



WEST OXFORDSHIRE LDF LOCAL PLAN

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL REVIEW OF CHIPPING NORTON STRATEGIC SITE OPTION 204



27 May 2014

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1. Background to Study and Report

- 1.1 This Report is prepared by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd (KLPL) on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council to examine the landscape and visual aspects of options for major development to the east of Chipping Norton (SHLAA site option 204). The Report goes on to make recommendations to WODC on the landscape and visual potential and constraints of the option and on a possible way forward.
- 1.2 This Report draws on earlier landscape character and landscape sensitivity studies undertaken on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council: West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 (WOLA) and the Chipping Norton Landscape Assessment 2009 by Amanda Hopwood Associates (AHLC). Further field studies have been undertaken. Particular attention has been given to the inter-relationship between the landscape hinterland and the settlement and to the degree that the landscape hinterland is representative of the wider landscape within which it lies.

2. Summary of expansion option

- 2.1 Land to the east of Chipping Norton has been identified as a potential strategic development opportunity within the West Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA site 204) (Figure 1F). The site option lies to the immediate east of the town and comprises 38ha. It is mainly open arable land but includes the site of the water tower and the adjacent farm and cottages. The northern boundary of the site option follows the A44 London Road in part and the edge of the Parker Knoll site. The southern boundary follows the footpath to Glyme Farm to the south of which lie the allotments and newly tree planted area off the B4026 Over Norton Road. The outer eastern boundary in part coincides with a 125m wide belt of tree planting; but to the south of this follows a weak boundary or no defined feature.

3. Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 3.1 The site option lies to the immediate east of the boundary of the Cotswolds AONB and therefore within its setting. The Cotswolds AONB adopted its Position Statement: Development in the setting of the Cotswolds AONB in 2013. This document states that: *The Board considers the setting of the Cotswolds AONB to be the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting materials or design can be considered to have an impact, positive or negative, on the landscape, scenic beauty and special qualities of the Cotswolds AONB.*

APPENDIX C: SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE COTSWOLDS (STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE)

The area is a rich mosaic of historical, social, economic, cultural, geological, geomorphological¹³ and ecological features. The special qualities of the Cotswolds which have been identified for the site option land within WOLA and AHLC include:

- *the Cotswold escarpment, including views to and from it;*
- *the high wolds – a large open, elevated landscape with commons, ‘big’ skies and long-distance views;*
- *dry stone walls, which give the AONB its essential character in many areas;*

- *internationally important ancient broadleaved woodland, particularly along the crest of the escarpment;*
- *the tranquillity of the area;*
- *well-managed arable and livestock farms;*
- *distinctive settlements, developed in the Cotswold vernacular, high architectural quality and integrity; and*
- *accessible landscape for quiet recreation.*

4. Brief summary of Local Plan guidance and policy in relation to the settlement expansion at Chipping Norton

- 4.1 The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (adopted June 2006) identifies Chipping Norton as a main service centre and a focus for new housing and employment growth. Unlike Witney and Carterton, the adopted Local Plan does not identify any strategic gaps and buffers around Chipping Norton but the fact that much of the town is covered by the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) serves to limit the potential direction of growth to the east of the town which is outside of the AONB.
- 4.2 The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan continues to focus most new housing and employment development at the District's main service centres including Chipping Norton. Land at Tank Farm, east of Chipping Norton, has been identified as potential site option to help meet the increased housing numbers presented by the new Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Land on the edge of Chipping Norton was considered in both the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998 (WOLA) and the Chipping Norton Landscape Assessment 2009 by Amanda Hopwood Associates (AHLC).

5. Overview of landscape and visual characteristics and sensitivity and guidance from WOLA and AHLC Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs)

- 5.1 The WOLA study was undertaken in 1998 and the AHLC study in 2009. The WOLA and AHLC studies are taken as the starting point for this report and the key landscape characteristics of the area derived from this work. This report uses the 'updated settlement edge areas' identified in AHLC as its reporting units and endorses the boundaries of these areas. However the brief for this report required a review of the landscape sensitivity and importance of the area of the site option.
- 5.2 Historically the provision of new green infrastructure has concentrated on providing landscape buffers to the open countryside which also help to screen the new built form in time. However Government guidance looks for green infrastructure to provide for open space opportunities with a multiple of purposes to serve the community as a whole. Any woodland planting should also conserve and enhance the current landscape character, and not be used solely to screen development.
- 5.3 The site option lies within the WOLA LCA1 Northern valleys and ridges / Open limestone wolds landscape type and the AHLC landscape area E1. AHLC E1 lies at the eastern edge of the town extending southwards from the London Road and A44 in the north to the B4026 in the south and eastwards to the east of North Chalford Farm and Glyme Farm and covers a much larger area than the site option 204 considered in this report.

6. Overview of settlement pattern at Chipping Norton and its landscape hinterland

- 6.1 The current study was not required to undertake a detailed assessment of the settlement pattern but identifies key features that will contribute to a better understanding of the best townscape option for the area.
- 6.2 **Chipping Norton** is a nucleated linear town mainly occupying the valley side on an unusually elevated ridgeline hill terrace/spur. It is located within 183 and 213m AOD on the west facing slopes of the ridge east of the town, with the exception of the Parker Knoll site which lies at 220m AOD. It has a linear historic core with volumes of 20 C housing on the edge of the town, in part spilling onto the hill top. Most of the settlement built form is still set low within the landscape and unobtrusive. The approaches into the town still retain a strong contrast between rural approach and the town character (as found along the A44 and B4026) with the absence of a suburban interface between the two. The form and layout of any new development on the town edge is therefore an important factor in integrating any new development into the town and its landscape setting.
- 6.3 The status of Chipping Norton as a designated service centre lends itself to some further expansion through urban extensions but this places significant pressure on the character of the landscapes that extend from the wider countryside up to the edge of the town. This report has therefore looked at both the impact of development and the potential for integrating new development and new green infrastructure into the town, the surrounding landscape and for enhancing the existing urban-rural edge.

7. Key constraints and opportunities

- 7.1 A number of key factors will determine the best landscape, townscape and visual option for the expansion of Chipping Norton:
- Retention of built form on slopes on the ridgeline and avoidance of any further expansion onto eastern slopes falling to the south-east;
 - Conservation and enhancement of the most sensitive and historically intact areas of open landscape within the existing rural hinterland;
 - Conservation of the continuity of the landscape around the town;
 - Retention of the existing visual envelope of the town as far as possible to the east of Chipping Norton and avoidance of expansion into prominent open fields beyond existing visually strong barriers;
 - Protection of the built form character and separate identity of Chipping Norton;
 - Integration of key areas of green infrastructure into the settlement either as part of the landscape transition zone to the town or as an internal asset forming part of the enhancement of the townscape pattern; and
 - Creation of an opportunity to significantly improve the hard urban edge and meet landscape targets for the area as set out in OWLS, WOLA and AHLC.

8. Assessment of Tank Farm SHLAA Site 204

Overview of site option in relation to landscape and visual assessments

- 8.1 The site lies within the western part of AHLC EI (East of Chipping Norton: Plateau). EI is typical of, but on the eastern edge of, the WOLA LCA1 Northern Valleys and Ridges which extend north and west of Chipping Norton. Most of the Northern Valleys and Ridges lie within the Cotswolds AONB although the site option area is not itself within either this national designation or a local landscape designation. The AHLC identifies EI as having high local landscape/visual importance and sensitivity.
- 8.2 To the east of the site option lies WOLA LCA3 Enstone Uplands from which there are views to the site option area. The open limestone wolds landscape type extends into the Enstone Uplands at this point reflecting the continuity of landscape character east of the town. Visual intrusion arising from large prominent buildings and development on visually exposed elevated landscapes is a key issue.

Table 8.1 below sets out the results of a review of the AHLC assessment of landscape importance and sensitivity in relation to the site option:

Chipping Norton LA	AHLC landscape sensitivity	AHLC landscape importance	2014 conclusions	Reasons
EI	High local landscape/visual sensitivity	High local landscape/visual importance	The landscape of the site option is of medium importance and sensitivity. Visually the site option is of high visual sensitivity as it abuts the AONB and the Conservation Area; lies on the high plateau and east of the ridge east of the town; and part of area is visually well connected to the wider landscape.	The site option is in arable use within large fields. The smaller more sensitive field pattern does not occur within the site option. Only part of the site option (in the east) lies within the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). The site option covers the prominent high ground of the plateau above 220m AOD close to the town and upper sloping ground between 210m and 220m AOD. However layers of vegetation soften the views of the town edge and water tower from the east. The development at Parker Knoll has extended the settlement onto the eastern part of the ridge east of the town centre but the vegetation around the Parker Knoll site is now starting to screen the development so that only roofs are now visible on the skyline. East part of site option has greatest visual connection with the wider landscape to the south and east.

Table 8.2: Assessment of impact on key characteristics of the landscape

Area LA	Key landscape characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
E1 East of Chipping Norton: Plateau (WOLA Northern Valleys and Ridges)	Plateau ridge falling and steepening to south-east	The upper plateau ridge relates best to the town and the Parker Knoll site.	Layers of tree planting and hedgerows are providing existing screening and softening to development on the higher ground including the water tower and Parker Knoll development. There is a potential to add to this landscape asset through new <i>large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland</i> (WOLA guidelines)	Contain development on higher ridgeline plateau
	Arable and some grassland agricultural land with scattered farms	The site option is arable with larger fields. Single farmstead next to the water tower within fields close to the town	Development structure should reflect the field pattern and retain link between farmstead and Conservation Area	Consider through any masterplan
	Large water tower, school, allotments and new development at Parker Knoll on settlement edge	Currently these elements are separated by open fields and treed hedgerows, breaking up the settlement edge. Development would link these elements and potentially create a hard edge to the town	There is scope for the provision of Green Infrastructure including tree planting to be provided to break up the eastern edge of any development and link into the existing woodland to the east of the site option, the allotments and the tree planted area to the east, the school grounds and tree lined approach to Chipping Norton.	Consider through any landscape masterplan
	Poor hedges in part. Newly planted plantations. Maturing trees and hedgerows	The development layout should allow for retention and enhancement of these existing landscape features	Existing features reinforced with adjacent open space	Consider through any landscape masterplan
	Regular parliamentary enclosure in large field pattern on higher ground	Development could reflect the field pattern	Landscape structure should reflect the field pattern	Consider through any masterplan
	Open and exposed higher ground with more enclosed lower levels	Open and exposed character of the higher ground may result in intrusive built form on the settlement edge. More enclosed lower levels have a good sense of continuity with the wider landscape	This will necessitate constraints on the built form to allow for tree planting to break up the mass and scale of any development.	Limit and vary height of development on the higher plateau.
	Good public rights of way links	Two PROWs affected by site option but these could be incorporated into landscape corridors	Create undeveloped buffer along footpath along southern edge to retain its rural character	Consider through any landscape masterplan

Table 8.3: Assessment of visual impact on key views and visual qualities

Area LA	Key visual characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
E1 East of Chipping Norton: Plateau (WOLA Northern Valleys and Ridges)	High level of intervisibility with the south and east. Higher ground forms skyline	Development on the skyline will be visible with built form forming the edge of the settlement.	Parker Knoll development is now better screened since the AHLC 2009 study but demonstrates the importance of good tree cover close to the built form on the higher ground	Detailed design of roofline to avoid breaking the tree skyline. Major tree planting in layers to provide long term screening and softening.
	Strong connection with rolling landscape to south	The south-eastern part of the site option has strong landscape and visual connections with the landscape to the south	Any landscape mitigation needs to be sited on higher ground	Omit south-eastern part of the site option from developable area and retain as open fields
	Long views south	Any development on the site option would curtail views south from within the site or the existing settlement edge. Long views south can be designed into the layout. Views from the footpath to Glyme Farm would not be affected	The need to screen and soften the settlement/development edge will obscure some views south from the site option. Long views south along open space can be designed into the scheme	Consider through any landscape masterplan
	Majority of town not visible except Parker Knoll development	Development on the site option will inevitably increase the prominence of the town in views from the east. The visual impact of the Parker Knoll development would become the norm, rather than the exception.	This impact can be partly mitigated in the medium to long term through substantive woodland and tree planting to screen the edge and break up the built form	Major provision of green Infrastructure and landscape structure planting and open space. Detailed design of built form is a key factor
	Water tower forms landmark	Development would lie below the water tower (if it is to be retained within the scheme)	X	Detailed design of height of built form to retain water tower as a landmark

Table 8.4: Assessment of contribution to local townscape and settlement pattern

Area LA	Key settlement characteristics	Comment on Option	Comments on landscape mitigation	Action recommended
E1 East of Chipping Norton: Plateau (WOLA Northern Valleys and Ridges)	Linear settlement along plateau ridgeline	Much of the site option is on the ridge and would reflect the northeast-southwest orientation of the town. The extension of the settlement off the plateau and to the east to be carefully controlled	Landscape mitigation to reflect this NE-SW alignment	Reinforce NE-SW alignment and reduce extension eastwards
	Small 20 th century estates on eastern edge	No conflict with historic core. Need to avoid overwhelming the settlement pattern with extensive generic development	Maintain separation of existing built form through retention of existing vegetation	Character led approach to sub-division of the site into smaller land parcels
	Weak landscape edge to town	Although the development would increase the prominence of the urban edge, there is an opportunity to provide a much stronger landscape eastern edge to the town	Potential to provide a much stronger eastern landscape edge	Provide major woodland and tree planting to edge
	Low small scale built form	Need to avoid built form above 2.5 storeys high and to reflect smaller pattern of development	Use to subdivide site option into smaller land parcels	Character led approach to sub-division of the site into smaller land parcels. Limit height and mass of built form to retain character of settlement edge

Assessment of potential benefit of landscape mitigation and contribution to Green Infrastructure at Chipping Norton

8.3 At present the site contributes to the rural landscape setting of Chipping Norton. An acceptable form of development on this site option has the potential to provide a landscape structure which would link into the woodland belts to the east of the site option and next to the allotments; to reflect the distinctive landscape pattern along the A44 and the existing settlement edge; and to deliver some of the landscape and visual objectives identified in WOLA and AHLC.

Conclusion and recommendations

8.4 The site option lies within AHLC character area E1. This area has been identified by AHLC as being of high landscape and visual sensitivity and importance with the potential for a very limited area of development west of the water tower. The proposed site option is in a sensitive landscape

and visual location within EI and will inevitably lead to an adverse landscape and visual impact on the perception of the eastern edge of the town, and extend the town beyond its current containment by the ridgeline. However the town is severely constrained in the opportunities for urban expansion by the AONB on its northern, western and southern edges, and by more exposed landscape parts of the setting of the AONB as in the south. The presence of the Parker Knoll site housing scheme has already consolidated the town's footprint onto the plateau to the east. However, the recommended reduced site option would extend the urban fabric further east along London Road although it would be contained by the 125m wide new woodland belt to the east. A landscape led approach to the siting, layout and mass and scale of the development is therefore essential. Figure 2F shows the recommended reduced area of the site option to avoid over-riding landscape and visual constraints to development. If development were to be allocated to this site, it is essential that this pattern is conserved and protected from adverse impact from local development. The need to protect and enhance the key landscape, visual and settlement characteristics of this area must lead to a restriction on the extent of the development.

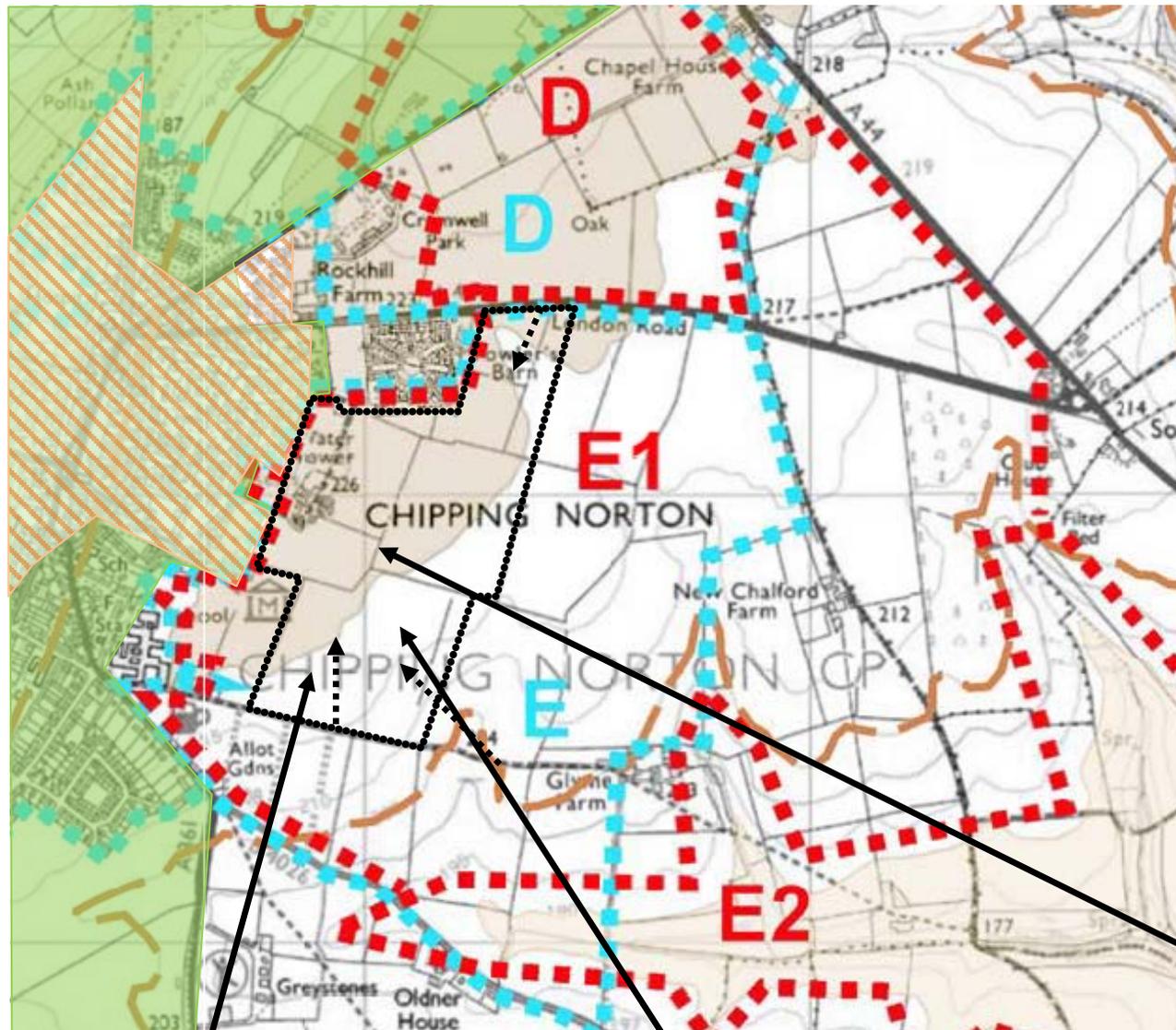
- 8.5 There is little merit in substantially reducing the area within the site option to small pockets (with the exception of the land west of the water tower which is less visually sensitive), as development of any part of the plateau will result in an adverse impact on the wider landscape, as observed at the Parker Knoll site, and a comprehensive scheme is more likely to deliver the substantive Green Infrastructure required to mitigate the impact of development on the plateau.
- 8.6 The setting of the AONB in the vicinity of the western boundary of the site option is already urban and characterised by 20th century development. The southern boundary of the site option is separated from the AONB by the allotments and tree planted area but there is intervisibility between the site option and footpath and the open landscape east of the AONB to the south. The effect on the AONB should therefore be low, provided the recommendations below for the provision of boundary and internal Green Infrastructure are included in any development proposal.
- 8.7 It is recommended from a landscape perspective that if the Chipping Norton site option is pursued further, revisions will be needed to the extent of development and a comprehensive Green Infrastructure masterplan prepared for the site. The number of potential dwellings will however need to be reduced in order to protect important landscape, visual and townscape features of the area.
- Open land in the south-east of the site to be excluded from the site option;
 - Remainder of site option area will occupy some exposed areas on the skyline. Development area must therefore be broken up by a large scale provision of open space, tree and woodland planting;
 - Retain all existing mature tree, hedgerow and scrub cover to provide basic structure for landscape mitigation;
 - Link a major tree belt / woodland planting (minimum 30m wide) along the plateau edge of the 220m contour east of the water tower and school (as shown in Figure 2F) connecting into the existing woodland east of the site option and tree planting around the school. Provide as advanced planting;
 - Provide additional 10m wide tree belts and open space with trees between the settlement edge and plateau edge planting and the settlement linking the hedgerows and tree cover around Parker Knoll development, along the settlement edge, around the water tower and the school;
 - Reflect existing relationship between built form and road verge along A44 London Road and retain avenue of trees along A44 London Road;
 - Create tree avenue approach into development off A44 London Road as an extension of tree planting pattern along the main road;

- Protect rural character of approach along PROW to Glyme Farm;
- No vehicular access off PROW to Glyme Farm or Conservation Area but provide good well landscaped pedestrian and cycle links to both;
- Possible secondary vehicular access via Trinity Road, avoiding creation of views of large scale of development from London Road;
- Detailed design of the landscape setting to each vehicular and pedestrian/cycle access and the existing road corridor should reflect the different character of each vehicular or pedestrian approach to Chipping Norton with particular attention to retaining the rural character of the footpath to Glyme Farm;
- Provide major contribution to the landscape and visual objectives for this area as set out in OWLS, WOLA and AHLC; and
- Design and layout of the development should avoid uniformity and reflect the small scale character of the town in a well treed historic pattern.

9. Summary of Recommendations: Chipping Norton

Site	Location	Potential housing no.s	AHLC Area	Key constraints to development	Recommendation as shown in Figure 2F	Estimated housing capacity
Tank Farm (SHLAA 204)	Land east of Chipping Norton	700 - 900	Chipping Norton EI	Within setting of Cotswold AONB Adjacent to Conservation Area Part of wider landscape east of the town	Reduced area for development with area in the south-east of the site option excluded	500

** Estimated numbers are based on reduced site area, open space requirements and potential range of housing density. Final numbers will depend on more detailed assessments, housing needs, requirements for Green Infrastructure and an appropriate built form for each area in keeping with the local character.



KEY

-  AHLC LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AREAS 2009
-  WOLA LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AREAS 1998
-  CONSERVATION AREA (INDICATIVE)
-  COTSWOLDS AONB (INDICATIVE)
-  INDICATIVE KEY LONG DISTANT VIEWS TO CHIPPING NORTON
-  KEY MIDDLE DISTANT VIEWS TO CHIPPING NORTON
-  SITE OPTION 204

FIGURE 1F: CHIPPING NORTON

PLAN SHOWING KEY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL CONSTRAINTS ON SITE OPTION

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