

Land at Slate Hall Industrial Estate
ERA – Henry Property Account
March 2025



VISUAL APPRAISAL LAND AT SLATE HALL INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, LOLWORTH



Quality Assurance

Site name: Land at Slate Hall Industrial Estate, Lolworth

Client name: ERA – Henry Property Account

Type of report: Landscape & Visual Appraisal



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1.0 Introduction

1.1.1 This Visual Appraisal (VA) has been prepared on behalf of ERA – Henry Property Account to inform the development strategy for, and the potential effects of, the proposed development on the parcel of Land at Slate Hall Industrial Estate (the Site).

1.1.2 The aim of the appraisal is to:

- Assess the visual baseline conditions, including relevant planning policy, designations, key characteristics, important views and potential visual receptors;
- Assess the visual sensitivity to inform the development of a masterplan strategy;
- To make a qualitative assessment of the potential visual effects arising from the proposed development; and
- Make recommendations to avoid or mitigate potential adverse visual effects and inform ongoing refinement of the design proposals.

1.2 The Site

1.2.1 The Site is just off the east-bound carriageway of the A14 road approximately 10km north-west of central Cambridge and is currently occupied by an industrial estate. There are a number of steel and timber clad buildings on the Site but a proportion of the Site is also used for the storage of vehicles including heavy-goods vehicles. There is also a tall concrete grain silo on the Site.

1.2.2 The Site is mostly surrounded by agricultural land, though this is also a patch of woodland to the immediate south.

1.3 The Proposal

1.3.1 The proposal is for the demolition of the existing light industrial and agricultural buildings and the construction of a business park comprised of two storey buildings, providing a total of approximately 5500 sqm of commercial space, and associated parking and landscaping.

1.3.2 The proposal would have a primary road running from south-west to north-east through the Site. To the north-west of this road would be three single-storey industrial units and to the south-east of it there will be eight two-storey units. The units will range in size from 150 sqm to 950 sqm in footprint; there will be a mixture of car parking and landscaping between the units. The northern corner of the Site will have a lake and denser planting. Further details are given in Appendix 2

2.0 Appraisal Methodology

- 2.1.1 It is proposed qualitative visual appraisal (VA) of the key issues will be completed to inform the development proposals. Therefore, it should be noted that while relevant guidance is followed to define the applied parameters, the VA does not include judgement on the significance of visual effects.
- 2.1.2 The appraisal takes into account current best practice guidance, namely:
- 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal', (GLVIA3) produced by the Landscape Institute with the Institute of Environmental Management and Appraisal (Third Edition, 2013);
 - 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals'. Technical Guidance Note 06/19, by the Landscape Institute;
- 2.1.3 Visual effects relate to specific changes in views and the effects on visual receptors (e.g. residents, users of public rights of way or recreational facilities). Changes to the visual setting of protected cultural or heritage features are also considered (e.g. Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas). However, the assessment of the significance of the heritage assets is not within the scope of the VA.
- 2.1.4 This VA will consider the Site and study area as shown in Map 01, Appendix 1.
- 2.1.5 The appraisal starts with the definition of the visual baselines which identifies key characteristics and constraints relating to the Site and its context. The baseline studies include landscape designations, published landscape character assessments, field observation (undertaken in February 2023) and representative viewpoints. The planning policy context is also taken into consideration in relation to the identified distinctive qualities at a local scale.
- 2.1.6 The baseline findings provide the basis for understanding the value in visual terms of the receptors that will be affected by the proposed development. This is combined with the susceptibility to change to establish the relative sensitivities.
- 2.1.7 Visual sensitivity is described using a scale from low to high which reflects the following parameters.
- 2.1.8 Visual sensitivity:
- Low Sensitivity – the view is of limited value, with low aesthetic qualities and detracting elements; the receptors are engaging in activities that would not involve or are not dependant on the appreciation of views of the surrounding landscape, therefore susceptibility to change is low.
 - Medium Sensitivity – the view is valued at local level and reasonably attractive, but otherwise unremarkable with some detracting features; the receptors are engaging with activities where appreciation of the contextual landscape is not the primary focus (i.e. cyclists on roads or travellers on rail) but it contributes to the setting of the route. In residential visual amenity terms, it is a secondary/periphery view.
 - High Sensitivity – the view is valued for its high scenic qualities and/or protected by planning designations, it is a distinctive view, visually intact and coherent with no detracting/deteriorating features; the receptors are engaging in activities where awareness of the contextual landscape is likely to be high (i.e. ramblers on public footpaths). In residential amenity terms, it is a primary/main view.
- 2.1.9 An appraisal of the visual effects will be carried out for relevant visual receptors. The appraisal considers a Year 1 scenario, assuming the Site is developed in accordance with the submitted proposal plans, and a Year 15 scenario assuming a typical growth of the proposed landscape strategy.

2.2 Study Area

- 2.2.1 The Site is located within an open landscape with little vegetative cover or topography change. The ZTV suggest that visibility of the proposal will interest a wide context. However, there are limited opportunity for public access within the Site's context. Therefore, a study area for visible effects of 1.5km is considered appropriate.

2.3 Desk-Based Study

Information for the LVA was gathered from the following sources:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2021;
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, September 2018;
- South Cambridgeshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2010)
- National Character Area (NCA) Profile 88
- Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment (2021)
- The Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database;
- Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 scale site-centred digital raster map; and
- Aerial photography: Google Maps (<http://maps.google.co.uk/>).

2.4 Field Study

A field survey was undertaken in February 2023 to assess:

- Landscape characteristics;
- Views of the Site from the surrounding areas;
- The location of visual receptors; and
- The potential visual effects arising from the proposed development.

The survey was generally undertaken from publicly accessible locations such as roads, bridleways, tracks, footpaths and public open spaces.

3.0 Planning Context

3.1 National Planning Framework

- 3.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the overall economic, social and environmental objectives that the planning system should follow to achieve sustainable development. At the heart of the NPPF is a '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*' (Par. 10). More specifically, the NPPF policies relevant to the Site and proposed development are detailed below.
- 3.1.2 The NPPF requires care of the public rights of way setting and strategic vision. Par. 98 states that '*planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails*'.
- 3.1.3 The framework stresses the importance of high quality design. It states that efficient use of land should take into account '*the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy spaces*' (Par. 122). Par. 124 adds that '*good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities*.' Good architecture and master planning need to be supported by '*appropriate and effective landscaping*' (Par. 137) to enhance and promote a strong sense of place.
- 3.1.4 It is noted that the new NPPF doesn't clearly define what constitutes a 'valued landscape'. Useful in the NPPF 2018 revision is the update to Par. 11 which provides some additional guidance through footnote 6. This defines, more thoroughly than before, '*areas or assets of particular importance*' as: '*habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 176) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 63); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change*.' However, for the purposes of this LVA, it is believed that the 'Stroud DC v Gladman high court judgement (reference CO/4082/2014) is still appropriate and valid, therefore, to be valued in terms of the NPPF would require the landscape to show "*some demonstrable physical attribute rather than just popularity*" i.e. it has to be 'out of the ordinary', as well as the recent Landscape Institute guidance TGN 02/21.

3.2 Local Planning Framework

- 3.2.1 The Site falls within the administrative area of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) where planning decisions are regulated by the adopted Development Plan, which includes a number of documents and planning policies relevant to the landscape and visual assessment.
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, South Cambridgeshire District Council, (September 2018)**
- **Policy S/2: Objectives of the Local Plan**
- 3.2.2 This policy sets out the strategic objectives of the local plan, setting out six key objectives to guide development within the district. Objectives include the protection of '*the character of South Cambridgeshire, including its built and natural heritage*'.
- **Policy HQ/1: Design Principles**
- 3.2.3 This policy is prefaced with the acknowledgement that settlements within the district vary in character. '*All new development will have an impact on its surroundings. Development needs to be of an appropriate scale, design and materials for its location and conform to the design principles set out in the policy*'.
- 3.2.4 '*Any development must also take proper care to respond to its surroundings, and create sustainable, inclusive and healthy environments where people would wish to live, work, shop, study or spend their leisure time*'. In order to achieve such design quality, the policy lists fundamental design principles which include protection and enhancement of natural and historic

assets, as well as conserving the countryside and open spaces, referring to the District Design Guide SPD and village design guides where appropriate.

- **Policy NH/2: Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character**

3.2.5 This policy focuses on the preservation and enhancement of local and national character and distinctiveness of the landscape as prescribed by existing evidence, such as the National Character Area Profiles.

3.2.6 The policy's supporting text states: *'The district's landscape is dominated by arable farmland with dispersed woodlands and often low, trimmed hedgerows. As a result, it is a predominantly open landscape, allowing long views. A mosaic of hedgerows, fields, parkland and small woodlands create variety and combine to create an often treed skyline. A greater degree of enclosure and a more detailed landscape is often associated with settlements and the many small river valleys.'*

South Cambridgeshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2010)

3.2.7 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) forms part of the South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework (LDF), with a purpose to ensure *'the delivery of sensitively and appropriately designed, sustainable developments.'* The Guide identifies that all *'new development will have an impact on its surroundings. The aim must be that any development, from a major urban extension to Cambridge to an extension to an existing home, takes all proper care to respond to its surroundings, including existing buildings, open spaces and village edges, and ensure an integrated scheme that does not harm local amenity and wherever possible, brings benefits to the area.'*

3.2.8 The SPD requires that any new development, *'must sit comfortably in its landscape, taking account of the topography and natural or man-made features. New development should not intrude upon the skyline, with the exception of specifically agreed features selected as landmarks, in the tradition of church spires or towers. ... careful consideration must be given to the height and form of buildings, with the built form broken down to appear as a composition of forms, rather than one large form and utilising trees and other planting to soften the impact on long distance views.'*

4.0 Visual Baseline

4.1 Visual receptors

4.1.1 There is some woodland cover to the south of the Site somewhat reducing its visibility from the Pathfinder Long Distance Walk to the south and from the A14 road. However, PRowS do pass near the Site to the north and there are PRowS crossing the higher ground to the west of the Site.

4.1.2 The following visual receptors will be considered for the assessment:

- Ramblers on the PRowS near the Site and further PRowS that overlook the Site;
- Cyclists and pedestrian at the vantage point on the bridge over the A14;
- Road users in proximity to the Site.

4.2 Representative Viewpoints

4.2.1 Ten viewpoints were selected to represent “typical views” for each identified receptor at varying distances and orientation from the Site. These are presented on the viewpoint location map in Appendix 3.

4.2.2 For each of the selected viewpoints, a representative panorama or photograph (Type 1¹ technical visualisations as per TGN 06-19) is provided in Appendix 3.

4.3 Landscape Character

National Character Area (NCA) Profile 88

4.3.1 The area is ‘a broad, gently undulating, lowland plateau dissected by shallow river valleys’.

4.3.2 Key characteristics and distinctive features relevant to the Site include:

- ‘The River Great Ouse and its tributaries meander slowly across the landscape’;
- ‘Variable, scattered woodland cover comprising smaller plantations, secondary woodland, pollarded willows and poplar along river valleys, and clusters of ancient woodland, particularly on high ground’;
- ‘Predominantly open, arable landscape of planned and regular fields bounded by open ditches and trimmed, often species-poor hedgerows which contrast with those fields that are irregular and piecemeal’;
- ‘Rich geological and archaeological history evident in fossils, medieval earthworks, deserted villages and Roman roads’;
- ‘Diversity of building materials including brick, render, thatch and stone’; and
- ‘Settlements cluster around major road and rail corridors, with smaller towns, villages and linear settlements widely dispersed throughout, giving a more rural feel. Small villages are usually nucleated around a church or village green, while fen-edge villages are often in a linear form along roads’.

¹ Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note, Visual Representation of Development Proposals, Technical Guidance Note 06/19, 17 September 2019, Landscape Institute

Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment (2021)

- 4.3.3 While the Greater Cambridge Local Plan is not yet adopted, the supporting evidence is a material consideration and it is the most recent, reliable information on local landscape character. Therefore, the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, February 2021) should be given precedence over the landscape character information in The Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (1991), South Cambridgeshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2010), Appendix 9 of the Cambridge Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) and the Cambridge Inner Green Belt Boundary Study (2015).
- 4.3.4 As shown in Map 07 in Appendix 1, the Site is located in the landscape character type (LCT) 2 Fen Edge Claylands and landscape character area (LCA) 2A Longstanton Fen Edge Claylands.
- 4.3.5 **LCT 2 – Fen Edge Claylands** is *‘a transitional, predominantly arable landscape’* with *‘large scale, open fields, orchards and villages built on “islands” of high ground’*.
- 4.3.6 Key characteristics of the landscape type relevant to the Site include:
- *‘Low-lying, gently undulating landscape with extensive vistas and large skies’;*
 - *‘Gradually rising landform, south from the edge of the Fens, which adds a prominence to the Fen Edge villages in places’;*
 - *‘Large-scale, open field system defined by a hierarchy of drains, ditches and lodes’;*
 - *‘Predominantly arable farmland supplemented with small scale pastoral field patterns around settlement edges’;*
 - *‘Little vegetation cover, limited to dispersed fragments of deciduous woodland, scattered traditional orchards and gappy hedgerows’;*
 - *‘Hedgerows, shelterbelts and small clumps of trees create a distinctive, localised vegetation pattern in proximity to villages’;* and
 - *‘Dispersed settlement pattern of villages on raised landform at the edge of The Fens and individual farms and cottages’.*
- 4.3.7 **LCA 2A – Longstanton Fen Edge Claylands** is *‘a gently undulating, settled, open landscape’* with *‘several villages located on raised “islands” above The Fens’*.
- 4.3.8 Key characteristics of the landscape area relevant to the Site include:
- *‘Settled rural landscape including villages with historic linear cores on elevated fen “islands” as well as small, isolated farms’;* and
 - *‘grazing marsh at Swavesey and Oakington, dispersed pockets of deciduous woodland and traditional orchards’.*

5.0 Assessment of Visual Effects

5.1 Site Visibility

- 5.1.1 A computer-generated zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) was produced showing the areas from which it would be theoretically possible to view the proposed development, based on the topography and taking into account major visual barriers (Refer Map in Appendix 3). Consequently, the ZTV analysis presents a 'worst case' scenario in terms of visibility and the actual extent of the envelope from which the proposals would be visible is likely to be much smaller when taking into account the screening effects of the lower-level vegetation and buildings.
- 5.1.2 The ZTV was produced using 'OS Terrain 5' data at 5 m resolution and assumes the maximum proposed building height of 9 m above existing ground level and a viewer height of 2 m. It is presented on a 1:25,000 scale Ordnance Survey base. The findings mostly correspond with field observations; particularly, with regard to the visibility on footpaths to the north of the Site and the lack of visibility, due to intervening topography, to the south beyond the A14 corridor. However, field observations did determine that visibility did not extend so far to the north due to intervening vegetation.

5.2 Predicted Visual Effects

- 5.2.1 The visual assessment considers the effects on visual receptors who currently afford views towards the Site and, therefore, may be affected by the proposed development. The assessment is based on:
- Site observations made during the Site visits undertaken in February 2023, and
 - Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis.
- 5.2.2 The assessment of visual effects on each of the identified viewpoints is detailed in Appendix 3. For each viewpoint the following information is provided:
- Type 1 representative panorama or photograph;
 - A description of the existing view; and
 - A qualitative assessment of the predicted visual effect.
- 5.2.3 Viewpoint locations are shown on Map 01 in Appendix 3.
- 5.2.4 Table 3 below sets out the key visual effects as a result of the proposed development on the identified groups of visual receptors.

Table 1 - Predicted Visual Effects

VISUAL RECEPTORS	PREDICTED VISUAL EFFECTS
Views from Public Rights of Way (PRoW) (Viewpoints 2, 3, 5, 6, 10)	As demonstrated in the assessment of the representative viewpoints there would be no adverse effects on the receptor. As a result of careful design of the massing of the buildings and the articulation of the roof line, the proposal would read as agricultural buildings, where it is not obscured by intervening vegetation or topography. The visual composition of the views would be largely unchanged.
Views from Pedestrian Overbridges (Viewpoints 1a, 1b, 4)	As demonstrated in the assessment of the representative viewpoints there would be no adverse effects on the receptor. Even with the elevated vantage point of these views, the careful

VISUAL RECEPTORS	PREDICTED VISUAL EFFECTS
	design of the massing, articulation of the roof line and retention of the silo building, or proposal of a similar feature, result in the proposal reading as agricultural buildings. The visual composition of the views would be largely unchanged.
Views from Roads (Viewpoints 7, 8, 9)	As demonstrated in the assessment of the representative viewpoints there would be no adverse effects on the receptor. As a result of careful design of the massing of the buildings and the articulation of the roof line, the proposal would read as agricultural buildings, where it is not obscured by intervening vegetation. The visual composition of the views would be largely unchanged.

5.3 Summary of Visual Effects

- 5.3.1 The proposal for development includes a masterplan. The building footprints, building arrangements and building heights within the Site proposed by the masterplan lead to massing and roof articulation that reads as a set of agricultural buildings. This character is further enhanced by retention of the grain silo or a similar feature. The masterplan also proposed further densification of the vegetation to the north-west corner of the Site where it is most looked upon by more sensitive visual receptors.
- 5.3.2 The retention of the agricultural character enhanced by the densification of vegetation would lead to the visual composition of the views being largely unchanged. Consequently, it would be unlikely there would be any adverse visual effects.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Design Recommendations

6.1.1 Design recommendations were made iteratively during the carrying out of this assessment, the proposed master plan was developed based on the following design principles..

6.1.2 Planting:

- Retain vegetation to west of Site and provide sufficient planting buffer to NW and SW of Site to prevent development increasing perceived urban character of Site.
- Density and species of tree planting to respect drainage hierarchy and be relatively limited in species range.

6.1.3 Skyline:

- Scope for a single landmark element of agricultural character to stand against skyline near location of current grain silo.
- The remainder of the rooflines should not be substantially higher than the taller existing building (excluding the silo) and be an articulated roofline with variation in heights.
- Roofs should be of shallow pitch without side gables. Flues should be kept to a minimum and concentrated around the landmark element.

6.1.4 Developable area:

- The east side of the Site has more scope for development whereas any development on the west side should be of low density.
- Continued building frontages should be avoided allowing gaps between the buildings.

6.2 Conclusions

This Visual Appraisal was conducted in accordance with the relevant guidelines and applying an objective professional judgement. The appraisal conclude that the proposal would have no adverse effects. This is due in part to design recommendations being made iteratively during the process.

APPENDIX 1

MAPPING

APPENDIX 2

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

APPENDIX 3

VISUAL ASSESSMENT
