

20/01788/FUL - 350 houses - Land at Shurdington Road Cheltenham

Review of further landscape material

Purpose of note

To provide a professional review of the further landscape elements of the proposal by Miller Homes to build 350 houses on land off Shurdington Road in Cheltenham. The note is intended to inform the determination of the planning application by Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) as they consider the proposals against their landscape planning policies.

Author of note

The note has been prepared by Stuart Ryder of Ryder Landscape Consultants who commented on the initial submission material.

Scope of note

The note considers the six further landscape submissions provided predominately by Hankinson Duckett Associates (HDA) on behalf of the Applicant. They are listed out as provided to CBC initially on the 16/4/21 and then again on the 18/8/21.

This second note should be read in combination with the first for context.

Each of the further documents are considered in turn before a summary section draws the substantive elements together and draws conclusion on compliance with landscape orientated planning policy. Conditions are highlighted in blue in the text as per the first consultation note.

My consideration of the documents was greatly assisted by being able to discuss them with Brian Duckett in advance of their review in an extended phone call on the 5th November, 2021 for which I am grateful.

Ref	Documents considered
-	Appendix 1 – Consultee Comments Tracker – 18.08.21.
1	HDA Response to PC consultation response
2	HDA response to Ryder Landscape Consultation Comments – 16.04.21
3	R2 and R3 Location Plan
4	Green Infrastructure Strategy – 10.06.21
5	Shurdington Road POS Schedule 06.10.21

Appendix 1 – Consultee Comments Tracker – 18.08.21

I found this to be a fair summary of the points made in the first extensive landscape consultation response. The summarised landscape topic areas that the Applicant’s planning advisor’s identified were set against three of the submitted documents – LVIA, Landscape Planning and Green

Infrastructure Strategy. However my remarks on the other six documents reviewed do not appear on this abbreviated summary.

With regard to the LVIA it basically directs all response to the submitted document 2. HDA response to Ryder Landscape Consultation Comments submitted on 23.4.21.

It is noted that in the RAG tracker that the landscape topic is given a green status colouring but no explanation of this traffic light system is given.

2 HDA Response to PC consultation response

PC in this regard stands for Parish Council and the note presents a detailed review of previous comments on the area made by Planning Inspectors either involved in Appeals or in reviewing the Cheltenham Local Plan.

It also identifies that the Applicant is willing to work with the Parish Council to arrive at a solution for areas R2 and R3 that is satisfactory to all parties.

Having visited the area for a number of years I would suggest the new housing area in whatever form it is consented is better served by the proposed allotments and informal open space/community orchard rather than a continuation of a reduced area of small-holdings.

The reason for this opinion are threefold;

1. The 'interesting' character of the small-holdings to me related to its wider extent which was in contrast to the surrounding suburban form. This interesting character has declined over recent years which is understandable given uncertainty about their ongoing future and retaining a reduced area would not preserve this wider character but possibly look as an oddity in its new setting.
2. The buffer function between the built form of the new houses and Lotts Meadow that the R2 and R3 spaces provide are fundamentally the same whether the land is put to small holdings or to the allotment and informal open space as per the application proposals.
3. The recreation and access opportunities that the allotments and informal open space provide for the new home owners and existing residents in the area is greater than the recreation value offered up to the fewer number of people renting the new small holdings.

Whatever land use are finally settled upon for R2 and R3 they must be put into an active landscape maintenance and management plan. Existing landscape assets such as trees and hedgerows must be brought back into more active management and new soft landscape needs establishment care and longer term aftercare so it achieves its end design goals. Likewise new hard landscaping through the area will need ongoing management and repair within a resourced and accountable structure.

I would support the Parish Council's comment about further tall trees in the boundary hedge to the north end of R2 for the benefit of creating a local setting to the development and in building up layers of vegetation to aid screening locally and forming a setting when viewed from the elevated part of AONB. These trees should be large native species and foundations of nearby houses should be designed in such a way that larger species can be accommodated in the hedge.

2. HDA response to Ryder Landscape Consultation Comments

The document responds to the points made in the first landscape consultation response across four pages of text. It relies at certain points that the application document is a Landscape and Visual

Appraisal (LVA) rather than a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to explain why cumulative effects have not been considered. It is not mandatory to avoid discussion of cumulative effects in LVA and this I think would still benefit the assessment of change and ultimately the response to the other development consented to proceed in the Shurdington Road area.

Brian Duckett in our conversation was keen to learn whether the LVA was considered reasonable in its review of any landscape effects on the AONB, particularly on views from Leckhampton Hill. I think these have been assessed fairly and as debated at Inquiries and summarised by different Planning Inspectors the landscape and visual effects on the AONB are deemed acceptable.

The local landscape change considers three HDA defined character area or CA's. CA1 is effectively the Site area, CA2 Lotts Meadow and CA3 the land to the north of the now consented secondary school running up to the AON boundary.

The LVA Conclusions on landscape character change are presented in §7.8 and §7.10. I do not agree that the landscape character change at CA1 will only be Minor given the scale of development and obvious change in land use. Ultimately the developed area will assimilate into the urban character of this part of Leckhampton but classing the change as a Minor effect under values it, it will be Moderate at least and the type of effect will be Adverse which the LVA does not clearly state. This landscape effect is inevitable as a result of development and I know was taken into account when the area was allocated under MD4.

Landscape effect of the development on the nearby CA2 I consider to be Minor and on CA3 Minor/Negligible. The landscape character of these two other areas are more affected by the Berry's Nursery (Kidnappers Lane) and Secondary School development respectively than the Miller Homes development.

From the LVA conclusions I agree that the majority of quality trees and hedgerows have been retained as landscape features and the most of the two brooks that cross the Site have been made as Green Infrastructure associated with the scheme.

With regard to visual effects the LVA reports minimal effects from the south, east and west and concentrates on the western end of Shurdington Road that would have open views to the development. At 7.10.5 it assesses that this effect is 'no more than Minor' after 10 years, this conclusion draws upon commentary at 7.9.2 that discusses the view from Shurdington Road. This paragraph states that views through the development to the Cotswold Escarpment will be retained.

This matter of a view through the development from Shurdington Road was discussed between Brian Duckett and Stuart Ryder and it was described by the former as occurring along Hatherley Brook. This is different to the identified view to Leckhampton Hill that was debated at Inquiry which was going to be through the blocks of the now removed local service centre of the larger scheme. The view along Hatherley Brook given its alignment will be more readily visible for people leaving Cheltenham rather than those entering it as occurs at the moment. This may seem a minor matter but there is a sense of an opportunity lost, particularly when coupled with the design layout comments on the Shurdington Road frontage.

To my knowledge the schedule of comments have been responded to but the LVA itself has not been updated. Should you wish it to be updated for checking of future effects or use through the review of the detail design submissions then you may wish to bring this to the attention of the Applicant.

3 R2 and R3 Location Plan

This plan is useful to locate the position of R2 and R3 and appears to have been produced by the Parish Council as part of its analysis of land for inclusion in the Local Green Space designation.

It is interesting to note that it identifies the view to Leckhampton Hill from Shurdington Road further to the west nearer the Kidnappers Lane junction as experienced today. It does not currently show one along Hatherley Brook.

4 Green Infrastructure Strategy

This document appears to be the same revision as I reviewed as Document 8 in my previous consultation response and I refer back to those more detailed remarks. I add some additional comments on street trees and the Shurdington Road frontage / entrance.

Street Trees


Since my initial comments in February 2021 the NPPF has been updated with a stronger requirement for tree planting in urban streets for a range of benefits in the current June 2021 version. The initial proposals showed some planting but not necessarily extensive. Brian Duckett has advised me that it is a matter the Applicant's Masterplanning team is aware of and a review of the current masterplan is underway.

The reason why the street trees are particularly important in this set of proposals is that the style of housing layout is such that there are limited front garden spaces in the dense arrangement of properties. Given the lack of open green space within the housing public realm e.g. verges or street ends the trees will likely be placed under water and root oxygen stress. The detailing of the trees' planting pits is critical to their chance of long-term survival and their sub-service detailing should be conditioned and developed to the satisfaction of Gloucestershire Highways Authority. Likewise their above ground growing space should be such that they do not cause nuisance to the owners of the new properties. The tree pit planting detail should be specifically conditioned to reflect its importance.

Likewise the actual trees themselves on planting should be the beneficiaries of Tree Preservation Orders. At planting they may not have the obvious amenity value to justify TPO's as applied to older trees but it is their potential that requires protection. It will also place a duty on the long-term managers of the development to replace any dead, diseased or dying stock so the vital street trees are not lost through wilful or accidental damage.

Shurdington Road Frontage

The amount of space, style of planting and the design layout at the roundabout entrance to the development was highlighted in my previous note, it was also the subject of discussion with Brian Duckett. A digital extract from the GI Strategy's Fig 7 – Green Infrastructure Opportunities is presented overleaf. It includes the descriptive box and the extent of the Shurdington Road frontage.



The existing boundary to Shurdington Road is poor in terms of landscape and ecological value. Development provides an opportunity to improve this edge and relate it to residential development to the north of Shurdington Road. Lengths of defunct species poor hedgerow would be removed. To the north east edge of the open space is a line of ash and field maple trees along the Shurdington Road. These would be retained. New tree planting is proposed for Shurdington Road to create a green leafy edge. The road would be fronted by a new urban open space and residential development, set back from the road where appropriate.

There appears to be a general lack of space to create any meaningful road corridor enhancement along Shurdington Road. It is agreed that the view up Hatherley Brook will appear as attractive open space from Shurdington Road but this quality does not seem to extend from west the brook to the entrance roundabout and beyond to the existing Kidnappers Lane properties. Likewise at the roundabout entrance into the estate there appears to be little space, or modification to the building layout to emphasise its importance as the gateway into a new neighbourhood. It is recommended that this section of the scheme that acts as both a frontage to the estate and as a key arrival point into Cheltenham is re-designed to form a more appropriate layout.

Should you choose to seek re-design of the entrance area this may allow the opportunity to create a more distinct view to Leckhampton Hill to be formed from Shurdington Road nearer to the existing viewpoint that people travelling both ways along Shurdington Road will be able to see.

6 Shurdington Road POS Schedule 06.10.21

I have no reason to question or challenge the POS figures which indicate compliance with the CBC Toolkit for open space provision in new developments.

As mentioned in my first comments it would be interesting to see what the level of open space is without the 'blue infrastructure' of the SuDS basins and two brooks within the calculations. I suspect that the POS requirements will still be exceeded but perhaps not to the same greater amount.

Other comments

In my previous consultation remarks I identified a list of seven points in my review that had flowed from the Indicative Landscape Strategy, they are repeated below with any updates comments placed in italics under each point.

1. The treatment of the Shurdington Road corridor so a positive image of the development can be presented and a key route into Cheltenham kept attractive – *Commented on again above.*

2. The creation of some form of entrance character other than the highway geometry of the entrance roundabout – *Commented on again above.*
3. There is limited tree planting within the estate. This is particularly important given the lack of front gardens or size of front gardens effectively preventing any garden planting. The street trees as shown require space to succeed and a careful design and installation to provide adequate soil volumes for growth, water / drainage balance / permeable surfacing / vehicle protection. I would recommend a specific condition requiring full details of street tree planting are submitted at the same time as the highway proposals. Within the Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP) their establishment care and aftercare should be explicitly stated. The success of their establishment should be reported on annually and replacement of failed stock also take place annually – *Commented on again above.*
4. Given the lack of green space to the front of properties tree planting should be provided in the rear gardens to provide some shade / transpiration and general visual amenity benefit – *Suggest dealing with via detail design and landscape condition.*
5. Benches are indicated in some communal areas. These and all other street furniture that are not included in the proposals should be conditioned and details of such things as benches' hard standing, maintenance access for emptying bins / dog bins, vehicle gates and barriers shall be supplied along with a maintenance strategy - *Suggest dealing with via detail design and landscape condition.*
6. The view to Leckhampton Hill from Shurdington Road does not appear to have informed the landscape response or the wider layout of the proposals. Could the applicant be asked to explain how they have addressed this matter? - *Commented on again above.*
7. Lack of landscape maintenance and management details whether in the form of a specific Landscape Maintenance and Management Plan (LMMP) or included in a combined Landscape and Environmental Management Plan (LEMP). This should be conditioned and be submitted at the same time as the detailed landscape proposals as pre-commencement conditions - *Suggest dealing with via detail design and landscape condition.*

Summary

The following substantive points have been defined in this note;

- A. That areas R2 and R3 would be better as allotments, informal open space and orchard compared to small holdings.
- B. With regard to the LVA there is agreement that landscape and visuals effects on the Cotswolds AONB are Minor;
- C. There is not agreement that the landscape effects on the Site would be Minor as stated by the LVA given their scale and change of land use, at least Moderate, Adverse is more realistic. However this is an inevitable change as a result of the proposed development and has been considered in the identification and subsequent allocation of the Site as part of MD4.
- D. Landscape change for HDA Areas CA 2 & CA3 are considered as reasonable descriptions.
- E. It is agreed that visual effects of the proposals from the east, south and west are as anticipated in the LVA.

- F. The view from the north is considered to need further consideration with regards to the impact on the view to Leckhampton Hill from Shurdington Road, a clarification note may assist rather than a further revision of the LVA.
- G. The importance of street trees in the dense layout has been further elevated by their explicit reference in the new NPPF and it is suggested that given this importance they are subject to TPO's from the point of planting.
- H. The design of the Shurdington Road frontage (other than the open space around Hatherley Brook) still gives cause for concern with apparent limited space for corridor improvement, or altered building arrangements to emphasise the entrance to the development.

Landscape orientated planning policies

JCS SD4 – Design Requirements

My comments with regards to the Shurdington Road corridor may be interpreted as part conflict with parts ii. Legibility & Identity and iv. Public Realm & Landscape.

JCS SD6 – Landscape

Compliance.

JCS SD7 – Cotswolds AONB

Compliance

Cheltenham Plan L1 – Landscape & Setting

Comment on the ability to see Leckhampton Hill from Shurdington Road could be interpreted as potential conflict with this policy.

Suggested Planning Conditions

Should you be minded to grant planning permission for this scheme in its current form the following is a list of suggested landscape planning conditions aimed at delivering and then managing a successful landscape and external realm scheme.

- I. Standard landscape condition related to provision of hard and soft landscape proposals as detailed design proposals at a suitable scale to be discernible with planting schedules and schedules of hard materials, boundary types and street furniture.
- II. Standard landscape condition for a defect's correction period of five years with an annual gapping up of failed stock within the first five years.
- III. Standard Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan to confirm the proposed management objectives, maintenance activities to achieve the objectives and mechanism for delivering the maintenance in perpetuity.
- IV. Provision of detailed design, maintenance and inspection regime proposals for all areas of children's play whether they are 'natural' or 'formal' in terms of equipment provided.
- V. In the interest of visual amenity provision of detailed design proposals for street trees planting pits to satisfy both the long term health of the tree and usage of the streets as adoptable highways.
- VI. Not a condition but confirmation of the suggestion to place a TPO on the newly planted trees to ensure their long term survival and when necessary replacement within the streetscene.