



DAVID WILSON PARTNERSHIP

Connecting people and spaces

Preliminary Landscape and Visual
Assessment

Highfield, Dunkeswell

March 2024

Document Checking

Issue	Prepared By	Date
Preliminary A	PL	18/3/24
Planning B	PL	18/4/24

Prepared for: Summerfield Homes

Prepared by:

Peter Leaver CMLI

David Wilson Partnership



Reference: Job No./H

Contents

1.0	Summary and Conclusions:	2
2.0	Designations	2
2.1	Blackdown Hills AONB	2
3.0	Local Landscape Character	4
4.0	Implications for design and development	6
4.1	Landscape Sensitivity	6
4.2	Landscape Effects	7
5.0	Visual Baseline and Potential Effects	8
6.0	Mitigation	11

1.0 Summary and Conclusions:

- 1.1.1 Characteristics of the site location, topography and vegetation cover contribute to its being of a low sensitivity to development. It is not anticipated that development would have a particularly adverse effect on the special qualities of the AONB, the historic landscape pattern nor on the characteristics and qualities of local landscape character.
- 1.1.2 Fieldwork has identified a limited area over which the site is visible. While development would be noticeable locally, the extent of its influence would be limited to the site and its boundaries and a small area to the south and east.
- 1.1.3 There are good opportunities for mitigation and to reinforce the existing settlement boundary through enhancement of existing green infrastructure. The existing vegetation around the site will reduce the visual influence of development.

2.0 Designations

2.1 Blackdown Hills AONB

- 2.1.1 The site is within the AONB designation. The AONB Statement of Significance identifies characteristics of the landscape that are key to its designation. These are:

- Isolated and unspoilt rurality – traditional settlement pattern and lack of disturbance by modern development contribute to sense of time depth.
- Diversity of landscape patterns and pictures – ancient hedgerows, long views, high plateau dissected by steep valleys, patchwork of fields.
- Unique geology giving rise to distinct topography.
- Architectural character – distinctive and fine rural architecture. Chert, cob, thatch. Relationship of buildings to the landscape.

2.1.2 Special qualities are summarised as:

- A managed landscape sculpted and maintained by the stewardship of generations of those who work the land.
- Undeveloped skyline of the northern scarp slope is a prominent feature in views from the Vale of Taunton and beyond.
- Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows.
- Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter, Culm rivers.
- Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields, and woodland
- A settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth containing farms and small scattered villages well related to the landscape.
- The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors.
- Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys
- A well-wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees
Pattern of regular, large-scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes.
- Majestic avenues of beech trees along northern ridges.
- Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high-hedged winding single-tracked lanes in the valleys.
- Wellington Monument is a key landscape feature identifying the Blackdown Hills over a very wide area in all directions
- A sense of remoteness enhanced by the exposure of the plateau and more intimate extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys.

- Wide open spaces provide exposure to the elements; big sky, windswept places, contrasts of sunlight and shadow.

3.0 Local Landscape Character

3.1 LCT1A Open Inland Planned Plateau

3.1.1 This LCT comprises a series of elevated fingers of land which are flat or gently undulating. The boundaries of the LCT are generally clearly marked by the transition to steep scarp slopes below (LCT 2A). This is a relatively simple landscape, with strong horizontal elements: flat horizons, straight roads and regular field boundaries. Vertical features, such as lines of roadside trees and electricity poles, are particularly noticeable. The simple landscape pattern reflects its late enclosure from common land. Settlement is sparse, and mostly occurs around crossroads, although there is more extensive 20th Century development associated with airfields. Archaeological features include prehistoric burial mounds, hillforts and beacon sites, and historic routes along ridge tops. There are occasional long views out over surrounding landscapes, particularly from the edges of the plateaux, some of which are associated with historic beacon sites.

3.1.2 Key Characteristics include:

- Predominantly pastoral farming on heavy soils, with some arable. Regular, medium- large scale fields bounded by well-trimmed hedges on narrow earth banks.
- Settlement generally comprises isolated farmsteads and clusters of buildings at crossroads. 20th Century settlement associated with airfields.
- Long, straight roads in the centre of ridges, often lined with beech avenues, with narrower, winding roads towards the edges. Few public rights of way.
- **A very uniform appearance**, with a simple landscape pattern and often a fairly large scale.
- **Extensive views often blocked by woodland on boundary or roadside trees**, but occasional long views. Wellington Monument, Gittisham masts and Stockland transmitter are landmarks.

3.1.3 Qualities / characteristics that make the landscape special include:

- A relatively simple landscape dominated by straight lines, often contrasting with the irregular patchwork of fields and wooded landscapes which surround it.
- Its high land forms the horizons in many views from the surrounding area.

- Important surviving archaeological features relating to prominent hilltop sites, including Farway prehistoric barrow cemetery, Culmstock Beacon and the Wellington Monument.
- Extensive heathland habitats at Gittisham and pockets of heathland and wet grassland elsewhere.

3.1.4 Landscape Strategy is:

3.1.5 The simple, regular pattern of the landscape is retained. Skylines and plateau edges should be kept clear of intrusive development, and communications masts sited with care to have minimal impact. Biodiversity should be enhanced through continued positive management of heathland, grassland and woodland/ plantation habitats. Archaeological sites should be protected from erosion and damage, and key views from them should be kept open.

3.1.6 Particular guidelines are:

- Protect the rural character of skylines by keeping built development away from plateau edges.
- Respect the general pattern of settlement, comprising dispersed farms and dwellings, and hamlets around crossroads.
- Any expansion of larger settlements/ developed areas should include strengthening of development edges through sympathetic planting (e.g. beech hedgerows and avenues)

Devon Character Area – Blackdown Hills

- Regular modern and Parliamentary fields of large and medium scale on the plateaux, reflecting late enclosure of common land, contrasting with smaller curving fields of medieval origin on valley slopes.
- Distinctive, unspoilt, and very exposed skylines often looking over the crowns of woodland on the steep greensand slopes with some views of the Wellington Monument in adjacent character area.
- High scenic quality reflected in the area forming part of the Blackdown Hills AONB.
- Picturesque villages with traditional buildings linked by narrow winding lanes; many listed buildings.
- Sense of isolation and remoteness, enhanced by exposure of the plateau; tranquillity provided by the dense woodland of the greensand scarps; one of the most tranquil areas in East Devon.

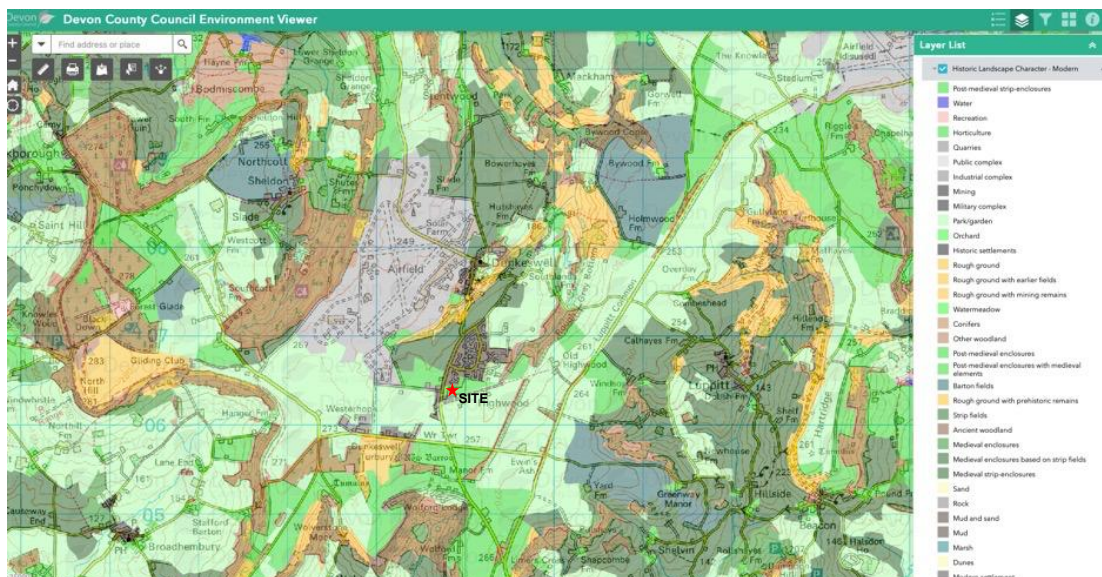
3.1.7 The landscape strategy includes guidelines with the overall aim of:

- Protecting the interrelationship and contrasts between open plateau, wooded scarp and intimate valley farmland which underpin the high scenic quality of this area.
- Reinforcing field patterns through the restoration and management of distinctive hedgebanks and shelterbelts.

- The landscape’s time-depth continues to have a strong influence, whilst opportunities for sustainable recreation and limited low-carbon development are sensitively accommodated.
- The open expansive views from the plateau landscape and its unfettered skylines are protected.
- Protect the sparse settlement pattern of clustered hamlets, villages and farmsteads. Prevent the linear spread of development along roads and ensure new development reinforces traditional building styles and materials, particularly local chert with red brick detailing.
- Protect the landscape’s network of quiet lanes and the contrast in character between those on the plateau and those on the greensand scarps and valley slopes, resisting unsympathetic highways improvements or signage.

Historic Landscape Characterisation

3.1.8 The site is within an area identified as post mediaeval enclosure - Enclosures of post-medieval date. Fields laid out in the C18th and C19th commonly have many surveyed dead-straight field boundaries. This enclosure type is more sensitive to development than some of the larger, modern enclosures around Dunkeswell (light green) but less sensitive than older barton fields (blue/green) or mediaeval enclosures based on strip fields that are common around the edge of the settlement.



4.0 Implications for design and development

4.1 Landscape Sensitivity

4.1.1 Characteristics and qualities relating to rurality, tranquillity, remoteness, time depth are already compromised in the local area as a result of existing development. Detracting features are present in

the area around the site.

- 4.1.2 Site selection in the development boundary of an existing village respects characteristic settlement pattern locally and of settlement around airfield. The site is away from the more sensitive historic core of the village on the edge of an area where there is already plenty of context locally for the type of development proposed.
- 4.1.3 The site is defined by strong boundaries that provide a high level of containment. In the local area, topography and woodland provide some containment in an otherwise open elevated landscape. The flat topography of the site and it's location on the plateau but away from the plateau edge means that there are very good opportunities for mitigation through planting and vegetation management.
- 4.1.4 Existing elements on site are not particularly rare or valuable and are not irreplaceable.
- 4.1.5 In the wider area, valuable characteristics susceptible to development include the special qualities of the AONB. Of these, the only one which would be susceptible to development on site would be tree cover and the possible presence of veteran trees.
- 4.1.6 The site and local area have a high level of ability to accept the development proposed and there are good opportunities for mitigation through layout and tree planting. The site is assessed as having a low sensitivity to development of the type proposed.

4.2 Landscape Effects

- 4.2.1 In respect of the special qualities of the AONB:
- Development is sited in an existing village; it will not change the characteristic settlement pattern of the AONB or impinge on the sense of remoteness experienced on unpopulated areas of the plateau.
 - The site is reasonably flat and on the plateau, but away from the plateau edge. As a result, development would not affect skylines and would not become a new noticeable feature in long panoramic views.
 - The proposal would not affect field patterns, beech hedgerows or the pattern of long straight highways characteristic of the AONB.
- 4.2.2 Development will not affect the skyline. The rural character of the skyline will be retained and built development is kept well back from the plateau edge. Development will not be prominent or particularly noticeable in long range panoramic views.
- 4.2.3 Development will not affect the character of the historic core of the village. It is not sited on the most sensitive historic landscape characterisation areas – Barton fields and Medieval enclosures based on

strip fields.

- 4.2.4 Development will not affect the character of quiet rural lanes, the site access will be on to a road, within the settlement boundary, that is already heavily influenced by development.
- 4.2.5 Increased extent of development will result in slight loss of tranquillity, detract slightly from time depth and detract slightly from unspoilt rurality. These effects will only be felt in a very local area around the site itself.
- 4.2.6 There are good opportunities for mitigation and to reinforce the existing settlement boundary through enhancement of existing green infrastructure. The existing vegetation around the site will reduce the visual influence of development.
- 4.2.7 Landscape and visual effects will be local to immediate area around the site and extending less than a kilometre to the south and east.

5.0 Visual Baseline and Potential Effects

- 5.1.1 The site is on a west facing slope in the centre of a plateau. Theoretical visibility was predicted from north – south running high land to the west and north. Fieldwork identified a more limited visual envelope. Mature hedgerows, woodland and trees in the study area limit visibility of the site and predicted visibility of proposed development. No open, unobstructed views of the entire site were found from publicly accessible areas. The site is surrounded to all sides by housing or mature hedgerows which filter views of the existing site.

Long views towards the site (VP1, 2, 3):

- 5.1.2 In views from ridges to the east (VP1) and west (VP2, VP3) housing in the village is perceptible through a filter of mature trees. The proposal site is not readily discernible. Development of the site would be barely discernible in these views. The character and qualities of views would remain entirely or fundamentally unchanged.

Views from the road (VP4, 5, 6):

- 5.1.3 The site is glimpsed through gaps in existing housing from the main road into the village, running to the west of the site. Two mature oaks identify the point where the site meets the road on its southern boundary and are positive landscape attributes of the site. There is a field gate providing access to the

site on the northern boundary. The site is within the perceived developed edge of the village, with housing to the west and south.

- 5.1.4 Development would be visible in views from the road, but its extent would not be entirely visible – screened by existing housing, hedgerow and trees. The proposal would not appear to extend the built development boundary of the village further into open countryside in views from the road. It would be beneficial to landscape quality and visual amenity if the two mature oaks on the road boundary could be retained as part of the development proposals.

Views from the south (VP7 – VP10):

- 5.1.5 A public footpath is separated from the southern site boundary by a narrow area of pasture and residential gardens (VP7). Views are over the site boundary hedge to the line of mature trees on the northern edge of the site and the houses beyond. The site is not part of any long, panoramic or locally important views from the footpath. While the footpath is in open countryside, its character is very much influenced by the developed edge of Dunkeswell.
- 5.1.6 The proposal would increase the influence of development on users of the footpath. The character of views would be substantially changed but would not be entirely out of character with existing views containing residential development. Management of the existing hedgerow and tree planting would help to mitigate effects with time.
- 5.1.7 The extent of visual influence southwards is on Long Lane, in the section between Rhododendron Drive and just west of Wolford Cross (VP8, VP9, VP10). Views towards the village are glimpsed over the hedgerow or through gateways. In these views, Highwood Farm is clearly visible across the fields. Existing development at Dunkeswell is visible beyond the farm buildings and north of the site, seen among existing mature trees in and around the village. The village extends east and west (right and left) of the site in these views.
- 5.1.8 The upper parts of new housing would be visible behind and to the side of the farm, filling the gap between Highwood Farm and houses on the main road. The edge of the village would not be seen to extend beyond its existing boundaries. The effect would be to increase the influence of the village in views, but it would not introduce new or uncharacteristic elements into views. Changes in views would be sporadically noticeable – glimpsed through gateways or over hedges. Management of the existing southern site hedgerow and tree planting would help to mitigate effects with time.

Views from the east (VP11 – VP14):

- 5.1.9 The footpath south of the site runs eastwards, downhill away from the village. (VP11). Views northwards are influenced by existing housing development in the village, contrasting with views southwards over open fields. The site and surrounding estate development is seen through a filter of surrounding mature trees. The eastwards extension of Dunkeswell influences views from the path further eastwards, beyond the area over which the site is visible (VP12). Existing mature trees along the path and on the boundaries of surrounding fields are a positive attribute to the character of views.
- 5.1.10 The proposal would bring the developed edge of Dunkeswell closer to users of the footpath and increase the influence of development. Changes to the character of views would be mitigated by the filtering effect of the existing trees on the eastern edge of the site. Although changes would be noticeable, they would not be out of keeping with other components of views. Retention of the existing tree belt and understorey planting / hedgerow management would help to mitigate effects with time. Off site management of the hedgerow on the northern edge of the footpath would also help to reduce the influence of development.
- 5.1.11 Rhododendron Walk curtails views of the site and the village from further to the east. The Walk itself is heavily enclosed by mature rhododendron bushes and trees (VP13), with only a very occasional very limited glimpse through the vegetation towards Dunkeswell. At the midpoint of the Walk, there is a break and a view towards Highwood Farm, with the site visible beyond (VP14). Existing houses on the edge of Dunkeswell are also visible in this view.
- 5.1.12 Upper parts of proposed development will be perceptible in this view, slightly intensifying the influence of development but not extending the perceptible developed edge of the village.

Views from private properties north east of the site (VP15):

- 5.1.13 Views over the site from roads and footpaths on the Highfield estate to the north east are blocked by existing houses. Views at VP15 are from field gateways and are representative of views from private properties on the edge of the estate. Existing views over open countryside are curtailed by existing mature trees in the hedgerows surrounding the site and Highwood Farm. The site appears as a separation between the Farm and estate development, but views are heavily influenced by exiting housing. The mature trees surrounding the site influence the character of views.
- 5.1.14 Development would be visible from private properties and field gateways on the edge of the estate. There would be an increase in the extent of development, but the proposals would not be out of

character with the existing views. Retention of the existing trees surrounding the site would help to filter views and mitigate effects.

6.0 Mitigation

6.1.1 The site is assessed as having a low sensitivity to development of the type proposed. Existing topography, land uses and vegetation will limit the effects of development to a limited area – consisting of the site and its immediate boundaries along with an area to the east and south extending as far as Rhododendron Walk and Long Lane. Within this area, the potential for adverse landscape and visual effects could be further mitigated by a series of interventions:

- Sympathetic planting to reinforce the existing settlement boundary, using the existing hedgerow on the southern boundary.
- Retain existing trees and strengthen hedgerows surrounding the site, particularly to the east and south to mitigate effects on views.
- Off site management of the hedgerow on the northern edge of the footpath would also help to reduce the influence of development.
- Care needed on road boundary to retain existing mature oaks in hedge.