

Landscape and Visual Statement

8th November 2018

1.0 Context of this Landscape and Visual Statement

The following Landscape and Visual Statement has been produced by Chartered Landscape Architects with expertise in Landscape and Visual Assessment at Soltys Brewster Consulting. This Statement follows baseline Landscape and Visual Constraints and Opportunities Mapping which was developed in advance of development layouts and has informed the current form and scale of the proposed development. This Statement is a concise summary of the baseline Landscape and Visual issues without the full application of GLVIA3 methodologies, but within the spirit of this national guidance and provides professional opinion on the appropriateness of the proposed development.

2.0 Introduction

The site lies within the south eastern part of the Gower AONB and is located on the southern edge of the village of Thistleboon. The larger settlement of The Mumbles is to the north and Newton to the west. The proposed development site comprises one field and a small section of a second much larger field, both broadly rectangular in shape and consisting of improved grassland. Both fields combined are approximately 1.3ha in size. Current proposals are to construct a total of up to 33 dwellings within the site.

The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the planning policies that are relevant to the site, the existing character of the landscape immediately surrounding the site and considers the visual appropriateness of the site for development, including brief conclusions on acceptability and likely landscape and visual impacts.

3.0 Landscape Planning Policy Context

A review of relevant key statutory and non-statutory landscape planning designations and policies has been carried out as part of this appraisal.

Landscape planning designations and policies indicate the value that national and local government, as well as statutory parties, attach to various landscapes or landscape features within a geographic area.

A brief review of the key landscape relevant planning policy provisions for Swansea, including the Gower has been undertaken. In November 2008 Swansea Council formally adopted the Unitary Development Plan. The Council submitted the Local Development Plan 2010 – 2025 to the Ministers of the Welsh Government for independent examination on 28 July 2017. The Deposit LDP has therefore been used for the purpose of this appraisal. Until this is adopted the policies within the UDP remain relevant.

Unitary Development Plan for Swansea Council

Creating a Quality Environment Policy EV1, states that new development shall accord with the following objectives of good design:

- i. *Be appropriate to its local context in terms of scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing, layout, form, mix and density,*
- ii. *Integrate effectively with adjacent spaces and the public realm to create good quality townscape,*
- iii. *Not result in a significant detrimental impact on local amenity in terms of visual impact, loss of light or privacy, disturbance and traffic movements,*
- iv. *Incorporate a good standard of landscape design,*
- v. *Sensitively relate to existing development patterns and seek to protect natural heritage and the historic and cultural environment, not only on-site, but in terms of potential impact on neighbouring areas of importance, and, where appropriate:*
- vi. *Foster 'inclusive design' by ensuring the development allows access for the widest range of people possible,*
- vii. *Support an integrated transport system,*
- viii. *Contribute to the creation of new, and the improvement of existing, spaces and an enhancement of the general street scene,*
- ix. *Promote resource efficient and adaptable buildings and layouts using sustainable design and construction techniques, including the reuse and recycling of construction and demolition waste on site, and energy and water efficiency measures,*
- x. *Provide a safe environment by addressing issues of security, crime prevention, and the fear of crime in the design of buildings and the space and routes around them*
- xi. *Have regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of any listed building.*

It states in paragraph 1.3.2 that *"The County does not have a uniform character, but is made up of areas and localities that have distinct identities. Design should respond to this local context, and, where there is scope, seek to improve the built environment. There will be instances where replicas of existing buildings are appropriate, for example, where infill developments are proposed in some of the residential terraces that are traditional to Swansea and the surrounding settlements and in the inter and post war suburbs. In the majority of cases however, modern, innovative, sensitive designs are encouraged in preference to imitations of historical styles, so long as they are sympathetic and appropriate to their surroundings"*.

While paragraph 1.3.10 states that the purpose of the Policy is to *"To protect the character of the County's countryside, particularly the Gower AONB and the upland fringes around Mawr, proposed development in rural areas will need to preserve, and where possible*

enhance, the environment through its location, scale and design. Schemes can assimilate into the landscape and village settlement pattern by giving careful consideration to design and materials, particularly in relation to scale, proportion, texture and colour, which reflect local character and relate sympathetically to existing development and surrounding landscape. Open spaces and gaps within a village setting can be an essential part of its character and will not necessarily be considered as infill plots for development purposes. Design Guidance is being prepared for Gower villages and the rural areas of the County, which will provide advice on appropriate building design and context.

Policy EV11 within Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes states that “*Development that would harm the character or setting of registered Historic Parks and Gardens or the character of Historic Landscapes will not be permitted*” and going on to note in paragraphs 1.4.20 and 1.4.21 that “*The Register identifies the following sites as Historic Parks and Gardens: Brynmill Park, Clyne Castle, Cwmdonkin Park, Cwmgelli Cemetery, Fairyhill, Kilvrough, Penllergaer, Penrice Castle, St. James’ Park, Singleton Park, Sketty Hall, Stouthall and Victoria Park. These are all shown on the Proposals Map. The effect of a proposed development on a Park or Garden or its setting may be a material consideration when determining planning applications. The Council will consult Cadw and the Garden History Society, as appropriate, on planning applications impacting on Historic Parks and Gardens. This policy will apply to any additional sites that are included in the Register following adoption of the UDP. The County contains two Landscapes of Historic Interest: West Gower and Cefn Bryn. Due to the large area that they cover, they are not shown on the Proposals Map, but can be found within Volume 2 of the Register and are illustrated in Diagram 5. The Council will have regard to the Register when determining planning applications where the development is of sufficient scale to have more than local impact on the historic landscape. Such developments would normally require an EIA that will include an assessment of the impact of the proposals on the historic landscape, including an Assessment of the Significance of the Importance of Development on Historic Landscape Areas (ASIDHOL)*”.

Policy EV26, which relates to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty notes that “*within the Gower AONB, the primary objective is the conservation and enhancement of the area’s natural beauty. Development that would have a material adverse effect on the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB will not be permitted. Any development within the AONB should:*

- i. Be of an appropriately high standard of design, and*
- ii. Retain and where possible enhance existing features of natural heritage and the historic environment.*

Gower AONB Design Guide – November 2011

Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), the guide sets out the good design objectives to be followed by all in the design and development process, to ensure that development respects the distinctive character of both the natural and built environment of the Gower. There are five main themes to the guide, one of which describes the existing landscape, settlement and built environment character of the AONB. The guide is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for development within the AONB.

Gower AONB Management Plan - 2017

The Gower AONB Management Plan is a statutory five year management plan that sets out the vision for the AONB. Chapter 3 of the plan describes the likely activities and pressures that are expected over the next 20 years.

4.0 Existing Character: Within the Site

The larger field is bound on its northern edge by Higher Lane and a gappy hedgerow with trees, varying from approximately 2.0 – 5.0m in height. The eastern edge of the field is also enclosed by a hedgerow, approximately 3.0 – 4.0m in height. The north-western edge of the field, which runs adjacent to an un-adopted footpath, is enclosed by a mature hedgerow predominately consisting of trees approximately 6.0m in high. The south-western edge of the field is enclosed by an area of tree and shrub planting approximately 5.0 – 6.0m in height.

The south-western edge of the larger field also forms the eastern edge of the smaller field, consists of a group of trees and shrubs approximately 3.0 – 6.0m in height.

The northern and western edge of the smaller field which runs adjacent to Public Right of Way - MU/5/3 consists of tree and shrub planting, approximately 3.0 -5.0m in height.

These hedgerows and trees provide a sense of enclosure to the northern parts of both fields. More so in the case of the smaller field due to its size. The southern edge of both the larger and smaller field are more open in character, as a low, gappy hedgerow/area of ferns and open edge respectively, define their boundaries.

Public Right of Way MU/5/2 enters the large of the two fields in its north-eastern corner and runs diagonally south-west where it exists the field in its most south-west corner.

The site broadly gently slopes down from approximately 98.89 AOD in the north-east to approximately 44.8 AOD in the south-west.

As noted within the Landscape Character and Visual Testing Study the site falls within the Visual and Sensory Aspect Area: Swansea West - Urban (SWNSVS003) as defined by LANDMAP and is described as *“The city west of the River Tawe forms the majority of the city of Swansea. It runs from the Swansea Bay waterfront up the slopes of Townhill, along the River Tawe, and up the various valley slopes and hills to the north and west, towards Gower. To the south it includes the suburbs of Oystermouth and Mumbles.”*

The Gower AONB Design Guide identifies eight character areas within the AONB, however it should be noted that that the site has been excluded from classification.

The Gower AONB Management Plan -2017 notes that a Landscape Character Assessment has been carried out for the AONB. This assessment identifies and describes 40 Landscape Character Areas (LCA) within the AONB. The site falls within LCA 33 – Limeslade, a description of which is provided below:

“This LCA is an area of exposed common land, enclosed to the north by the urban edge and to the south by the indented coastal cliffs, with small sand and shingle beaches enclosed by a rocky foreshore. The prominent rocky landform of Mumbles Head marks the south-eastern extremity, whilst the western end is marked by Rother's Torr at the edge of the Langland LCA”

5.0 Existing Character: Immediate Environs Surrounding the Site

Housing along Beaufort Avenue, consisting of detached two storey style dwellings housing and within housing along the northern edge of Higher Lane consisting of a mix of large detached 3 story style dwellings and smaller 2 storey detached dwellings are located to the west, north and north-east of the site, respectively. These form a suburban character to this part of the landscape. These developments typically restrict views north and west.

As noted above, Higher Lane forms the northern boundary of the site and is a primary connector route between Limeslade, Thistleboon and Langland. The residential housing and its associated high brick boundary wall which lies adjacent to the road to the north and the combination of low wall and hedgerow, including the sites northern hedgerow boundary create a sense of enclosure and form a semi-rural character to the road as it passes the site.

To the east, a single detached 2 storey house situated within a large plot of land is located adjacent to the site. This is a prominent property which takes advantage of sea views to the south-west. To the south lies agricultural fields, of improved grassland that are enclosed by mature, hedgerows.

The landscape is therefore generally more open and rural in character to the south and east and is dominated by the surrounding agricultural fields, of improved grassland that are enclosed by mature hedgerows, which are a feature of the landscape within this part of the Gower AONB. Typically trees are a feature limited to within the hedgerows.

6.0 Existing Character: Wider Study Area

To the north, beyond Higher Lane and to the east the land rises and forms the settlement area of Thistleboon and Limeslade respectively. To the west the land generally falls forming the settlement of Langland and Langland Bay, the latter of which creates a strong coastal character to the area. To the south the land is typically a mix of agricultural fields and sand dunes that all towards the coastal edge. Views are available from a southern network of public footpaths out to into the Bristol Channel and along the coast line towards Landland Bay Golf Course to the west and Mumbles Hill to the east, reinforcing the coastal character of the landscape.

7.0 Existing Views

Views from the north are limited to Higher Lane and neighbouring properties due to the built form of Thistleboon. Views from the east are limited to the adjacent open fields, including Public Right of Way MU/4/1 and the immediately adjacent property. More distant views from the east are limited to the elevated areas such as Mumbles Hill due to the built form of Limeslade. Views from the west are limited to the immediate adjacent un-adopted footpath, Public Right of Way MU/5/1 and properties along Beaufort Avenue. More distant views of the south and south-eastern parts of the site are available from the more elevated areas around Langland Bay Golf Course and from the Wales Coast Path near Newton Cliff.

Open views of the whole site are available from the immediate surroundings to the south and from Public Right of Way MU/3/2 which runs east west long the top of the cliff to the south.

8.0 Predicted Views

The ZTV which has been produced for a 3km study area from the centre of the site, refer to figure 1873201-SBC-00-NA-GA-L-103-P01 indicates the proposed theoretical visibility of the proposed development, based on a maximum ridgeline height of 9.085m and therefore can be considered a worse case scenario.

The ZTV indicates that views of the development would be predominately restricted to locations immediately surrounding the proposed site, extending south towards the coastal edge and north to the residential properties along Amberley Drive and Hill Crest. Further to the east there may also be potential views from Mumbles Hill. From locations to the west, any potential views are predicted to be restricted to locations from Langland Bay Golf Club and residential areas located between Langland, Newton and Oystermouth.

Visibility of the proposed development is predicted to be predominantly from locations to the south west of the site, within the Bristol Channel. To the north, apart from the areas identified above, there will be no views of the proposed development. In reality areas from where the proposed development will be seen are likely to be significantly reduced further by the screening effects of built form and vegetation, which are not taken account of within the ZTV.

9.0 Predicted Landscape and Visual Effects Conclusions

Currently the landscape within and surrounding the site is partly defined by the existing housing development, which extends along the entire length of the western and northern site boundary. The proposed housing will not extend beyond the current urban boundary lines that currently exist to the east and to the south and will therefore fit into the existing settlement pattern of Thistleboon and will also be of a similar height, massing and density as the adjacent, existing housing development. While it will increase the proportion of urban development within the area, due to reasons outlined above it is likely to be seen as part of the existing urban fabric of Thistleboon as opposed to a separate or isolated development to the village.

There may be some slight erosion of the existing semi-rural character along Higher Lane due to the removal of the existing hedgerow to the northern boundary as it may give a sense of complete urban landscape on both sides of the Lane. However, the retention (excluding the partial hedgerow removal required for development access and visibility splay) and replacement of this hedgerow would have the ability to mitigate against this (Refer to Note 1 in Figure 1873201-SBC-00-NA-GA-L-101 P01).

Currently the southern boundary of the site is open and there would be potential for views of the development from surrounding locations, albeit, current views include the rear of existing housing which forms the settlement boundary of Thistleboon, Limeslade and Langland, including the dwellings along the northern edge of Higher Lane. In addition as the ZTV indicates, visibility south would only extend to a very small proportion of the Wales Coast Path, where the majority of sensitive receptors would be located.

The introduction of a traditional hedge with tree groups incorporated into the hedgerow along the southern boundary and the inclusion of a soft landscape spine extending into the site will aid in integrating the site with the existing, surrounding landscape character. This will be further assisted by the careful and sensitive architectural design of the proposed dwelling facades, including the locating the single storey dwellings to the eastern boundary

of the site. (Refer to Note 2 and Note 3 in Figure 1873201-SBC-00-NA-GA-L-101 P01).

Existing hedgerow planting along the east and western boundaries should be retained to provide screening to adjacent houses and views, along with maintaining the local rural character of the un-adopted and adopted Public Right of Way to the west.

As can be seen from the ZTV, beyond the immediate environs of the site boundary, locations where the proposed development is potentially visible is limited. However from locations where it will be visible, it is predicted that due to the type of development, its size and form, the site will be integrated in to the existing landscape and will be viewed as part of the existing urban fabric within this part of the Gower.

Views from the Wales Coast Path are predicted to be restricted to a very short section of the path, to the south west of the site. However in reality, views may be partially screened by the housing to southern edge of Beaufort Avenue.

There are no Registered Historic Parks and Gardens within the study area, however there are three Schedule Ancient Monuments (SAMs); Oystermouth Castle, Caswell Cliff Fort and St. Peters Chapel and Well, Caswell Bay. Their locations are shown in Figure 1873201-SB-00-NA-GA-L-102 P01. The ZTV indicates that there will be no views of the development from any of the SAMs and therefore there will no effects upon them.

An area of common land extends from Mumbles Hill in the east and along the coastline to Langland Bay in the west. The ZTV indicates that any views of the development from common land will be restricted to Mumbles Hill. From this location, the proposed development will be seen against a backdrop of the existing houses that extend along the western boundary of the site and will therefore be visually integrated into the existing character of the landscape.

As indicated in Figure 1873201-SB-00-NA-GA-L-102 P01 there are three Conservation Areas within the study area. Views of the proposed development would be restricted to the northern fringes of the Langland Bay Conservation Area at and also the northern fringes of the Newtown Conservation Area. From both Conservation Areas, existing built form is predicted to screen all views of the proposed development and therefore there will be no effects upon them.

The proposed development occupies only a very small proportion of the AONB and will relate with the existing residential development patterns to the north and west of the site to the extent that there will be a no fundamental loss of the essential features that currently defines the AONB. It is therefore predicted that there will be no significant effects on the existing landscape character or visual amenity and does not conflict with the policies as set out within the Unitary Development Plan, Gower AONB Design Guide or the Gower AONB Management Plan.

10.0 Summary

The form of development proposed has been guided by baseline Landscape and Visual advice and the resulting development layout, scale and massing has responded to the site location and the constraints and opportunities related to it. Along with strategy landscape proposals (as illustrated on figure (1873201-SB-00-NA-GA-L-101) it is considered that the development proposals are appropriate to the site in Landscape and Visual Terms.