LAND AT ELLESMERE
LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

in connection with an outline planning application for Land at Ellesmere

August 2014

illmanYOUNG

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Burbury Investments

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Site Location

1.1.1. The site is situated on the south side of Ellesmere, one of the principal towns in North Shropshire; see figure 01. Ellesmere is a regional centre for tourism, being home to 'The Mere' and the Llangollen branch of the 'Shropshire Union Canal' which attract significant numbers of visitors each year.

1.2. Commission

1.2.1. Illman Young Landscape Design Limited was commissioned by Burbury Investments to undertake a landscape and visual assessment to assess the potential landscape and visual impacts that would arise as a consequence of seeking consent for the construction of a mixed use development, primarily comprising of a marina, other leisure facilities and residential development. This remit included participation in the design iteration process with the Design Team, to enable the proposal to respond to the outcomes of the assessment process.

1.2.2. Illman Young have wide experience in the preparation of landscape and visual impact assessments, and the development of both design criteria and detailed designs on sensitive sites.

1.3. The Development

1.3.1. Burbury Investments are seeking to develop the site to provide a comprehensive range of leisure facilities and 250 houses. The leisure element comprises a 200 berth marina and associated boating facilities, hotel, pub and play barn, a spa centre with both indoor and outdoor sports activities, holiday lodges, and a touring caravan park.

1.3.2 Shropshire Council are currently developing a Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan (SAMDev), which identifies the application site as a new housing and mixed used site. Following the recent public consultation exercise, the SAMDev Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of

State for examination by an Independent Planning Inspector later in 2014, with the Plan scheduled for formal adoption in 2015.

1.3.2. Scope of the Study and the consultation process

1.3.3. This study was requested by Shropshire Council as part of a Scoping opinion (ref: 13/00804/SCO) related to the development of the site for multi-use leisure facilities. An outline contents was submitted to the Council for their agreement in May 2013.

1.3.4. A meeting was held on 16 July 2013 with Tim Rogers, Planning Officer and Sue Swales, Biodiversity Officer of Shropshire Council to discuss and review the baseline studies, and the potential effects of the project, as part of the design iteration process.

1.3.5. Key issues discussed were:

- The extent of the study area
- Key landscape and visual issues arising from the baseline study
- Design decisions made to date and their potential impact
- Ecological issues
- Flooding, and drainage strategy
- Pedestrian and cycle strategy
- Green infrastructure and networks

1.3.6. The draft baseline document was issued to Shropshire Council for their comment and approval subsequent to the July meeting, and agreement was sought on:

- Key viewpoint locations

- Likely impacts and effects

1.3.7 The extent of 3D graphic information likely to be provided was discussed, and it was acknowledged that this would not be to the level of a photomontage, but would endeavour to communicate the nature of the scheme.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. In principle, this study seeks to ascertain the most suitable location and form for the proposed development, minimising the potential impact on the surrounding landscape and seek to integrate the scheme in a manner

appropriate to the character of the local environment. For those effects that cannot be avoided, the study will provide appropriate mitigation measures.

1.4.2. This study makes an assessment of the existing landscape and visual resource before making an assessment of the potential effects that will be caused by the proposals.

1.5. Guidance for the Study

1.5.1. The document has been produced in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), 3rd Edition, produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment[1], and Landscape Institute Advice Note: Use of Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment[2]. These are widely considered to be the industry standards on the subject.

1.5.2. This new guidance requires lesser reliance on tables and formulaic expressions; this assessment therefore uses tables as a guide for assessing impacts and effects but uses professional judgement to qualify their use.

1.5.3. The EU Directive on EIA is clear that it requires the identification of '*significant environmental effects'.* Identifying significant effects stresses the need for an approach that is proportionate to the project, and the nature of the likely effects. The assessment distinguishes between landscape effects and visual effects. Landscape effects are changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape. Visual effects relate solely to changes in available views of the landscape and the effects of those changes on people. Effects can be beneficial as well as adverse.

1.5.4. The difference between **impact** and **effect** should be noted. **Impact** refers to the action being taken, whilst **effect** is the change arising from the action.

1.6. Limitations, Constraints and Assumptions

1.6.1. The assessment has been undertaken during spring/summer 2013 when there was full foliage on the trees and shrubs. This can potentially reduce the visual impact of any proposed development. However, thick belts of trees or

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[1] The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment 3rd Edition (2013) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

[2] Landscape Institute Advice Note 01/2009: Use of Photography and Photomontage in Landscape and Visual Assessment

shrubs will still have a screening impact during winter months when they have no foliage. It should be noted that the assessment was undertaken on site and recorded through the photographic viewpoints. Despite strict guidance on how such photographs are taken, they are intended to be illustrative and are not meant to replace the experience of visiting the site in person.

1.6.2 It is not possible or practicable to assess the potential visual impact of a proposed development from every part of the local area, however, the study is sufficiently comprehensive to allow the proposals to be properly considered and assessed so that it may fulfil the purpose of effectively informing the decision-making process. GLVIA states that sufficient viewpoints should be agreed to allow a proper assessment to be undertaken.

1.6.3 Site observations involved walking Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and visiting significant public viewpoints to determine the likely visibility of the development. Photographs from selected viewpoints were taken using a Nikon D40X SLR camera.

1.6.4 Photographs were taken at a focal equivalent to 50mm on a conventional 35mm camera, to create the view which is generally accepted as being closest to that seen by the human eye.

1.6.5 Panoramic views consisted of photographs taken by the criteria outlined above merged together with Adobe Photoshop software. No other photographic manipulation was undertaken.

2. PREDICTED EFFECTS ARISING FROM THE BASELINE STUDIES

2.1 Initial Predicted Effects

2.1.1 An assessment of the initial predicted landscape and visual effects was undertaken for the purposes of guiding the development proposals. The first stage of mitigation can therefore be achieved through this process, whilst the second specific mitigation stage can then be employed to address any residual effects that cannot otherwise be fully satisfied by the first stage of mitigation.

2.1.2 The potential impacts of the project must therefore be considered throughout the design development process, and any adverse impacts that cannot be designed out, should be mitigated as part of the proposals. The residual landscape and visual effects can then be formally assessed.

2.2 Landscape Effects

2.2.1 The following landscape effects were considered as potentially arising as a consequence of the development proposals:

- Reduction in the quality of the local landscape character, and particularly the specific qualities associated with the canal side location.
- An appropriate impact on the listed canal side buildings
- That the new extent of Ellesmere is not physically contained in accordance with local character, and therefore not satisfactorily assimilated as part of the town from external locations
- Loss of grade A and B trees and traditional hedgerow field pattern
- Negative impact on retained trees through proximity of development
- Damage to local notable topography through regrading
- Potential increase in planting and biodiversity as a consequence of the development
- The need for screening of large structures may result in planting patterns atypical of the local landscape character type

2.3 Visual Effects

2.3.1 The following visual effects were considered as potentially arising as a consequence of the development proposals:

- More prominent urban edge to Ellesmere from views along Oswestry Road

- Visual presence of significant built development not related to canal uses from the canal
- Potential dominance of new buildings on listed canal buildings and views along the towpath
- Addition of built form within the current field structure resulting in a loss of views across open fields
- Loss of rural views from some sections of the canal/towpath
- Suburbanisation of footpath route through the site
- Potential improvement in the current view of the sewage works from the canal footbridge

3. LEGISLATION, GUIDANCE AND POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Local Planning Framework

3.1.1 The proposal site lies within the administrative authority of Shropshire Council who formally adopted their Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) on 24 February 2011. The relevant policies are set out below:

3.1.2 "*CS3:* The Market Towns and Other Key Centres

The Market Towns and other Key Centres will maintain and enhance their roles in providing facilities and services to their rural hinterlands, and providing foci [sic] for economic development and regeneration. Balanced housing and employment development, of an appropriate scale and design that respects each town's distinctive character and is supported by improvements in infrastructure, will take place within the towns' development boundaries and on sites allocated for development…

North West Shropshire…

Ellesmere will have development to support local business development, recognising its high quality landscape particularly the environmental and historic assets of the meres and the canal…"

"*CS5: Countryside and Greenbelt*

New development will be strictly controlled in accordance with national planning policies protecting the countryside and Green Belt.Subject to the further controls over development that apply to the Green Belt, development proposals on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits…

Agricultural/horticultural/forestry/mineral related development, although proposals for large scale new development will be required to demonstrate that there are no unacceptable adverse environmental impacts…"

"*CS6: Sustainable Design and Development Principles*

To create sustainable places, development will be designed to a high quality using sustainable design principles, to achieve an inclusive and accessible environment which respects and enhances local distinctiveness and which mitigates and adapts to climate change. This will be achieved by:

- *Protects, restores, conserves and enhances the natural, built and historic environment and is appropriate in scale, density, pattern and design*

taking into account the local context and character, and those features which contribute to local character, having regard to national and local design guidance, landscape character assessments and ecological strategies where appropriate;

- *Contributes to the health and wellbeing of communities, including safeguarding residential and local amenity and the achievement of local standards for the provision and quality of open space, sport and recreational facilities. Is designed to a high quality, consistent with national good practice standards, including appropriate landscaping and car parking provision and taking account of site characteristics such as land stability and ground contamination…"*

"*CS16: Tourism Culture and Leisure*

To deliver high quality, sustainable tourism, and cultural and leisure development, which enhances the vital role that these sectors play for the local economy, benefits local communities and visitors, and is sensitive to Shropshire's intrinsic natural and built environment qualities, emphasis will be placed on:

- *Supporting new and extended tourism development, and cultural and leisure facilities, that are appropriate to their location, and enhance and protect the existing offer within Shropshire…*
- *Supporting development that promotes opportunities for accessing, understanding and engaging with Shropshire's landscape, cultural and historic assets including the Shropshire Hills AONB, rights-of-way network, canals, rivers and meres & mosses. Development must also meet the requirements of Policy CS17…*
- *Supporting schemes aimed at diversifying the rural economy for tourism, cultural and leisure uses that are appropriate in terms of their location, scale and nature, which retain and enhance existing natural features where possible, and do not harm Shropshire's tranquil nature…*
- *Development of high quality visitor accommodation in accessible locations served by a range of services and facilities, which enhances the role of Shropshire as a tourist destination to stay. In rural areas, proposals must be of an appropriate scale and character for their surroundings, be close to or within settlements, or an established and viable tourism enterprise where accommodation is required…"*

"CS17: Environmental Networks

Development will identify, protect, enhance, expand and connect Shropshire's environmental assets, to create a multifunctional network of natural and historic resources. This will be achieved by ensuring that all development:

- *Protects and enhances the diversity, high quality and local character of Shropshire's natural, built and historic environment, and does not adversely affect the visual, ecological, geological, heritage or recreational values and functions of these assets, their immediate surroundings or their connecting corridors;*

- *Contributes to local distinctiveness, having regard to the quality of Shropshire's environment, including landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets…*

3.2 The SAMDev Land Allocation

3.2.1 Shropshire Council are currently developing the Shropshire Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan see appendix 1, which will set out proposals for the use of land and policies to guide future development in Shropshire. A Pre-Submission Draft (Final Plan) was published on 17th March 2014. At present this document has not been adopted. The document identifies the 'Land South of Ellesmere' EL003 as a new housing and mixed use site:

- EL003a as an allocated housing site for 250 homes
- EL003b as 18 hectares of a leisure and tourism site

"S8.1: Ellesmere Town Development Strategy…

2. New housing development will be delivered through the allocation of a single greenfield site to the south of the town, subject to the implementation of satisfactory drainage and flood risk measures. The allocation site together with a windfall balance reflects available opportunities and past rates. The specific site allocation for housing is identified on the Policies Map and in Schedule S8a below and is capable of delivering 250 new homes…

4. The allocation of 18 hectares of land for leisure and tourism uses is located adjacent to the allocated housing site to the south of town. The scheme represents an exciting opportunity for Ellesmere to further develop its leisure and tourism facilities and enhance the visitor experience, thus helping to attract more tourism to the town to help boost the local economy. Development of the site will be subject to the implementation of satisfactory drainage and flood risk measures in conjunction with the housing site. The specific site allocation is identified in Schedule S8.1c below…"

3.2.2 At a local scale the proposal site falls within Shropshire District who have developed a Place Plan as part of the LDF. The Place Plan identifies local priorities for Ellesmere and the surrounding countryside. Two key priorities identified within the Environment and Climate change section of the plan are as follows:

- Urban Landscape Character Assessment
- Survey of important views in and out of Ellesmere

Both studies are currently aspirational, and are due to be carried out as part of the 'Environmental and Climate Change' section of the Place Plan. They are not based on any historical or prominent views within the town, although it is noted within the Ellesmere Conservation Area (character area 12), that views from the canal depot buildings towards the sharply defined S shaped edge of town has its rural setting marred by the derelict Creamery site and the sewage works.

3.3 Environmental Designations and Planning Constraints

3.3.1 There are no national landscape designations within or near to the study area. However, bridge 60 - Stanks Bridge (List Entry 1176940) is a Grade II listed Canal Bridge located at the south west corner of the site. Buildings associated with the British Waterways Board Canal Maintenance Depot, Shropshire Union Canal, comprising of 4 no. Grade II* buildings and 1no. Grade II building are located on the opposite side of the canal at the eastern end of the site.

3.3.2 A number of other listed buildings and structures are also located within the study area but these are mostly confined to the urban areas of Ellesmere and the smaller settlements of Newness and Onston, where they have no direct physical or visual relationship with the application site.

3.3.3 Ellesmere Conservation Area defines architectural and historic aspects of the town and is subdivided into 12 individual areas. 'Area 12: Beech House and Canal Workshops, Shropshire Union Canal' lies adjacent to the proposed site on its eastern side. It highlights the canal's strong rural character and the integration it creates between the centre of the town and the surrounding countryside. It also highlights the opportunity to enhance and reinvigorate the wharf area as part of the existing Creamery site development, although it warns of threat to local character by inappropriate development.

3.3.4 The nearest Scheduled Ancient Monument is Ellesmere Castle (List entry ID: 1019303), located approximately 0.4km away, to the east of the site. It will not be physically or visually affected by the proposed development.

3.3.5 A RAMSAR site and SSSI are located at White Mere and Mere Wood, approximately 2km from the application site.

3.3.6 Two TPO's exist along the site boundary adjacent to the water treatment plant but it is not expected that these will be affected by the proposed development; see appendix 2. Planning constraints are shown on figure 02.

3.3.7 The Core Strategy identifies no specific planning constraints relating to the site.

3.4 Site Constraints

3.4.1 Techill Brook runs the length of the application site from east to west, with approximately 1.2km of the brook within the site culverted. Due to the position of this watercourse and a further culverted section to the west of the site, The 'EA Flood Risk Map' shows that this is an area that has a significant chance of flooding with a high proportion of the site lying within flood zone 3a. The flooding is caused by this surface water culvert surcharging during periods of heavy rainfall – see figure 02.

3.4.2 In order to accommodate the necessary flood storage volumes, the intention is to open air the culvert to create an open watercourse as part of the development, creating a 'Flood Corridor'. To prevent impacts on third party land, the proposals need to provide the same floodplain volume and conveyance as those existing, and for the FFL's of the proposed buildings to be set at both 600mm above the 100-yr plus climate change, and above the 1000-year level. This is the subject of a separate report by BWB that forms part of this ES.

3.4.3 The Shropshire Union Canal's function as a tourism and leisure route provide a key opportunity for the proposed leisure features associated with the development, while its historic context, high volume of pedestrian activity and proximity to the site provides it with its key constraint.

3.5 Recent Planning History

3.5.1 A small part of the proposal site was previously included in the outline application for the adjacent site that is currently under construction. This comprises a mixed use development including residential, community uses, retail, cafe, restaurant and public house with means of access, car parking and new areas of public realm (ref: NS/06/02588/EIA) The permitted site is located to the north of the proposal site. Some elements of this development, including the public realm improvements and supermarket, have already been

constructed and are in use. Other parts of the site have been subject to planning applications in the more distant past.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. A desktop study of the site was undertaken, including an assessment of character, landform, landscape features, policy and designations. This information was both used for, and considered in conjunction with the site visit.

4.2 Definition of the Study Area

4.2.1 A brief description of the existing land use of the area is provided and includes reference to existing settlements, transport routes and vegetation cover, as well as local landscape designations, elements of cultural and heritage value and local landmarks or tourist destinations. These factors combine to provide an understanding of landscape character, and an indication of particular key views and viewpoints that are available to visual receptors and therefore are to be included in the visual assessment.

4.2.2 The study area was confined to approximately 1-2km from the site. Beyond the area chosen, the visual impacts of the development are not considered likely to be significant due to localised topography and tree cover. At these distances, the development is likely to be screened by local features, such as landform, buildings and vegetation or become a recessive element within the landscape. Due to the large number of possible viewpoints to choose from, those chosen were done so on the basis of their location in relation to the site and landform, and to present typical views.

4.2.3 For the purposes of this report the area of the site to be considered within the assessment has been defined as the land within the Applicants control, shown within the red line boundary as indicated on figure 1.

4.2.4 In the interest of clarity the five fields that make up the application site have been described as Fields A to E within this report. See figure 03.

4.3 Landscape Effects

4.3.1 Landscape effects are defined as changes to the landscape resource: the various elements, character, and qualities of the landscape that may be affected as a result of development. These include the following:

- **Landscape elements:** introduction or removal of trees, vegetation, water bodies, built features and other elements which together form landscape patterns;
- **Landscape patterns:** degradation or erosion of groups and arrangements of landscape elements, which form patterns that are characteristic of landscape character types; and
- **Landscape character:** the landscape character is a product of a combination of factors that contribute to the creation of a unique setting. Landscape character is a product of the combination of geological features, geomorphic processes, floral and wildlife associations, with social, economic and cultural forces.

4.3.2 Landscape effects may be adverse, beneficial or neutral and have been assessed by consideration of three criteria:

- The **sensitivity** of the landscape resource or receptor;
- The **magnitude** of the affected landscape resource; and as a consequence;
- The **significance** of the effect.

4.3.3 Consideration of the **sensitivity** of the landscape receptor against the **magnitude** of change posed by the development to give the **significance** of the effect, is fundamental to landscape assessment and each of these criteria has been defined in more detail with relevance to this assessment.

4.4 Sensitivity of Landscape Receptors

4.4.1 The sensitivity of landscape receptors have been determined by reference to the baseline assessment of the existing landscape and are classified as high, medium or low. The classification of sensitivity with regard to landscape receptors is a product of its susceptibility to change and the value attached to that landscape.

4.4.2 There are no landscape designations in the area of the proposal site. Assessment of sensitivity takes into account the location of the proposal site at the junction of rural and urban landscapes.

4.5 Magnitude of Impacts

4.5.1 Magnitude of landscape impact is a function of the degree of change to the landscape element. Judgment is required about the scale or extent of change in the landscape that is likely to be experienced as a result of each effect. For example, the addition of a large total length of hedgerow to a site, as compared to the existing amount of hedgerow, would be considered to be an impact of higher magnitude. A block of woodland that was removed in its entirety could be considered to be subject to an impact of the maximum magnitude criteria.

4.6 Visual Impacts and Receptors

4.6.1 In order to assess the potential visual impacts of the proposed development, it is first necessary to establish the area of surrounding land over which the existing site exerts a visual influence. Within this visual envelope, viewpoints from footpaths, roads and other publicly accessible locations have been identified and assessed.

4.6.2 This is done through the use of information gained from desktop and field based visual survey techniques, the purpose of which is three-fold:

- It allows the existing visibility status or baseline condition of the site to be established.
- It provides information that can be used to direct and determine an appropriate design for the development that causes least visual disturbance.
- It allows an effective range of mitigation measures to be developed and tested.

4.7 Analysis of Visibility from Public Rights of Way

4.7.1 Having examined the study area's visual environment, a number of key viewpoints were identified to illustrate the site's general visibility. As vegetation around the boundary of the site plays an important role in screening it from the surrounding landscape, it has not been considered as part of the site for the purposes of this assessment. The overall visibility of

the site and key viewpoint locations are identified and included as photographs within the LVIA figures associated with this report chapter.

4.7.2 A hierarchy has been established to enable the views to be categorised relative to their impact and importance as follows:

- Clear views – where a substantial part of the development site can be clearly seen from distant viewpoints, or where a lesser part can be seen from a very close viewpoint.
- Partial, intermittent or filtered views – where clear views of the site are obtained for a limited part of the site only, or where a greater part is seen but filtered by intervening vegetation.
- No views – either where topography or the density of the intervening vegetation is such that the site is either not visible, or where such a minor part is visible that it is not readily discernible, or where the filtering effect of the intervening vegetation is such that the site is similarly not readily discernible.

4.8 Sensitivity of the Receptors

4.8.1 Based on the GLVIA, the different receptor categories are ranked in order of their sensitivity to visual impacts which depends on two key elements:

- **Activity** which the receptor is undertaking - those who are walking within the landscape are considered to be of the highest sensitivity as they are considered to be there specifically to enjoy the countryside. People in their place of work, for example, are considered to be concentrating upon their work and are therefore considered to be less interested in the surrounding landscape. Those in cars are considered to be of a medium sensitivity, as their main focus of attention will be on the road.
- **Context** of the proposed development – considers whether the pro21312posed development is in keeping with the surrounding area or is the proposed use incongruous with local settlement patterns and land uses.

4.9 Magnitude of Visual Impacts

4.9.1 Magnitude of visual impact is a function of the following factors:

- The distance from receptor to the source;
- The nature of the impact (obstruction, intrusion, cumulative); and
- The degree of change to the existing view caused by the construction of a new feature or the obstruction or modification of an existing view. The overall effect upon visual amenity can range from degradation to enhancement.

4.10 Significance

4.10.1 The two main criteria that determine significance of effect are magnitude of the impact and the sensitivity of the location or the receptor. A higher level of significance is generally given to large-scale impacts and impacts on sensitive locations. This means that small impacts on sensitive areas are usually more important than large impacts on less sensitive areas. Environmental Assessment requires the identification of effects which are considered to be 'significant.' Effects considered to be 'significant' in EIA terms, are those which result from impacts of higher magnitude on receptors of higher sensitivity. Whether or not an effect is considered to be 'significant' is assessed using professional judgment of the magnitude of impact against the sensitivity of the receptor.

4.11 Nature of Impacts

4.11.1 Significance is not a reflection on the nature of the effect, i.e. whether the effect is beneficial or adverse. An impact may be of large magnitude but the effect may be beneficial in nature, as in the hedgerow example above. Effects may be one of the following:

- Beneficial – an improvement on the current view or landscape character;
- Neutral – no change in view or effect upon the landscape deemed to be neither beneficial nor adverse; or
- Adverse – new elements or the effects of the proposed change detract from the visual amenity or landscape character.

5. LANDSCAPE BASELINE

5.1. Landscape Character

5.1.1. The landscape around the site has been subject to a number of landscape character assessments, undertaken at a range of differing scales, these include:

- **National Level**: Natural England – Joint Character Area 61: Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain
- **County Level**: Shropshire Landscape Typology - Landscape Description Unit SP/54 - Principle Settled Farmland

National Landscape Character Assessment

5.1.2 At a national level, the landscape character of the study area has been described and documented in Natural England's 'Joint Character Area 61: Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain' (a National Character Area (NCA) profile is currently under construction for the area but has not yet been completed).This gives a broad-scale description of how the landscape has been defined and shaped by natural, historical and sociological events including local geology, soils, topography, land cover and land use. Collectively these features of the landscape combine to create the unique character of the landscape.

5.1.3 The landscape characteristics that apply to this area are summarised as follows:

- *Extensive gently rolling plain interrupted by sandstone ridges, the most prominent being the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge.*
- *A unified rural landscape, with strong field patterns, dominated by dairying which merges with more mixed and arable farming to the north and south-east.*
- *Boundaries are predominantly hedgerows, generally well-managed, with abundant hedgerow trees which are mostly oak.*

5.1.4 Key opportunities in this area that are relevant to the proposal site include:

- *Maintain and enhance the landscape's distinctly rural character*
- *Retain the strong pattern of hedgerows, including ensuring a young stock of hedgerow trees to replace the predominantly over-mature trees*

The Shropshire Landscape Typology (January 2006)

5.1.5 At a county level the landscape character of the study area has been described and documented as 'Landscape Description Unit SP/54 - Principle Settled Farmland'.

5.1.6 The landscape characteristics that apply to this area are summarised as follows:

- *Settled lowland landscapes of small villages and hamlets, scattered farms and relict commons, with varied soil conditions that are predominantly utilised for mixed farming;*
- *Tree cover comprises scattered hedgerow and field trees (mainly oak and Ash), amenity trees around settlements, and denser linear stands of alder and willow along watercourses;*
- *Clustered settlement pattern of hamlets and smaller villages and a medium to high density dispersal of farmsteads and wayside cottages. Together with the relatively small, sub-regular fields, these elements combine to create medium scale landscapes with predominantly filtered views.*

5.1.7 No key opportunities for landscape character improvements are identified within the Shropshire Landscape Character Study areas.

5.2 Local Landscape Character

5.2.1 The local character is of a medium scale, open rolling landscape with localised points of higher ground within predominately undulating countryside. Irregular field boundaries with bands of trees and woodland give the appearance of a well wooded landscape and create visual enclosure.

5.2.2 The urban/rural interface of Ellesmere with the surrounding countryside is characterised by the well planted ridgelines that surround the town and buffers all but a few elements of built form from the surrounding landscape. This gives a semi-rural character to the area in which the town of Ellesmere does not feature to any great extent until you are within its urban environment.

5.2.3 Settlements beyond the town of Ellesmere comprise groups of houses and small villages as well as industrial and educational establishments.

5.3 Topography

5.3.1 The site lies between 90 – 100m AOD, generally sloping towards a centre line running east/west with the land gradually rising up to the west. The main

drainage ditch and culvert is located along this line. The canal is positioned at an elevated position relative to fields A & B, running level with the centre of the site before falling below the level of the field as the ground rises up to the west. The town of Ellesmere rises up away from the site in the north.

5.3.2 The wider landscape is predominately flat with land lying at around 90 - 100m AOD, with localised high points creating small but elevated features within the landscape; most notably in Ellesmere where Castle Field lies at a height of 121m AOD. The land gradually rises up around the village of Welsh Frankton, creating a marginally elevated area to the west of the site. See figure 03.

5.3.3 *Constraints & Opportunities* - Constraints to the site include the elevated ridgeline that runs adjacent to the boundary with the school to the west which will impose constraints on the location and level of new buildings, and ground to the east that falls away from the level of the canal. Opportunities from the site's topography include the relatively flat ground adjacent to and level with the canal on the sites western side and the existing tumps that contribute to the sites character.

5.4 Existing Vegetation and Land Use

5.4.1 The site comprises a series of open pastoral fields bounded and defined by well-maintained hedges, occasional hedgerow trees and bands of mature tree planting. Individual trees occur within some fields. Boundaries with the adjacent town of Ellesmere range from being open with post and wire fencing to hedgerows and bands of mature hedgerow tree planting. The canal runs along the length of the site's southern and eastern boundaries and is defined by well-maintained hedges and hedgerows with intermittent bands of hedgerow tree planting.

5.4.2 *Constraints & Opportunities* – there is the opportunity to recreate local patterns of vegetation within the scheme to provide visual containment and/or compartmentalisation of the housing areas, and reinforce locally typical landscape character typologies such as the well wooded appearance and visual containment of the town of Ellesmere.

5.5 Existing Landscape Resource

5.5.1 The landscape resource of the site comprises enclosed pastoral grassland bounded by a strong network of well-maintained hedgerows with intermittent

mature hedgerow trees. Isolated field trees are also present and localised 'tumps' create distinct landform elements within the site.

5.5.2 A comprehensive Tree Survey has been undertaken by Illman Young Landscape Design Ltd. It is considered that the level of landscape resource is high, with many good quality trees throughout the site being worthy of retention. The tree survey identifies 60no trees of which 9no are grade A and 36no Grade B, which are worthy of positive retention where possible, 13no Grade C, which have some value but do not necessarily need to be retained and 2no. trees have been categorised as U and should be removed due to their poor condition.

5.5.3 The Tree Survey also identifies approximately 3.6km of existing hedgerow that forms both the boundary to the site, as well as defining the individual fields within it. Hedgerows that form the site boundary were generally found to be species rich and in good condition. Those running through the site were mostly incomplete and generally in poor condition. They have been identified by Shropshire Council on their interactive 'Landscape Character Map' as being species poor and of low ecological value.

5.5.4 *Constraints & Opportunities* - there are a number of good quality trees and hedgerows within the site which should be considered for retention. There is considerable opportunity to improve the quality and biodiversity value of the existing hedgerows as part of the proposals.

5.6 Existing Development

5.6.1 The site currently exists as a series of undeveloped fields used for pasture. It is bordered along the length of its southern side by the Shropshire Union Canal with the A495 bordering a short section in the north west corner of the site. There is no built form within the site, although a listed bridge is located in the site's south west corner. To the east the site is bordered by a sewage treatment facility and lies in close proximity to the listed Canal Depot Buildings, while to the west it is bounded by open fields.

5.6.2 The former Creamery site to the north of field A, is currently in the process of being redeveloped with public space improvements and a Tesco supermarket already completed. The first phases of housing are currently being constructed adjacent to the site along its north eastern boundary.

5.6.3 *Constraints & Opportunities* – The existing canal depot buildings offer a unique opportunity to link the proposed development with the areas rich heritage, while the retail development on the former Creamery site creates a strong focal point and focus for the surrounding community. The adjoining sewage works is a key constraint on the positioning of the residential and leisure buildings within the site.

5.7 Existing Rights of Way

5.7.1 There is a limited network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) around the application site, with the exception of footpath 0208/12Y/1 that runs through the site's western most side and up along its northern boundary before continuing on into the town of Ellesmere. The canal towpath forms a significant pedestrian route along the length of the site's southern boundary.

5.7.2 In addition to the designated footpaths and bridleways, 'Route 26: Chirk Bank to Ellesmere' section of the Shropshire Union Canal runs along the entire length of the site's southern boundary, with the associated towpath running along the northern side of the canal, immediately outside the site boundary.

5.7.3 All formal public rights of way (including footpaths, bridleways, by-ways and areas of open land) have been taken from the Definitive Map as held by the 'Shropshire Council Definitive Map Online'. Those that are relevant to this application have been checked on the ground along with all local roads. For the most part, all footpaths are well maintained, easily accessible and well used. See figure 05.

5.7.4 *Constraints & Opportunities* –there are a number of well used public rights of way in the area including the tow path along the canal; opportunity exists to create greater connectivity both within the site and across it between the canal and the town of Ellesmere as well as improve access to the historic union canal depot buildings.

5.8 Landscape Value

5.8.1 The landscape of the application site is not designated either nationally or locally, although it has value locally due to its relationship with the Shropshire Union Canal and the rights of way across it. The town of Ellesmere is surrounded by an abundance of irregular pastoral fields dotted with isolated tree planting and small hills. The landscape type is both abundant and typical,

and has no particular special or defining characteristics outside the local landscape character description. The quality of the natural landscape within the site is mixed; gradually improving as it becomes more rural to the west, away from the urban edge of Ellesmere. It plays an important role in buffering the interface between the exposed urban edges of Ellesmere and the surrounding landscape.

5.9 Sensitivity to Change

5.9.1 Sensitivity is a combination of susceptibility to change of the receptor combined with its value. Susceptibility to change is the ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies. The landscape receptors have been identified as having following sensitivity:

5.9.2 Landscape Resource – Trees & Hedgerows

The susceptibility of these landscape elements to change, depend on their location and the nature of the development proposals. However, if appropriate space is provided within the layout to maintain the various tree components, the integrity and continuity of the hedgerows, then they would be of moderate susceptibility to change. Trees of grade A, B or C are respectively of high, medium and low value as individual specimens, although when occurring as a group/copse their collective value increases. The majority of hedgerows are of moderate value, but those which are species rich or containing trees are of high value. Therefore the sensitivity of the receptor ranges from high to moderate depending on their value, with only trees of low value having a low sensitivity. Trees that are categorised as requiring removal have low value and low sensitivity, although they may have some value as an ecological resource.

5.9.3 Landscape Patterns - Well Wooded Skyline & Pastoral Fields

The susceptibility of these patterns to change is dependent on their nature and location in relation to the proposed development. The elevated ground to the north of the site is of high importance as a landscape pattern in defining the rural edge to the town of Ellesmere and is therefore of high value. However if the development is sited appropriately on the elevated ground in

such a way that it does not compromise the existing skyline, then it would be of low susceptibility to change. Therefore sensitivity of the receptor is moderate.

5.9.4 Land Use - Agricultural Land

This land use has a moderate value locally as an agricultural feature and is currently used for pasture. It is classified as a mixture of Grade 2, 3a, 3b & 4 agricultural land by the Agricultural Land Classification maps, with land graded 2 & 3a being the 'best and most versatile land' for growing crops. While this land would be of a high susceptibility to change given the nature of the proposed development and its value as a potential site for growing crops, these changes are in line with planning policies for the site; as identified within the SAMDev, as an area intended for mixed use, residential and leisure development. The proposals are therefore in line with achieving the current landscape planning policies and as such sensitivity of the receptor is low.

5.9.5 Landscape Character - Rural

The landscape character of the site has a moderate value locally as rural landscape that helps to define the urban/rural edge to the town of Ellesmere. It would therefore be of high susceptibility to change given the nature of the proposed development. However the proposals would be in keeping with the leisure aspects associated with the canal and are also in line with the SAMDev planning policies for the site. The proposals are therefore in line with achieving the current landscape planning policies and as such sensitivity of the receptor is low.

5.10 Summary

5.10.1 The proposal site is located on the south side of the town of Ellesmere. The character of the area is semi-rural landscape, typically characterised by irregular field patterns and localised points of high ground on an undulating topography. The site is defined by the urban edge of Ellesmere, the Shropshire Union Canal and the open countryside.

5.10.2 The proposal site is a series of pastoral fields that were in use for cattle grazing at the time of the site visit. It is bounded for the most by hedgerows which also sub divide the land into five separate fields. The site contains

some localised ground undulations in the form of two small tumps as well as a number of notable trees.

5.10.3 The sensitivity of this landscape to change is dependent on the ability of the different landscape elements to accommodate the proposed development. Although the susceptibility of these landscape elements varies from moderate to high, through the changes to the planning context in relation to the SAMDev Plan, the sensitivity to change is considered low.

5.10.4 The following section proceeds to consider the extent to which the existing site is visible within the surrounding landscape, and the sensitivity of the receptors viewing it.

6. VISUAL BASELINE

6.1. Overall Visibility

6.1.1 Due to the undulating nature of the landscape and localised areas of high ground, the visual envelope is for the most part confined to the immediate surrounds of the site. Development on higher ground associated with the town of Ellesmere screens views from the north, while the elevated and well vegetated ground around Castle Field screens views out towards The Mere. Conversely, views out from the elevated ground around Castle Field towards the application site are also screened by intervening vegetation and residential development. Views to the south and west are again contained by intervening vegetation and the surrounding topography.

6.1.2 Due to the size and nature of the site it is not possible to see all five fields in their entirety from any one view. Views are generally limited to partial views overlooking two or three fields at a time. No long distance views are possible from the surrounding area, including from the elevated ground at Welsh Frankton. Long distance views are defined as being over 2km. See figure 06.

6.2 Site Visibility and Key Viewpoints

6.2.1 Visibility of the site generally divides into two groups of views:

a. Firstly, views from the Shropshire Union Canal and public footpaths which are in close proximity to the site

b. Secondly from the surrounding local road network from further afield but still in close proximity to the site

6.2.2 The viewpoints from Rights of Way and roads are identified on figure 7, and illustrated on the photographs illustrated on figures 07a to 07e.

6.3 Views from the Canal Towpath and Surrounding Public Footpaths

6.3.1 **From the canal towpath adjacent to field A** - Starting from the Wharf, there are no views of the site until the canal footbridge at the eastern most edge of the site is reached, which offers clear views out across Field A and further west across the site from its elevated vantage point spanning the canal; see viewpoint 1.

6.3.2 Travelling south/west around the site boundary, the towpath is slightly elevated above the site, but the height of the adjacent hedge prevents views into the site, although the canopies of trees within the fields are clearly visible above. Occasional gaps within the hedge allow glimpsed views through into fields A & B but these are infrequent - see viewpoint 2. The section of towpath from the canal buildings towards the Wharf creates a sense of arrival in Ellesmere.

6.3.3 *Constraints & Opportunities* - Development should reinforce the sense of arrival/act as a gateway to Ellesmere, forming a suitable feature in the immediate landscape and as the towpath is accessed over the footbridge towards the town. Built form towards the edge of the canal should not be dominant, but can connect positively with the canal side. Higher elements of built form should be set back, both to reduce their impact, and also to avoid a negative visual impact on the listed buildings.

6.3.4 **From the canal towpath adjacent to field B** - where the level of the canal is similar to that of the adjacent site and there are more substantial breaks in the hedgerow vegetation, clear views of fields B & C are possible, while filtered views of field A are possible through the field boundary vegetation. The elevated ridge to the rear of field B is visually prominent, containing a mature thick hedgerow and many tall mature trees. See viewpoint 3.

6.3.5 Residential properties on higher ground within the town of Ellesmere are partially visible through the well wooded ridge as is the roof line of the school. It is not possible to see the sewage works (to the rear of field A) due to intervening vegetation and grass banks.

6.3.6 *Constraints & Opportunities* – development should be located on site at a level, and of a height that it can be visually contained by the dense line of hedgerow and the lower mature tree canopy. Built form should also be set back from the towpath to reduce its prominence along this section of canal.

6.3.7 **From the canal towpath adjacent to field C & D**, where the level of the canal is similar to that of the adjacent site the hedgerow drops to approximately 1m high, allowing wide panoramic views in both directions.

6.3.8 Clear views of fields C & part of field D are possible. Additionally, the two tumps within field D form distinct features within the view and partially screen views to the landscape beyond. See viewpoint 4.

6.3.9 At the very western end of the site, the level of the canal drops to below that of the adjacent field and the hedgerow climbs to almost 4m high, from this location views of the site are no longer possible.

6.3.10 *Constraints & Opportunities* – development should be kept away from the highest elevated areas of field D to maintain its open aspect and avoid buildings being seen on the horizon. Built form should also be set back from the towpath to reduce its prominence along this section of the canal.

6.3.11 ***From Footpath 0209/12/2 at its junction with the canal travelling north-east*** – This footpath travels up from the Shropshire Union Canal, through field D, along and outside the boundary of field C and then up towards Lakelands School before connecting with the residential areas of Ellesmere.

6.3.12 From the junction with the Shropshire Union Canal the well maintained hedge that forms the south western boundary of the site screens views into the site and beyond although the canopies of trees within it are clearly visible – see viewpoint 5. On entering the site the elevated sections within fields B & C become more visible as you move further northwards into the site gradually opening up to the north side of field D. The well planted ridgeline gives a well wooded appearance to the horizon and screens views of Ellesmere beyond.

6.3.13 *Constraints & Opportunities* – Development should be kept back from the south west side of the site and be of a suitable height so that built form is not seen above the existing hedgerow. New planting may also assist in composing any new development located here. Towards the northern end, built form should be set back from and at a level such that it is seen below the general tree line, so that it can be composed within the landscape.

6.3.14 ***Footpath 0209/12/2 Northern Side*** – from the northern side of field C up to the school, there are partial views of fields A, B & C through gaps in the hedgerow trees, while filtered views of the site are possible through smaller gaps in the boundary vegetation. See viewpoint 6. Hedges running along the canal and field boundaries form prominent features in the mid ground of the view, while the hedgerow tree planting creates a well wooded appearance in the landscape further south.

6.3.15 *Constraints & Opportunities* – development should be set back from the elevated sides of fields B & C and at a level to maintain views to the south. Delineation of the field boundaries should be retained to maintain the irregular

field pattern which is characteristic of the site. Additional tree planting within existing hedges would assist in assimilating development within the landscape.

6.3.16 **Ellesmere Business Park (*Footpath0208/8/1)*** – Adjacent to Ellesmere Business Park, clear views of field E are seen above the boundary hedge across the main road, while filtered views of a small part of field D are seen through the field boundary vegetation – see figure 7. The elevated ground within the mid ground helps to define the horizon in this location and screens views out to the surrounding landscape.

6.3.17 *Constraints & Opportunities* – Development within field E should consider how it can be integrated whilst maintaining a rural character to the edge of Ellesmere. Development within field D should consider its impact on the horizon beyond, through its level, and the height of the existing boundary trees. Additionally, consideration should be given to the way that planting can assist in assimilating its form and mass.

6.4 Views from roads

6.4.1 **Oswestry Road** – Clear views are possible over the western section of the site and to the surrounding landscape beyond from a section of the Oswestry Road to the north-west of the site – see figure 8. The elevated ground within the southern section of Field D forms a large component within the view and is a key element of the undulating and rural character of the landscape.

6.4.2 *Constraints & Opportunities* – Development within the southern part of field D would require the redefinition of the site boundary as the urban edge of Ellesmere in a way typical of the local landscape.

6.4.3 Birch Road – For a short section of road adjacent to the junction with Love Lane, a small part of Field A is visible between a small gap in the tree canopy on the far side of the cricket pitch and adjacent field. The Canal Depot Buildings are clearly visible from this location and form a significant component within the view. See viewpoint 9.

6.4.4 *Constraints & Opportunities* - Built form should be located back from the site boundary and be of a suitable height so that it is not seen above the existing boundary vegetation and does not adversely affect the setting of the canal depot buildings within this view.

6.5 Residential Views

6.5.1 Residential views are generally considered to be from the ground floor windows of the principle daytime rooms within a house. Whilst the potential impact of development on residential views must be recognised and considered, such views have no status in planning, unless the residential amenity of the dwellings is infringed.

6.5.2 New residential development is currently being constructed adjacent to field A, to the south of Berwyn View - See appendix 3. During construction and on completion, this housing will have a significant screening effect on views looking south towards the site from this residential area.

6.5.3 There are generally no views of the proposed development from the existing residential properties on the south side of Ellesmere, as the properties are generally orientated with their principal rooms looking east/west, and most have solid boundary fences 1.8m in height, which restrict outward views. Glimpses into the site are seen from the ends of cul-de-sacs close to the boundary of the housing area, however, these views are limited to small portions of field A and will be lost once the housing development to the south is completed. see viewpoint 10.

6.6 Summary

6.6.1 To summarise the key points arising from the base-line visual survey:

- It is not possible to see all five fields from any one location:
- All the fields can be seen from various viewpoints around the site;
- The zone of theoretical visibility extends mainly westwards and southwards until contained by rising ground and woodland in the near distance. To the north, the school and housing of Ellesmere located on rising ground similarly contain inward view;
- The existing good quality hedgerow and trees along the tow path combined with the lower position of the canal in the west screens most inward views from the canal towpath;
- Elsewhere hedgerow and hedgerow trees also provide good visual containment to the majority of the site;
- Where the ground level of the field rises up to that of the canal, clear views of the site and beyond to the surrounding area are possible;

- The raised tumps within field D create a feature within the landscape that is typical of the surrounding area;
- Views of the elevated ground around Ellesmere and the Ellesmere Castle site are possible from the canal towpath and from within the site;
- Location of development in relation to the site boundary is likely to be critical;
- The nature of the development will have a varying effect on the character of the site.

6.6.2 These issues must therefore be used as a guide to assist in the evaluation of how the site may best be developed.

6.7. Design development and mitigation

6.7.1 The potential impacts of the project must therefore be considered throughout the design development process, and any adverse impacts that cannot be designed out, should be mitigated as part of the proposals. The residual landscape and visual effects can then be formally assessed.

7. The Proposed Development

7.1 Strategy for Development

7.1.1 The overall strategy for the development has been predominantly landscape led with massing and sizing of built form evolving in response to the landscape parameters identified within the baseline assessment of this report, see figure 8. In addition to these landscape constraints, the site's location within a flood zone has also had a bearing on the strategy for the development. The masterplan has therefore progressed through a number of design iterations (for the full design iteration see Appendix figures 2 Site masterplan Revisions D, H & M and Site Sections), the key points of which have been summarised below:

- Relocation of hotel and leisure spa and set back away from canal side to minimise visual impact
- Relocation of pub/restaurant and leisure barn to accommodate root protection areas of existing mature trees T4 to T8
- Redesign and subsequent removal of garden centre from masterplan of the proposed due to potential visual impact
- Relocate caravan plots to south side of field D minimising visual impact and maintaining open aspect of field
- More informal layout created for caravan plots and holiday cabins to reduce density, allowing retention of hedgerow field boundaries and incorporation of woodland pocket planting
- Caravans set back from the western boundary, and the ground level regraded to reduce visibility from the west.
- Flood attenuation area created to the centre of the site with smaller linear features within fields A and D
- Residential units set back from elevated section of site to preserve existing wooded skyline
- Residential units arranged in a terraced fashion to accommodate avenue tree planting to help assimilation into view
- Restriction of development around existing tumps to maintain their character and form
- Alignment of the existing public footpath through the site retained and accommodated within a landscape setting

7.1.2 Generally, the larger more prominent development has been constrained to the least visible parts of the site to the east, closer to the town's amenities while smaller, lower density development and seasonal use, has been located to the more rural and open parts to the west.

7.1.3 The site will provide a comprehensive range of leisure facilities as well as 250 houses. The leisure part of the development will comprise the following elements:

- 200 berth marina with associated boating facilities
- Hotel (120 bed)
- Pub/Restaurant and Play Barn
- Leisure Spa Club with outdoor sports facilities
- Holiday Cabins (43 units)
- Touring Caravan Park (70 plots)

7.2 Built Form - see Masterplan SK25 Rev M

7.2.1 HOTEL & LEISURE COMPLEX – Located in the eastern most part of the site adjacent to the existing canal depot buildings, with a shared car park and outdoor recreation facilities. Both buildings will stand a maximum of 3 storeys high (circa 13-16m), with the hotel creating a key feature, when approaching the town of Ellesmere by the canal.

7.2.2 PUB/RESTAURANT AND PLAY BARN – These will comprise of a 2 storey pub and restaurant building (circa 11 tall) and a 2 storey play barn (8.5m tall). Both will be located adjacent to the boundary with the canal and have associated car parking areas.

7.2.3 MARINA – Located alongside the canal in the eastern portion of the site the marina will sit level with that of the canal and will comprise of both a short and long stay zone either side of an central area of hard standing. Built form associated with the marina will be a 2 storey workshop and facilities building (circa 13m tall), located centrally in line with the proposed entrance. In addition to these two buildings, there will also be two foot bridges located at the marina entrance and adjacent to the workshop to provide pedestrian access.

7.2.4 HOUSING – Housing is located on the rising ground along the northern portion of the application site and comprise a series of low density houses, approximately 2 - 3 storeys high (between 8m & 10.5m tall). They will be set back a suitable distance from the site's northern boundary in order to maintain the well treed appearance of the skyline and help to compose them within the view.

7.2.5 CABINS & CARAVAN PLOTS – Located on the south and western edges of the site adjacent to the canal. The caravan park will consist of access roads and square plots of hard standing that measure 11m x 11m laid out in an informal arrangement around a central access road on the lower ground surrounding the tump. The holiday cabins will be 6-7m tall and set out in an informal arrangement around a central access road adjacent to the canal towpath. Both the caravan park and holiday cabins will each have an associated single storey administration building (6m to ridge) located between the two areas, in the form of an amenity block and reception building.

7.3 Landscape Infrastructure

7.3.1 CENTRAL GREEN AREA – located along the line of the existing stream culvert through the centre of the site, a 2.5m deep depression will provide flood attenuation for the site. Further to the west additional areas of public open space, public amenity spaces and play/recreation facilities will also be provided.

7.3.2 EXISTING VEGETATION - The majority of tree and hedgerow planting will be retained as part of the structure of the proposed layout. One section of hedgerow running north to south from the sewage works will be removed, while the remainder of hedges will be retained with only small sections being removed to facilitate parts of the development. All hedgerows being retained as part of the development will have infill planting carried out where necessary, while tree planting and inter-planting with native hedgerow species will be used to improve both the site's amenity and biodiversity.

7.3.3 PROPOSED VEGETATION – A comprehensive strategy for tree and shrub planting is proposed as part of the development (see figure 10). The purpose of this planting strategy has been 3 fold, working to re-enforce the existing landscape resource of the site and help to restore the local landscape

character. This in turn will assist in composing the proposed built form within the surrounding landscape.

7.3.4 Footpath 0209/12/2, running through the western section of the site, will be afforded suitable space within the development and planted accordingly to allow it to be maintained as a semi-natural route.

8. Landscape Impact Assessment

8.1 Evaluation of Impacts on the Physical Landscape Resource

8.1.1 EFFECT ON THE TREE RESOURCE – whilst the scheme is indicative, it is intended to keep as many of the grade A, B & C trees as possible, that is, those most suitable for long term retention. In its current iteration, the proposals will necessitate the removal of 7 individual trees and 3 tree groups, these are as follows:

- 5no. category B trees
- 1no. category C tree
- 1no. category U tree
- 2no. category B groups
- 1no. category U group

8.1.2 As part of the proposals, a large number of trees will be planted throughout the development via street trees and amenity planting. There will therefore be a considerable increase to this existing landscape resource resulting in a major impact on a **moderately sensitive** receptor, resulting in a **major beneficial** effect in both the short and long term.

8.1.3 EFFECT ON THE HEDGEROW RESOURCE – it is intended to retain as much as possible of hedgerows with high ecological value, with sufficient space being provided to ensure they are retained in good condition throughout the construction phase and beyond. In its current iteration, the proposals will necessitate the removal of approximately 440m of hedgerows, 250 of which has been identified as being species poor and of low ecological value by Shropshire Council.

8.1.4 There are approximately 400m of new hedgerows being planting as part of the proposed development, resulting in a net loss of approximately 40m from a total of 3600m. In addition to new hedgerows being planted existing poorer quality hedgerows will be gapped up alongside planting of new hedgerow trees carried out as part of the proposed landscape strategy for the site. See figure 11.

8.1.5 There will therefore be a minor impact on a moderately sensitive receptor, giving a **Minor Adverse** effect in the short term, improving to a **Moderate Beneficial** effect in the long term.

8.2 Evaluation of Impacts on the Character of the Site

8.2.1 The application site is located within the 'Principle Settled Farmland' character area and comprises a series of open pastoral fields and serves as a buffer between the town of Ellesmere and the surrounding countryside. It is predominantly bounded by mature hedges and hedgerows, with the Shropshire Union Canal defining the length of its southern boundary

8.2.2 IMPACT ON THE PRINCIPLE SETTLED FARMLAND CHARACTER AREA – The existing pastoral fields will be developed for a mixture of leisure, tourism and residential development. Although the local landscape character is of moderate sensitivity to this type of development, the site's allocation as an area for housing, leisure and tourism within the Shropshire SAMDev plan, will need to be taken into account when considering this landscape's sensitivity to change.

8.2.3 While it will result in a permanent change of high magnitude to the existing nature of the site, the impact that the proposed development will have on the character of the landscape has been mitigated against through the careful placement and massing of the built form. Larger scale leisure facilities have been located within the more urban section of the site, with the low density housing and smaller scale tourism/leisure elements being located in the site's more rural areas. Additionally, planting within the development site has been used in a manner which is in keeping with the character of the surrounding landscape. Over time the proposals will become assimilated into Ellesmere's residential character, as well as with the leisure & tourism activities associated with the Shropshire Union Canal. This change is therefore deemed to be one that will be in keeping with the existing semi – rural character of the area.

8.2.4 The magnitude of such impact is **high**. An impact of high magnitude on a receptor of **moderate sensitivity**, would result in an effect on the landscape character of the area, which is of **moderate adverse effect**. However due to the site's designation as one for housing, leisure and tourism, and the mitigation to the layout of the site through the design process, its ability to accommodate this type of change within the context of the overall landscape character of the area, is considered to be high, reducing the overall effect to

moderate/minor adverse. This effect is not considered significant in EIA terms.

8.2.5 IMPACT ON THE INHERENT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE – the proposed mixed use development will replace the existing pastoral fields within the site. This will result in the loss of the site's openness and its inherent rural character. This change will be permanent.

8.2.6 Despite the fact that the proposals are in line with achieving the current landscape planning policies they will have an impact of **high magnitude** on a moderately sensitive receptor, and therefore the effect on the site's character will be both **moderate and adverse.** However while this is a significant change, this has to be balanced against the designation of the land for housing, leisure & tourism. This is not considered significant in EIA terms.

8.2.7 IMPACT ON THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE SITE – As the proposed development will replace the existing grass fields currently used for grazing and a small proportion of existing hedgerow, there will be a partial loss to this part of the site's existing ecological habitat. This loss will be permanent. Grassland being lost is pastoral and existing hedgerows through the site are intermittent and provide little in the way of continuous ecological habitat through the site. Proposed planting of mixed hedgerows, native trees, wildflower grass and wetland habitats and will address the current lack of biodiversity corridors running through the site.

8.2.8 Although there will be a loss in some of the site's existing ecological habitat, this is of low quality in terms of biodiversity and there will be a significant amount of tree and hedgerow planting proposed, creating habitat and enhancing the site's existing biodiversity value. The opening up of the culvert and associated landscape works will assist in helping to promote water vole habitat. There will therefore be a minor impact on a moderately sensitive receptor, giving a **Moderate/Minor Adverse** effect in the short term, improving to a **Moderate Beneficial** effect in the long term.

8.3 Summary

8.3.1 The overall landscape effect balances both the effect on the physical resource and the effect on landscape character. The enhancement of the existing

vegetation and the provision of additional planting will have a beneficial effect on the physical landscape resource of the area. In addition to this, the proposed ecological improvements to the site will have a beneficial effect on the biodiversity of the area.

8.3.2 There will be a permanent and complete change of character within the application site; the effect on the character of the surrounding areas will be of **moderate to minor significance**. As the site is allocated for comprehensive redevelopment, the complete change of character is expected through the change in planning policies for the land.

8.3.3 Enhancements to the physical landscape resource and biodiversity will ensure that the development can be appropriately accommodated within the context of the Shropshire Union Canal and the Town of Ellesmere. Overall, the effect on the landscape resource is not considered significant in EIA terms.

9. Visual Impact Assessment

9.1 Evaluation of Visual Impacts

9.1.1 Visual impacts and effects relate to the changes in character of the available views resulting from the development, and the changes in the visual amenity of the receptors. The following section proceeds to describe how the proposed development will alter the site's existing visual environment and describe the resultant effects of its impact once the mitigation planting has become established.

9.1.2 Generally, the larger more prominent development in the form of the hotel and leisure spa will be visible from those areas immediately adjacent to the site in the east. Mitigation planting will have limited effect on screening this part of the development from the adjacent tow path but will help to compose the buildings within the view. However, intervening vegetation both existing and proposed will prevent any views of this section of the site from the west.

9.1.3 To the west, smaller scale lower density development will be visible from those areas immediately adjacent to the site and from further afield. Due to the type of development proposed in these areas combined with its low density and areas of proposed mitigation planting, partial views will be limited to the elevated ground north and west of the site and views from along the canal will be heavily filtered by intervening vegetation.

9.1.4 In assessing the potential visual effects of the development proposals, consideration was given to the effects in the round, however, the specific effects have been summarised through the agreed viewpoints, which could then be used for the purpose of evaluating the specific visual impact of the proposals, once the development had been built and the mitigation planting has reached maturity after a period of fifteen years. An analysis of the site's visual environment is summarised in the table below:

Location	Representative viewpoints	Sensitivity of the receptor	Susceptibility to change	Significance of effect		
				During construction	On completion	After 15 years
Shropshire Union Canal [Field A]	1 & 2	High	High	Moderate /Major Adverse	Moderate /Major Adverse	Moderate Adverse
Shropshire Union Canal [Field B]	3	High	Medium/ Low	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse	Neutral
Shropshire Union Canal [Fields C&D]	4	High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse
Footpath 0209/12/2	5	High	Low	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Neutral
Footpath 0209/12/2	5&6	High	High	Major Adverse	Major Adverse	Moderate /Minor Adverse
Footpath 0209/12/2	6	High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse
A495 Oswestry Road	7	High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse
A495 Oswestry Road	8	Medium	High	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse
Birch Road (Residential Road)	9	Medium	Low	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse
Berwyn View (Residential Road)	10	Medium	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

9.2 Near Distance Views from the Canal Towpath & Public Footpaths

9.2.1 FROM THE CANAL TOWPATH ADJACENT TO FIELD A (See viewpoints 1 & 2) – The majority of the views from this section of the towpath will experience partial views of the proposed hotel, leisure spa and pub/play barn. Due to the existing hedgerow located along the site boundary and the elevated position of the canal towpath, views of the proposed development will be limited to the upper floors of these buildings , which will form prominent features along it, and in places will re define the existing skyline. Further west, partial views of the marina will be possible with clear views of the work shop, and facilities building also becoming possible at the new entrance to the marina from the canal. Residential development on the elevated parts of field B will also be

partially visible in the background although they will lie below the existing wooded skyline.

Positioning of the buildings combined with mitigation tree planting to the existing boundary hedge of the canal and tree shrub planting within the site, will in the long term create visual screening of the development although taller buildings adjacent to the canal will still be visible.

Sensitivity of the view is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **medium**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate/major adverse** in the short term, reducing to **moderate** adverse in the long term. This is considered significant in EIA terms.

9.2.2 FROM THE CANAL TOWPATH ADJACENT TO FIELD B (See viewpoint 3) – The majority of the views from this section of the towpath will experience either full or partial views of the proposed marina and holiday cabins in the foreground, while residential development on the elevated parts of fields B & C will also be visible. Views back towards the hotel and leisure spa will not be visible due to intervening vegetation, although partial/filtered views of the pub and play barn will be possible during the winter months.

In the long term mitigation planting amongst the holiday cabins will help to assimilate the built form into the landscape, while positioning of residential properties on the higher ground and tree planting within the development will further reinforce the well wooded appearance of the landscape and preserve the existing skyline. The marina itself is a typical feature of canals, and considered by many as an attractive part of walking along them.

Sensitivity of the receptor is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **medium to low**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate/minor adverse** in the short term, reducing to **neutral** in the longer term**.** This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.2.3 FROM THE CANAL TOWPATH ADJACENT TO FIELD C & D (See viewpoint 4) – The majority of the views from this section of the towpath will experience either full or partial views of the proposed holiday cabins and touring caravans. They will partially redefine the skyline when looking towards the

west and residential development on the elevated parts of fields B & C will also be visible.

In the long term mitigation planting amongst the holiday cabins and touring caravans will help to assimilate the built form into the landscape, screening views into the site and contain the majority of the visual environment to the canal tow path. It should also be noted that the caravan usage is in the main seasonal, such that the impact of a small number of caravans during outside the main season will be substantially less than during the summer months.

Sensitivity of the receptor is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **medium**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate adverse** in the short term, reducing to **minor adverse** in the longer term. This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.2.4 FROM FOOTPATH 0209/12/2 AT ITS JUNCTION WITH THE CANAL TRAVELLING NORTH-EAST (See viewpoint 5) – Prior to entering the site, the views of vehicles within the proposed touring caravan park will not be possible above the hedgerow field boundary (until in very close proximity to the site) as they will be located on ground regraded down and set back from the hedge.

In the long term, additional hedgerow tree planting along the existing field boundary will further reduce the presence of these elements within the view, while pockets of tree and shrub planting will further reinforce the well wooded appearance of the existing skyline.

Sensitivity of the view is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **low**, resulting in a visual effect that is **minor adverse** in the short term, **reducing to neutral** over time.

9.2.5 FROM FOOTPATH 0209/12/2 RUNNING THROUGH THE WESTERN PORTION OF THE SITE - From within the site boundary (whether travelling north from viewpoint 5 or south from viewpoint 6) views of the residential units and proposed caravan plots will be possible although these will be limited to the northern and southern ends of the footpath respectively.

Along the central section of the route, views of the proposed road network and open watercourse will be clearly visible, although these will be set within

the context of the existing retained tumps and planted accordingly to allow it to be maintained as a semi-natural route as it moves through the Site.

Sensitivity of the view is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **high**, resulting in a visual effect that is **major adverse** in the short term, **reducing to moderate minor** over time.

9.2.5 FOOTPATH 0209/12/2 ON THE NORTHERN SIDE OF THE SITE (See viewpoint 6) – the majority of views from this footpath will experience full or partial views of the site, with residential development being visible along the northern boundaries of fields B, C & D. From this elevated position, a large proportion of the central green park and proposed marina will also be visible in the mid ground, while filtered views of the holiday cabins and caravan parks will be possible through smaller gaps in the boundary vegetation. The well wooded appearance in the landscape further south will not be affected by the proposals.

In the long term, proposed areas of planting within the site will have matured and begin to feature as notable elements within the development. These will help to break up the massing of the built form and help to assimilate the proposed development within the view.

Sensitivity of the receptor is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **medium**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate adverse**, reducing to **minor adverse** in the longer term. This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.2.6 ELLESMERE BUSINESS PARK (FOOTPATH0208/8/1) (See viewpoint 7) – the majority of views from this footpath to the north west of the site will experience full or partial views of the proposed central trunk road and access roundabout off of Oswestry Road. Partial views into the caravan park to the south will also be visible, with the caravans and associated amenity buildings partially defining the horizon.

In the long term, proposed hedgerow tree planting will reinforce the existing boundary vegetation and screen views out to the caravan park and the wider landscape beyond, restricting views to the proposed junction and access road in the foreground.

Sensitivity of the view is therefore deemed to be **high**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **medium**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate adverse** in the short term, reducing to **minor adverse** in the longer term. This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.3 Views from the Local Road Network

9.3.1 OSWESTRY ROAD (See viewpoints 8) – The majority of the views from this section of road will have clear views of the proposed development in the south west corner of the site, with the caravan park forming the main part of the development visible. In addition to this a small amount of the proposed residential development will also be visible to the north while the remainder of the development will not be visible due to intervening vegetation and topography.

In the long term, reinforcement planting to the existing hedge along the site's western boundary and pockets of woodland planting within the caravan park will help to assimilate the built form into the landscape and further reinforce the well treed appearance of the existing skyline.

Sensitivity of the view is therefore deemed to be **medium,** while its **susceptibility to change** is **high**, resulting in a visual effect that is **moderate adverse** in the short term**,** but reducing to **minor adverse** in the longer term. This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.3.2 BIRCH ROAD (See viewpoint 9) – Views from this short section of road will have only partial views of the proposed development with the southern-most corner of the hotel building being visible between the existing bands of tree planting along the canal. The hotel will form a new component within the view, although this will be of a scale that is in keeping with that of the existing Canal Depot Buildings. No planting is proposed to mitigate the new man made element within the view.

Sensitivity of the view is deemed to be **medium**, while its **susceptibility to change** is **low**, resulting in a visual effect that is **minor adverse in both the short and the long term**. This is not deemed significant in EIA terms.

9.4 Residential Views

9.4.1 BERWYN VIEW (See viewpoint 10) – Views onto the proposed site from this residential area will be heavily screened by the proposed residential development to the south of this area and as such there will be no views of the site from this location.

The resulting visual effect is therefore considered to be **neutral**.

9.5 Significance of Visual Effects

9.5.1 This assessment takes into account the Site, within the proposed SAMDev Plan as an area allocated for housing, leisure & tourism. The proposals will result in a significant change to the nature of the views, but in terms of significance have been considered in the context of this allocation.

9.5.2 At present views towards the Site are generally limited to areas in close proximity to the site. Beyond that they are contained by the combined effect of topography, vegetation and the existing settlement in and around the town of Ellesmere. It is therefore possible to categorise the significance of the proposed development's visual envelope into the following:

a. Views from the Shropshire Union Canal and public footpaths in and adjacent to the site, and secondly,
b. Views from the surrounding local road network

9.5.4 Views from the Shropshire Union Canal and public footpaths in and adjacent to the site - Visual receptors immediately adjacent to the site will experience a change in views that whilst **moderately adverse** in the short to medium term, they are impacts that are inevitable as a result of a development of this scale and as such are unavoidable. Views of the new marina are generally not considered adverse, as they are in keeping with the use and history of the canal, and to many people are themselves considered an attractive and interesting element that is appropriate and typical of the canal.

9.5.3 Views from within the site are limited to a section of footpath 0209/12/2, however, due to the nature of the proposed development, visual receptors moving through the Site will experience a **major adverse** change, although the space afforded to this route within the masterplan and the proposed planting along it will help to maintain its semi-rural nature.

9.5.5 In the long term mitigation planting within the site and along its southern and western boundaries will have had time to establish, improving the screening effect of the existing boundary vegetation to the development while amenity planting within the site will further soften its visual impact within the view and in the instance of footpath 0209/12/2 will help to maintain its semi rural nature.

9.5.6 Secondly from the surrounding local road network - Visual receptors in the middle distance to the site will experience a change in views that whilst **moderate adverse** in the short to medium term, will become **minor adverse** in the long term, this is not considered significant in EIA terms, as the site has now been designated for mixed use development and its impact has been mitigated against through both the design process and proposed green infrastructure.

9.6 Summary

9.6.1 The selected viewpoints and visual assessment have demonstrated that although the Site is visible from a localised area around the site, the more adverse effects have been mitigated against through the careful massing and placement of the development, with large elements of green infrastructure being used to both soften the impact of the proposed development and to re-enforce typical features of the view such as the woodland ridge as an extension to Haw Wood.

9.6.2 Overall its impact will be **Moderate Adverse** in the short term, gradually becoming **Minor Adverse** as it is assimilated into the landscape by the improved boundary vegetation and tree /shrub planting within the site, as they become established.

9.6.3 There will be a permanent and complete change of views towards the application site from rural pasture to a mixed use residential environment with leisure and tourist activities associated with the Shropshire Union Canal. The effect on the views from the surrounding areas will be of **Minor Significance** in the long term.

10. Conclusion and Summary

10.1 Conclusion

10.1.1 The proposed development comprises a range of leisure facilities and 250 houses. The leisure element will include a 200 berth marina and associated boating facilities, hotel, pub and play barn, a spa centre with both indoor and outdoor sports activities, holiday lodges, and a touring caravan park. Shropshire Council have allocated the site for housing and mixed used development.

10.2 Landscape Resource

10.2.1. The site is located within a medium scale, open rolling landscape with localised points of higher ground within predominately undulating countryside. It is bounded by mature hedges and hedgerows and comprises a series of irregular field boundaries with bands of trees and woodland, which give the appearance of a well wooded landscape and a sense of visual enclosure.

10.2.2 Its character is strongly influenced by the Shropshire Union Canal that runs along the length of the site's southern boundary and it forms the interface between urban character of the town of Ellesmere and the surrounding rural landscape beyond.

10.2.3 As the site is now allocated for comprehensive redevelopment, a complete change of character is expected through the change in planning policies for the land, with a development type that is in keeping with the recreational character of the canal.

10.3 Landscape Character

10.3.1 Whilst there will be a permanent and complete change of character within the application site, the effect on the character of the surrounding areas will be of low significance in the longer term. Improvements to the physical landscape resource, will have a long term beneficial effect on trees and hedgerows. In addition, this improved resource will help to create a balance between the proposed development and the character of the existing surrounding landscape to ensure that the proposals can be appropriately accommodated within the new character of the town of Ellesmere.

10.3.2 It has been shown that the landscape effects resulting from the proposed development will be Neutral in the long term.

10.4 Visibility

10.4.1. The selected viewpoints and visual assessment have demonstrated that although the application Site is visible from a localised area, where the proposed development will be seen, the more adverse effects have been mitigated against through the careful massing and placement of the development, confining large scale development to areas of low visibility and smaller scale buildings to more visible parts of the site at a density that has allowed retention of existing land form and the opportunity to plant pockets of woodland, re-enforcing typical features of the view such as the well wooded appearance of the skyline and the undulating countryside.

10.4.2 It has been shown that the visual effects resulting from the proposed development will generally be of **moderate adverse significance (in the short to medium term, becoming minor in the long term overall as proposed planting within the site matures** This is not considered significant in terms of EIA.

10.5 Summary

10.5.1 The site has been assessed in terms of its landscape character and visibility within the landscape, with reference to national, county and local level character assessments, to identify the key landscape elements within the site, and the visual impact of the site on the surrounding landscape.

10.5.2 This is a predominantly recreational development located within a rural setting adjacent to the town of Ellesmere and the Shropshire Union Canal. Despite its scale, the existing nature of the landscape and the design of the proposals limits the effects, which are primarily experienced in and immediately adjacent to the site, creating a balanced addition to the town, while maintaining the character of the surrounding rural setting.

10.5.3 As a whole, it is considered that the proposal should be acceptable in terms of its impact on the surrounding landscape and will be in keeping with the existing recreational uses associated with the Shropshire Union Canal.

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