

Appendix 8

Landscape.

Landscape Character

The site is within National Character Area 148: Devon Redlands, and within the Devon Character Area: Culm Valley Lowlands. In the Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment the site is within LCT 3E: Lowland Plains.

Landform and Watercourses

The site forms the south-eastern slope of the shallow valley of the Spratford Stream, and is separated from much of the valley floor by the motorway and the mainline railway. The valley side is indented with the small valleys of tributary watercourses. The site is highest between Pitt Farm and the B3181 where the land rises towards a ridge at over 95m AOD. Adjacent to the motorway, the land is between 70m AOD and 75m AOD.

Significant Vegetation

Across much of the site, there is a complex pattern of relatively geometric but substantial hedges and hedgerows. Trees are found both within hedges and in the fields, probably originating from former field boundaries. There are also several blocks of woodland, some mixed coniferous and deciduous, which lie between the service area and Pitt Farm. The pattern of hedges along the straight lanes across the site and down the B3181, as well as the well vegetated boundaries across the site north of Pitt Farm, help to define its character.

Habitat Survey

The Phase 1 habitat survey indicated that the site features a variety of habitat types, including Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. The many mature trees found throughout are important for biodiversity and the hedgerows act as wildlife corridors. The hedgerows and woodlands / copses add to the structural diversity and wildlife potential of the site. If the site is developed upon it is recommended that the hedgerows and woodlands are retained where possible. The hedgerow running along the road from Braddons Farmhouse to the B3181 junction is particularly species rich in places. Key species present or potentially present Bat species; Badger; Dormouse UK and Devon BAP), Barn Owl; Hedgehog (UK BAP); Amphibian species; Reptile species; Nesting birds

Visibility

The landscape appraisal of the site completed as evidence in support of the Local Plan Review produced a Visual Envelope of the site in order to understand the visibility of the site, and as a guide to likely view points within the landscape. The Visual Envelope took account of the topography but not barriers such as buildings,

trees or hedges. Since the initial landscape appraisal of the site was produced the promoters of the J27 site have commissioned further landscape work. This work has included Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTVs) as well as 20 suggested viewpoints from which views toward the site should be considered. Officers of the Council have visited and provided comments to the promoters Landscape Consultant regarding the suitability of the viewpoints.

The site is bounded by major roads and partly by a cycle way, and is crossed by the A38, and two lanes, one of which is a footpath and one a permissive path, which provide viewing opportunities.

The location of the site on a north-west facing slope tends to limit views from the south and east, although there are viewing opportunities from the north and west. Vegetation on the site boundaries limits the views to and across the site.

Heading south along the M5, the service area, within the site, is not visible from the motorway. Approaching the bridge carrying the cycle path (south of J27), there are open views to the site, interrupted only by the occasional clump of native or semi-native trees. Beyond the bridge, and adjacent to the cycle path, the views onto the site are completely open, except parallel to Pitt Farm, when for a short distance roadside vegetation reduces views to the site. However, where views are available, they are limited to one or two field depths when significant on-site field boundary vegetation generally limits the extent of views beyond these boundaries to where there are gaps

From the A38 heading east, the site is largely open to the road, the service area to the south beyond a low hedge blocking views further to the south. On the south, beyond the service area, there is an open field with a low hedge and post and rail fence, which allows views across the field, until they are blocked by the mature vegetation on the far side of the field. Further east as far as Waterloo Cross, the junction of the A38 and the B3181 the site is screened by the Waterloo Cross Caravan Park and the Waterloo Cross public house.

Along the B3181, heading south, views into the site vary according to the management of the roadside vegetation and the time of year. Where views are available they are limited to a single field depth, owing to substantial boundary vegetation on the far boundary, combined with the slope towards the M5 corridor. However, beyond the entrance to Mountstephen Farm, wider views become available across the more open landscape, with the hills east of Tiverton forming the horizon some 5 or 6km away. In places there are no roadside hedges..

From the more elevated points of Sampford Peverell such as Higher Town, about 1.5 km from the site, the southern part of the site is seen across the intermediate skyline, but much of the site is obscured by woodland. The more open areas approaching Willand are clearly visible.

The site is crossed by three lanes, the northernmost links the B3181 to the A38 near the service area. It is closed to traffic but is accessible by pedestrians. A further two are designated as a public footpath and a permissive path. All of these routes are limited by hedges and hedgerow trees, which were typically about 1.5 to 1.8m high

at the time of survey. This vegetation largely restricts views across the fields to field gates, and then only to one field depth, as a result of the substantial vegetation along most boundaries within the fields.

To the east of the B3181 the land rises towards the edge of Uffculme about 1km away, but generally drops towards the River Culm. The combination of a strong pattern of hedges, hedgerows, woodland blocks and topography prevents views of the site, reinforced by the limited footpaths across the landscape which limits viewing opportunities to lanes.

Although there is extensive high ground to the north of the site, beyond the M5 and the A361, the strong hedgerow pattern along the lanes and across the fields limits the viewpoints. However, from the Grand Western Canal Country Park to the west of Sampford Peverell, there are views from the towpath towards the site, and in particular the more open southern part of the site. The towpath is also a public footpath and part of the National Cycle Network.

Views from the AONB towards the site tend to be limited to those from higher ground because of the intricate pattern of vegetation and undulating topography at the foot of the escarpment. From Culmstock Beacon, over 5km from the site and about 700m inside the AONB, part of the site is just discernible with the naked eye. Part of the site can be discerned along the ridge carrying the B3181. Junction 27 is not visible owing to intervening land form.

There is also extensive high ground to the north west of J27, beyond the M5 and A361. From this elevated area/ridge it is possible to achieve views across a majority of the site. However, due to the hedgerow pattern along the lanes and across fields, the opportunities to achieve these viewpoints is limited mostly to views from field gateways.

Relationship to Existing and Proposed Development

Along the A38 from Junction 27 to Waterloo Cross, the context of the site is significantly developed, although less so to the north. The junction itself consists of extensive engineering with associated road surfaces, signage, lighting, columns and moving vehicles. The developed context is provided by the service area, Business Park, Caravan Park and the Waterloo Cross Public House, reinforced by the garden centre, just beyond the roundabout at Waterloo Cross. Beyond the southern end of the site, employment development has extended north-eastwards from Willand to adjacent to the site boundary; there is also development consisting of a Public House, filling station and a car sales business. The M5 corridor, along the western boundary of the site has a strong influence on that part of the site, providing almost continuous movement, noise and large scale engineering.

Across the site are several large clusters of farm buildings, including poultry sheds. Despite those features, the site does not appear developed when within it largely as a result of the pattern of woodland and hedgerows which limits views across the site. Where there are views down the lanes to the hills beyond the M5, and where the M5 is not seen, the link to the more distant rural landscape emphasises the rural character of the site.

Positive Features of the site

The pattern of hedges, hedgerows, mature trees and woodlands provide effective sub-division of the site south of the A38 at Pitt Farm and also provides the skyline in view from the M5 and B3181. There is also a sense of remoteness along the lanes, where not influenced by the M5.

Negative Features of the site

The developed context of the junction, including the service area and the junction itself, provide an incongruous character to the rural landscape, but one that is common to motorway junctions. Although off site, the caravan park, public house and garden centre reinforce the developed character.

The M5 corridor reduces the tranquillity and remoteness of the western side of the site, although it is the principal location from which the site is viewed. Although there are two large farm developments on the site, at Pitt Farm and Mountstephen Farm, the vegetated boundaries and woodlands limit their impact.

Distinct areas within the site

The site consists of two distinct character areas, from north to south as set out below:

- The Junction 27 development cluster takes in the motorway junction, the service area and the business park (there is a second development cluster at Waterloo Cross, which is off site) (B); and
- South of the service area and the A38 and extending as far as Mountstephen House, is an area of enclosed fields, with limited views and robust field boundaries interspersed with woodland blocks (C).