding landscape that is characterised by large open arable fields and woodland blocks.

Properties

Views from properties are generally of moderate sensitivity. The proposed development is generally well screened to views from properties in close proximity.

There are potential views from the dwelling on Chalfont Lane, from here there are partial views of the development, as a slither of land between the vegetation along Tilehouse Lane in the mid-distance, rising up to the well wooded horizon of Old Shire Lane.

Landscape and Visual Effects - Restoration stage

Overall the submitted 'Illustrative Restoration Plan' is supported. The restoration and conservation of landcover and vegetation should help strengthen local landscape character and improve condition, providing a landscape enhancement in the long term.

Landform and land use

Restoration to original ground levels is fully supported and reflects the local topography of the sloping valleys side transitioning into the flat valley bottom.

Restoration to agriculture is fully supported and reflects the existing land use. The introduction of a new wetland area is also supported.

Planting strategy

The proposal to remove the main access and restore the hedgerow is supported.

The majority of new planting should take place in advance of the development so that at the restoration stage, it is beginning to become established, this is discussed in more detail below.

Advanced planting

The submitted 'Illustrative Operations Plan' (1022/O/2) indicates new planting at the main access, alongside the A412, and along the majority of Tilehouse Lane. This approach is fully supported in principle, however confirmation is required that this planting will take place in advance of the operational stage of the development.

With regards the new planting along Tilehouse Lane, this should be extended along the entire length of Tilehouse Lane and along Old Shire Lane. Tilehouse Lane and Old Shire Lane are important historic features of this landscape, in line with the guidelines for managing change in this area,⁸ the creation and restoration of hedgerows (hawthorn, hazel and beech) along these routes is a key priority.

Conclusion

Overall the proposed development results in negative landscape and visual effects due to the introduction of further intrusive industrial activity into an agricultural landscape that detracts from the quality of views and amenity of local public rights of way and historic routes in close proximity.

However the significance of this is reduced due to the limited scale of visual effects (relatively well contained ZVI), the short term and temporary nature of the scheme, and the delivery of some landscape enhancements.

In the long term, it is suggested that any negative effects of the scheme are substantially outweighed by the development of HS2 that is likely to result in permanent significant negative landscape and visual effects, changing the character of this area to one dominated by linear transport infrastructure.

⁸ Landscape Character Assessment, Southern Hertfordshire 2001