

# **Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment**

in respect of

## **Land to the North of Oswestry**

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2014

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Planit-IE Ltd has been appointed by the landowners to carry out a landscape and visual appraisal of the land to the north of Oswestry. Planit-IE LLP is a registered practice of the Landscape Institute and has considerable experience in all areas of landscape design and visual assessment.
- 1.2 The site occupies 4 areas of green field land on the north east edge of Oswestry, the majority of the land lying between Wittington Road and the railway line, inside the A5 by-pass. Two parcels of land lie to the west of Gobowen Road (B5089) and the railway line and one further area lies adjacent to the A5 by-pass at the junction with Wittington Road.
- 1.3 Representations have been made to the current Local Plan Inquiry for the site to be allocated for a mix of development uses. These proposed uses include: a new high quality residential neighbourhood within the western and central areas of the of the landholdings (sites 1, 2 and 4); re-use of Old port Farm and sensitive extension of the farm buildings for residential; a new visitor car park linked to the nearby Oswestry Historic Fort, a scheduled ancient monument (site 3); and new employment uses to the east of the A5 by-pass (sites 6 and 7). The proposals will include new open space provision and habitat creation, as part of a comprehensive landscape strategy for the site. Plan 1 illustrates the locations of the site and an aerial photograph is shown within Plan 2.
- 1.4 As part of the representations to the Local Plan Inquiry, a development masterplan has been produced which illustrates how the site could be developed. This identifies locations for different uses on the site and provides sufficient detail to understand the scale and impact of the built form and the mitigating effect of the proposed landscape. The masterplan proposals have been prepared by Planit-ie LLP, with transportation input from dtpc.
- 1.6 The town of Oswestry lies is the largest market town and civil parish in Shropshire, England, close to the Welsh border. It is at the junction of the A5, A483, and A495 roads. It is located at the western edge of the Shropshire plain, before this rises towards the Welsh border and the Clwydian Hills. Oswestry is the largest settlement within the Oswestry Uplands, a designated Natural Area and National Character Area. Refer to Figure 1 for site location.

- 1.7 The Indicative Masterplan is illustrated in Plan 3.

## **2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **Site Description**

- 2.1 The sites are characterised by subdivided agricultural fields, with the exception of site 4, which forms a single plot.
- 2.2 The historic Hill Fort and wooded area are clearly visible, to the north and west of site 1.
- 2.3 To the west, the area is characterised by larger fields and sporadic planting.
- 2.4 To the east of the bypass, land comprises a mix of fields, leisure facilities, agricultural holdings and woodland.
- 2.5 To the south, green open space is integrated into the suburban expansion areas of Oswestry. There is a green buffer along the western edge of the bypass.
- 2.6 To the west of Gobowen Road the land begins to rise up towards the west, rising steeply alongside the housing to meet the wooded hill above Oldport Farm. Within the central areas there is some variation, with the land falling away from Whittington Road (116 AOD to 113 AOD) and rising up steeply to Gobowen Road (from 114.69) AOD to 120 AOD). The site falls to a low point of 110 AOD along the north east boundary. To the east, there is a more gradual fall to the south and east.

## **3.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 This assessment has been carried out with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2013 (referred to hereafter as “the Guidelines”). The assessment included both a desk-based analysis and on-site field study and observation. The desk study involved the

collation and review of existing maps and written information about the site and the wider landscape beyond. The main sources of information included:

- Ordnance Survey plans and topographic survey information;
- Aerial photographs;
- Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan, 1998;
- Natural England National Character Areas;
- The Shropshire Landscape Typology 2006;
- Oswestry Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (White, 2009).

3.2 This information provided the basis for an appraisal of the pattern and character of the site and its surroundings. It served to identify relevant planning policy and special designated areas, and highlighted potential receptors of landscape and visual impact.

3.3 The visual assessment for the development was carried out through a mix of desktop analysis and on site observation. An initial desk study of the area, with reference to topographic data and aerial photographs, was used to determine the broad zones of visual influence (ZVI), i.e. areas of land that are visually connected to the site. The principal views of the site were determined in the field, with particular emphasis on checking potential visual receptor areas such as public footpaths, principal vehicular routes and residential areas.

3.4 Representative viewpoints were identified which were considered to be of particular significance in terms of providing a range of views of the site and where development would have the potential to affect their character and quality.

3.5 Photographs of each of the principal viewpoints were taken by a professional photographer using a fixed lens camera. The camera lens had a focal length equivalent to 50mm, i.e. similar to that seen with the naked eye. Where panoramic views were taken, the individual frames were stitched together in accordance with the Guidelines. A selected number of views have 2 photographs, to illustrate how the view looks when trees are in leaf, and in the winter months when trees are bare. The views selected were those

considered to vary significantly in terms of the potential visibility of the site dependent on the time of year.

- 3.6 To create the photomontages, a digital block model of the proposed development was produced. Using 3-D modelling software, perspective views of the model are created and can be placed accurately within the photographs. The location and scale of the development within the photographs is verified by topographic survey, whereby, key features within the view are surveyed. This can then be used, together with digital terrain data, to accurately position the rendered model within each photomontage.
- 3.7 In assessing impact on the selected viewpoints, a number of criteria have been employed. These include: a measure of the view's importance; the degree of visibility of the development from the viewpoint; the sensitivity of the visual receptor; the magnitude of the predicted impact, and the ultimate significance of the impact. An indication of the level of confidence in the prediction is also made.

#### **Level of Importance**

- 3.8 The importance of the various views have been categorized on the following basis:-
- National - Views from monuments of national significance such as The Abbey.
  - Regional - Views from regionally important routes including recreational and vehicular routes, such as views from the A671.
  - District - Views from important undeveloped areas, such as Spring Wood and the Nab Hill, and vehicular routes of district level importance.
  - Local - All other views, including views from the local road and public footpath networks.

#### **Degree of Visibility and Prominence**

- 3.9 The degree of visibility and prominence of the proposed development within the selected viewpoint is measured in accordance with the following scales:

1	Highly visible	1	Very prominent
2	Partially Visible	2	Reasonably Prominent
3	Scarcely/Not Visible	3	Not Prominent

## Landscape Sensitivity

3.10 For the purposes of this assessment the sensitivity of the landscape is based on an evaluation of:

- The character and quality of the wider landscape, and;
- The character and quality of the site.

3.11 The determination of the sensitivity of the landscape is based upon an evaluation of each aspect of the landscape likely to be affected. The evaluation reflects factors set out in the guidance on landscape and visual impact assessment i.e *“it’s quality, value, contribution to the landscape character, and the degree to which the particular element or characteristic can be replaced or substituted.”* The sensitivity of the landscape has been assessed according to the categories below

3.12 High

- A highly valued landscape (e.g forming part of a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Historic Park or Garden or containing highly valued components
- A landscape in good condition, whose characteristics or components make a strong and positive contribution to defining landscape character.
- A landscape containing characteristics/components that would be irreplaceable or difficult to replace.

3.13 Medium

- A moderately valued landscape (e.g. forming part of a locally designated landscape) or containing moderately valued components.

- A landscape in moderate/fair or declining condition whose characteristics or components make some positive contribution to wider landscape character.
- Containing landscape characteristics/components that are likely to be replaceable to some extent.
- Moderate sensitivity may also apply to different combinations of high and low value, condition and contribution to character.

#### 3.14 Low

- A landscape of very limited/low value.
- A landscape in poor condition whose characteristics or components do not contribute positively to landscape character.
- Containing landscape characteristics/components that are likely to be easily replaceable.
- Not all aspects noted above are required to apply concurrently to result in a low sensitivity.

### **Sensitivity of Visual Receptors**

3.15 Visual receptors include the public or community at large, residents, visitors and other groups of people or individuals. In defining the sensitivity of visual receptors, account has been taken of the degree to which they are likely to be focussed on the landscape or wider setting. Potential seasonal screening effects have also been identified. The sensitivity of the visual receptors identified will be categorized as follows:

- High – Occupants of residential properties/communities with valued views. Recreational users whose attention or interest may be focussed on the landscape e.g. visitor's to National Parks or AONBs.
- Medium – People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation including users of local public footpaths. People travelling on local roads.
- Low – People at their place of work or whose attention is focussed elsewhere. People travelling on main roads or railways through the landscape and who experience only fleeting views.



## **Confidence**

3.16 The predicted impact is assessed against the criteria set out below in order to attribute a level of confidence to the assessment.

- High - The predicted impact is either certain, or very likely to occur, based on reliable information or previous experience.
- Medium – The predicted impact and its level are best estimates, based on on-site and desktop study.
- Low – The predicted impact and its level are best estimates, based on given knowledge and experience. More information may be needed to improve the level of confidence.

## **Magnitude of Impact**

3.17 The magnitude of the impact is measured in relation to the extent that changes affect the character and features of the view, either in a positive or negative way. The following descriptions define the magnitude:

- High - Leads to a major alteration to key elements/features/characteristics of the view and/or introduces elements considered to be totally uncharacteristic when set in the attributes of the receiving landscape.
- Medium - Leads to a partial loss or alteration to one or more of the key elements/features/characteristics of the view that may be prominent but may not necessarily be considered to be substantially uncharacteristic when set in the attributes of the receiving landscape.
- Low - Leads to a minor loss of or alteration to one or more of the key elements/features/characteristics of the view, or change that may not be uncharacteristic when set in the attributes of the receiving landscape.
- Negligible - Leads to a very minor loss of or alteration to one or more key elements/features/characteristics of the view that are not uncharacteristic when set in the attributes of the receiving landscape – approximating to the “no change” situation.

### **Significance of Impact**

3.18 In determining the significance of the impact, account is taken of the sensitivity of the visual receptor, the importance of the view and the predicted magnitude of the impact. The impact is described in terms of the beneficial and/or adverse effects where the impact is clearly identifiable, and negligible where the impact is not clearly identifiable.

- Major - Where there would be a very noticeable and highly significant alteration to the existing view
- Moderate - Where there would be a clearly noticeable and moderately significant alteration to the existing view
- Minor - Where there would be a perceptible alteration to the existing view, but one of low significance.
- Negligible - No discernable change in the existing view or landscape.

## 4.0 BASELINE CONDITIONS

### Landscape Character

#### *National Landscape Character*

- 4.1 A Countryside Character Map of England was published in 1998 that identifies a series of character areas within the various regions of the country that go to make up the varied landscape of the Nation. Oswestry falls at the intersection of two broad character areas. To the east of the town, the area is defined as Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain and to the west, as Oswestry Uplands.
- 4.2 The upland area to the west of the town forms the edge of the Clwydian Hills and affords views into Wales and eastwards across the Shropshire Plain. The area is deeply rural with small irregular fields, copses and woodlands and scattered farms and hamlets. The border area is characterised by prominent hill forts, including the Old Oswestry fort, situated on the edge of the town.
- 4.3 The area to the east of Oswestry is characterised by the gently rolling Shropshire Plain, a predominantly rural landscape of dairy farming with farms defined by well-managed hedges and hedgerow trees. Areas of woodland are generally small, but the frequent hedgerow trees give the impression of a far more wooded landscape.
- 4.4 Key characteristics of the Oswestry Uplands Character area include:
- Steeply sloping, flat-topped, predominantly limestone hills form a band across the western half of the area, giving way to gentler foothills and the Shropshire Plain to the east.
  - Soils are derived from the Carboniferous limestone bedrock and support rare flora and fauna such as the pyramidal and greater butterfly orchids.
  - Numerous streams winding across the undulating landscape, with dramatic gorges carved out in the limestone, support species such as the Atlantic stream crayfish.
  - There are scattered patches of broadleaved woodland and coniferous

plantations throughout the area, particularly on the steeper slopes, which are dissected by narrow, often wooded valleys. There are linear woodlands along valley sides and wet woodlands on valley bottoms.

- Pasture is the dominant land use on the higher ground, with mixed, more commercial agriculture on the foothills to the east.
- The field pattern is irregular, with species-rich hedgerows (characteristically hazel) and some hedgerow trees across much of the area; however, the pattern is more regular in the north-west, where it is of relatively late enclosure.
- There is a strong Welsh influence on place names, and dispersed settlement character, particularly in the west and south. A clustered settlement pattern occurs in the south-west, associated with the mining industry.
- A strong time depth is evident in the medieval and earlier field patterns and routeways, iron-age hill forts such as that found at Oswestry, scattered parklands on lower slopes and industrial mining activity/archaeology.
- Industrial and residential development is evident around the market town of Oswestry, but the area is still one of the most tranquil in the west Midlands area.
- Many former quarries are dramatic features in the landscape but are now abandoned and have become overgrown with grassland and scrub.
- There are traditional farmsteads and buildings of local Carboniferous limestone with slate roofs. They are occasionally whitewashed.
- Offa's Dyke is an important historic landscape and recreational feature that runs north–south through the area.

4.5 The history of the area is dominated by its position at the junction of upland and lowland and its' natural resources. The large iron-age hill forts at Llanymynech and Old Oswestry are evidence of the area's importance in the Iron Age, and it is possible that lead and copper were already being mined in the prehistoric period at Llanymynech. Certainly copper was being mined during the Roman period.

4.6 The pattern of scattered hamlets and farmsteads with small, irregular fields and open moorland on the high ground was probably present by the time the Anglo- Saxons arrived in the locality. In the 8th century, Offa's Dyke was

created to protect Mercia against attacks and raids from Powys. In the later Saxon period, the area around Oswestry was part of the manor of Maesbury, but the Anglo-Saxon hold on the landscape was probably tenuous, since there are virtually no old English names west of the town.

### **Statements of Environmental Opportunity**

4.6 SEO 1: Protect and enhance the area's distinctive and intricate historic landscape character – particularly its transitional character from the plains of Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire into the uplands of Mid Wales, and its mosaic of pasture, woodlands and grasslands – to retain sense of place, enhance biodiversity networks and retain the area's high tranquility levels.

4.7 For example, by:

- Reinforcing links between wildlife habitats by managing permanent pasture in upland areas in the west of the National Character Area (NCA), to protect the landscape and ecological value of unimproved limestone soils and their flower-rich hay meadows.
- In the lowlands, protecting the pattern of field boundaries by managing hedgerows and other boundary features so that they are retained in, or restored to, good condition.
- Planning and managing commercial woodland in line with the UK Forestry Standard so that awkward shapes are resolved and native tree species are used, to improve landscape and biodiversity value.
- Protecting from further loss key elements of the landscape mosaic, particularly those areas of semi-natural habitat such as calcareous grasslands, fen, ponds and woodlands.
- Planning to reinforce the connectivity of habitats within and into adjoining NCAs and into Wales, using the historic patterns of field boundaries and semi-natural habitats. This will be particularly important in facilitating species movement and colonisation in response to climate change.
- Conserving more remote areas from development by working to ensure that traditional settlement patterns are retained and that these areas maintain relatively high levels of tranquility.
- Designing new developments that are integrated with surrounding

boundaries and landscape character, to minimise noise and visual impact (including light spill).

### ***Regional Landscape Character***

- 4.8 Within the Landscape Character Assessment (The Shropshire Landscape Typology 2006), the site falls within Landscape Character Type: Principal Settled Farmlands. These are prevalent throughout northern Shropshire, mainly in association with Permian and Triassic sandstones. These are settled lowland landscapes of small villages and hamlets scattered farms and relict commons, with varied soil conditions that are predominantly utilised for mixed farming.
- 4.9 Like the Settled Pastoral Farmlands, this landscape type lacks significant woodlands, although small pieces of ancient woodland and plantation occur in some areas.
- 4.10 Characteristically, however, 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.
- 4.11 The Principal Settled Farmlands are also defined by a clustered settlement pattern of hamlets and smaller villages and a medium to high density dispersal of farmsteads and wayside cottages.
- 4.12 Together with the relatively small, sub-regular fields, these elements combine to create medium scale landscapes with predominantly filtered views.

### **Local Plan Evidence Base**

- 4.13 Prior to representations made to the current Local Plan Inquiry for the sites to be allocated for development, a landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment for defined areas around Oswestry and other settlements in the former Borough was carried out by White Consultants in 2008. This complemented a County Landscape Character Assessment by Shropshire

County Council. The study assessed the capacity of the landscape to accommodate housing and employment development, identifying those landscapes that should be protected from development.

- 4.14 Sites on the north-west urban edge of Oswestry were defined in the 2008 study as having medium landscape impact, with medium capacity for employment and medium/low capacity for housing. The A5 corridor was considered to reduce the tranquility of the potential development site, but to make it visible. Visual detractors included the power line across the site and the commercial/industrial buildings to the south and south west. The hill fort was observed to be a prominent landmark, and the study identified that the part of the site with least effect would be the southern half, defined by a line from the northern edge of the existing industrial development at Park Hall running west, using a hedge line as a northern boundary. This would avoid extending development further north than existing development and would not impinge on more sensitive parts of the hill fort setting. The study recommended that should the site be developed, there would be a need for large scale planting on the northern boundary and breaking up the massing of development. It was also recommended that opportunities should be taken to respond to the hill fort in any development layout by using the axes of view corridors, especially from the surrounding road.
- 4.15 This guidance has assisted the preparation of the masterplan and the consideration of impact on both landscape and heritage.

#### **Local Landscape/Site Character**

- 4.16 The immediate character of the site is defined by its location at the urban fringe. The site itself is predominantly pastoral fields, which are defined by neat hedges in keeping with the wider surrounding countryside. The main area of the site, however, is influenced by the major transport corridors that lie beyond the site and the built form that defines the northern edge of the town. Residential areas give way to commercial and light industrial premises along Wittington Road, overlooking the site. To the north east, the busy A5 by-pass lines the edge of the site and allows views across it to the town. The old railway line that follows the B5069 is disused and marks the western edge of the development site.

- 4.17 The Old Oswestry hill fort is a prominent landmark beyond the western edge of the site. A distinct landform with steep ramparts to its sides, it becomes clearly visible on approaching the town from the north along the A5 and the B5069 and is also visible above the hedge lines along Wittington Road and from the A5 by-pass heading north at the junction with Wittington Road. Land rises up to recreational woodland and the ramparts of the Hill Fort, to the south west and north west of Old Port Farm.
- 4.18 The local landscape character appears characteristics with National Character Area 33, as defined by Natural England, as well as some of the characteristics of Shropshire Landscape Typology: Principal Settled Farmland. These include:
- Pastoral land use along higher ground;
  - Irregular field pattern;
  - small to medium scale fields, hedgerows, hedgerow trees and semi-natural woodland;
  - setting of Iron Age Hill Fort.

#### **Other Site Features of Value**

- 4.19 The most significant landscape features within the site itself are the hedges that mark the field boundaries (see Figure 2). These vary in character over different parts of the site. The hedges bounding Wittington Road and the A5 By-pass are generally neatly trimmed with few hedgerow trees, allowing more open views to the north and west, whereas, much of the boundary with the disused railway line is an overgrown hedgerow characterised by mature hawthorn and tall vegetation.
- 4.20 A dense line of mature trees defines the north east edge of the site along the boundary of the parcel of land adjacent to the Wittington Road / By-pass roundabout. These entirely screen the works that lie beyond. The parcel of land to the south of this, also on the eastern side of the by-pass, is defined along its eastern boundary by a hedgerow, including a number of mature trees that break up views into the site from Wittington Road.



- 4.21 The hedge lines that define the boundary to the development sites play an important role in defining local landscape character and should be retained wherever possible. Some of the intensively managed hedgerows have the potential to provide a more informal landscape edge to the site by allowing them to naturalize, providing localized screening and improved wildlife benefits.
- 4.22 There are no tree preservation orders applying to any of the trees within, or along the boundary of the site. Notwithstanding this, the hedgerow trees along the boundaries are of local significance and should be retained under any development proposals. It should be entirely feasible to retain the vast majority, if not all, the existing mature trees on the site through a carefully considered approach to master planning.
- 4.23 The locally defined character areas have been assessed in terms of their landscape sensitivity as follows:

<b>Landscape Character Area</b>	<b>Landscape Sensitivity</b>
1 Recreational Woodland	High
2 Sloping fields up to the Woodland	Medium
3 Sloping fields up to the Hill Fort	High
4 Small/Medium Sized field pattern	Medium
5 Rolling pastoral small/medium sized field pattern	Medium/high
5 Hill Fort	High

### **Townscape Character**

- 4.24 Figure 3 provides an illustration of the townscape character areas referred to within the Design and Access Statement that accompanies this application. In addition, we have identified Conservation Areas and Local Buildings of Merit.
- 4.25 Oswestry is an ancient market town located in the North of Shropshire close by the English - Welsh Border.

- 4.26 Dating to around 1086, the castle L'oeuvre was recorded in William I's Domesday Book as being built by Rainald, Sheriff of Shropshire in the Hundred of Meresberie, it was once a frontier outpost that saw both Welsh and Anglo Saxon mix together prior to the Norman conquest.
- 4.27 The earliest reference to the town was recorded 1272 and the settlement of Blancminster, which derives from its white stone church.
- 4.28 Most of the town centre has been designated a Conservation Area, conveying a mixture of architectural styles. There are many old timber framed houses, for example Llywd Mansion on Cross Street, the Heritage Centre, the Blackgate, the Fox Inn and the shops along Beatrice Street. Georgian architecture is also represented particularly around St Oswald's Church where there are a number of imposing town houses complete with grand entrance staircases and front doors.
- 4.29 Oswestry saw some later Victorian growth, out from the historic core, many terraced houses and churches and railway buildings reflect this period.
- 4.30 Later 20<sup>th</sup> century housing growth occurred to the north, east and west of the town characterised by suburban housing estates, which do not contribute to the traditional character of the settlement due to poor quality buildings and a lack of well defined open space.
- 4.31 The northern area of the town, and, in particular, within the wider setting of the site and the Hill Fort, resulted in some incongruous late 20<sup>th</sup> century development within the landscape, particularly in relation to the industrial and commercial buildings around Whittington Road, which serve to adversely impact on the surrounding rural landscape.
- 4.32 Of more relevance to informing the development of the sites, is the surrounding rural/agricultural built character, which forms a defining feature of the local townscape and landscape character to the north of Oswestry, including Old Port Farm itself, Park Hall and Park Green.

## **Landscape Designations**

- 4.33 Figure 4 illustrates environmental designations and Public Rights of Way.

#### ***Open Countryside***

- 4.34 The site falls under the landscape designation of *Open Countryside*. New development in these areas is required to be in keeping with the character of the landscape area and should reflect local vernacular, scale, style, features and building materials. Proposals to conserve, renew and enhance landscape features are permitted, providing regard has been given for the characteristic landscape features of the area.

#### ***Public Rights of Way/Linkages***

- 4.35 The application sites are overlooked by a network of public footpaths, which run around the circumference of the hill fort and its ramparts, at the upper and lower levels, providing elevated views over the sites. The route is well used, but access around the Hill Fort is restricted to the footpaths. Moreover, there is only one access point up to the Hill Fort, from the west. The footpath links to the Hill Fort from the official visitor car park off Gatacre Lane, and then continues northwards to Pentre-clawdd. In order to access the visitor car park, vehicles have to navigate through a residential housing area, and therefore it is not immediately accessible off the strategic Road network.
- 4.36 There is also a footpath network through the recreational woodland, immediately adjacent to site 1, which provides limited visibility of the site.

#### ***Scheduled Ancient Monument***

- 4.37 The Old Oswestry Hill Fort together with two adjoining sections of Wat's Dyke is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, protected by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended). The impact on the Hill Fort has been fully assessed within the Heritage Impact Assessment.

### **Visual Analysis**

#### ***Views from Local Road Network:***

- 4.38 Figure 5 illustrates the principal views of the site from the local road network. Approaching the site along Wittington Road from the town centre, views over Site 4 become clearly available on the left hand side above the hedge line. This occurs to the east of the Kwik-Fit Depot that marks the edge of a small light industrial area on the north east edge of the town.
- 4.39 Views over the site are also available from the A5 By-pass on approaching the roundabout junction with Wittington Road. On approaching from the south, views to the north west are open, and there are clear views over the low hedgerows to Site 4 and the backdrop of the hill fort (see View 2). Approaching from the north towards the Wittington Road junction, views open up intermittently across Site 4 and 5 between groups of roadside trees, as illustrated by Views 5 and 11.
- 4.40 On approaching the town centre along Gobowen Road, there are partial views across Site 3 (view 6). Traffic travelling north along Gobowen Road will have partial views into Site 1, above the hedge that lines the road.
- 4.41 Wider views from the surrounding road network are highly restricted, with only a glimpsed view through a gap in the hedge allowing a partial view between the elevated landforms of the hill fort and the wooded hill that otherwise screen the western edge of the site (view 17).

***Views from Public Footpaths:***

- 4.42 The principal public footpath views are from the two elevated landforms to the west of the site. A footpath route runs around the top of the hill fort and gives clear views over Sites 1, 2 and 3 and beyond over the Shropshire Plain. Another footpath passes through the woodland that covers the small hill to the south of the fort. Whilst the dense tree canopy restricts the extent of views from within the woodland, there are close views over Sites 1 and 3 from the eastern edge of the woodland. The existing housing is evident alongside part of the footpath. See Views 8 and 9.
- 4.44 There are close views into the site from the disused railway line that bounds the western edge of Site 4. This is not currently a public right of way, although the route has potential to become a strategic footpath route and/or

cycleway in the future.

***Views from Local Housing:***

- 4.45 The main body of the site (Site 4), is bounded at its western edge by light industrial works, with only a few residential properties having potential views from the south of Wittington Road. There are only 4 properties that face onto the site with reasonable views and these are Nos, 36,37,38 and 39, Maplehurst Drive.
- 4.46 A modern housing development lies on the edge of the town to the west of Gobowen Road. A small number of these houses back onto Site 1 from Jasmine Gardens and have 2nd floor views over the open fields of Old Port Farm.

**Visual Receptors**

- 4.47 Visual receptors refer to those people who will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development.

Key visual receptors for the new development include the following:

- Users of surrounding cycle and footpath routes for recreational purposes, whose attention may be focussed on the landscape;
- Occupiers of neighbouring residential properties with views affected by the development;
- Communities where the development results in changes in the landscape setting or valued views enjoyed by the community;
- People travelling through or past the affected landscape in cars.
- People at their place of work.

## **5.0 MASTERPLAN**

### **Vision**

- 5.1 The vision for this proposal is to create a new sustainable residential neighbourhood, and employment uses that sit within a publically accessible open space setting, improved access to, and understanding of, the hill fort and which responds to the surrounding landscape in a manner that has a positive impact on the lives of the people within and around the new development. The proposals will have a positive impact on the wider settlement of Oswestry by providing a number of planning benefits defined below.

### **Proposals**

- 5.2 Seven potential linked employment and residential development sites within Oswestry North are shown on Plan 3. All are located on the west side of the hill fort at varying distances from the monument. Closest are Sites 1, 2 and 3, which are on the west side of the B5069 at the foot of the slope.
- 5.3 Site 1: is residential, and forms an extension of the existing housing area on the northern edge of Oswestry. It occupies a site, which is currently green space between the foot of the hill fort and the urban fringe. The layout is more rural in character than the adjoining suburban development, and incorporates a significant amount of green space, with a wide landscape buffer between the proposed housing and the farm. On plan it can be seen to complete the urban edge in a rational line, occupying the land between the woodland slope and the B5069.
- 5.4 Sites 2 and 3: consist of the existing Oldport Farm and the proposed car park for visitors to the hill fort. The proposal for the farm involves retention of the historic farmhouse and ranges of 19th century barns, and their conversion for residential use. The unsightly cattle sheds, silage clamps and other modern structures will be demolished. A new L-shaped range replaces the poor quality farm buildings, and the layout is arranged around a courtyard to retain the agricultural character. A substantial area around the site is retained as open fields. A new access immediately to the north will provide access to the site

and will serve a new car park and interpretation point with a pedestrian link to the hill fort.

- 5.5 Site 4: is residential. The south-western part is largely screened from the hill fort by existing development. The remainder is relatively low density and has a village green at its heart. Informal tree and copse planting along the northern edge of the housing forms a soft boundary, allowing views over the open agricultural land. The existing hedgerow is retained as part of a green chain running through the area. A new footpath link through the fields connects the existing neighbourhoods with the proposed access to the hill fort and provides new opportunities for viewing the monument.
- 5.6 Proposed development has been removed from site 5, as part of ongoing discussions with the Local Planning Authority and English Heritage.
- 5.7 Site 6: is the corner plot adjoining the existing industrial site off the A495. It is proposed for B2/B8 employment use with development set back behind a wide perimeter landscape strip.
- 5.8 Site 7: is proposed for employment use and is set back behind a wide landscape buffer along the southern side of the A495. The northern part is proposed for B1 light industrial use with B2/B8 employment to the south.

### **Masterplan Considerations**

- 5.9 Planit-IE has prepared a masterplan following extensive analysis and evaluation of constraints and opportunities and a detailed study of the local context.
- 5.10 A comprehensive landscape framework has been developed by Planit-IE, which aims to retain the key existing landscape and ecological features of value on site. These include the hedgerows, which will potentially be cut back to an appropriate height and to allow access, and the trees and native shrubs running through the site. The provision of publically accessible open space around the hill fort will form a major feature of the new neighbourhood.

- 5.11 The masterplan aims to respond positively to existing ground levels within the site, with development working with the existing contours, particularly the principle of nestling development into the hillside within site 1. A substantial area to the north, and central areas of site 3 (separating sites 1 and 2) have been left free from development, due to the potential visual impacts on views from, and to the hill fort, and consideration of the contribution that this open area has on the visual setting off Oswestry.
- 5.12 A substantial wedge of green open space has been retained within sites 6 and 7, in order to facilitate the retention of existing valuable native tree and shrub planting. In addition, this green wedge is intended to visually 'break up' long-range views of the development from Hill Fort.
- 5.13 The masterplan also has due regard to the setting of the hill fort through the general siting, scale, form, structure and visual appearance of the proposed development.

Refer to Plan 3 and Design and Access Statement for the Masterplan Vision.



## 6.0 POTENTIAL IMPACTS

### Prediction of Impacts

- 6.1 Potential landscape impacts relate to individual landscape elements, landscape character and the characteristics of the surrounding townscape. The predicted landscape impacts can be divided into temporary impacts, i.e. those which will occur during the construction phase, and permanent impacts, which will be ongoing throughout the operational phase of the proposals.

### Potential Construction Impacts

- 6.2 The development is at a relatively early stage in the design and construction programme and, as such, it is difficult to predict with much certainty the precise methodology that will be adopted for construction and site management. However, it is possible to identify some broad impacts that may arise during the construction phase:-

- the visual impact of HGV movements carrying out enabling works on the site, implementing landscape proposals and implementing masterplan proposals;
- the visual impact of site lighting around construction areas
- the visual and landscape impact of remodelling ground levels
- landscape impacts of incorporating service and utilities.
- visual impact of temporary screening measures and protective fencing
- landscape and visual impacts of temporary parking, on-site accommodation and work areas
- landscape and visual impact of material stockpiles

### Potential Operational Impacts

- 6.3 The significant potential effects that will be identified and assessed are:

#### Landscape Impacts

6.4 The significant potential effects that have been identified and will be assessed are:

- impacts on the landscape character areas within the site and valuable site features;
- impacts on the surrounding landscape character;
- impacts on the surrounding townscape;
- Impacts on designated landscapes of value and Conservation Areas and Buildings of Townscape Merit;
- impacts on Public Rights of Way and cycleways;
- impacts on site topography;
- impacts on other site features of value.

#### Visual Impacts

Potential visual impacts are considered in terms of changes to the extent of visibility of the site and changes to the identified principal viewpoints.

### **Assessment of Landscape & Visual Effects**

#### **Construction Phase**

Feature/Nature of Impact	Timescale	Magnitude of Impact	Significance of Impact	Confidence Level
The visual impact of HGV movement & general construction works	Medium Term	Moderate Negative	Moderate Adverse	Medium
The visual impact of site lighting around construction areas	Medium Term	Minor Negative	Moderate Adverse	Medium
The visual and landscape impacts of remodelling ground levels/cut and fill operations	Medium Term	Moderate Negative	Moderate Adverse	Medium
The landscape impacts of incorporating services and utilities.	Medium Term	Slight Negative	Minor Adverse	Medium
The visual impacts of temporary screening measure and	Medium Term	Slight Negative	Minor Adverse	Medium

protective fencing.				
The landscape and visual impacts of temporary parking, on-site accommodation and work areas.	Medium Term	Moderate Negative	Moderate Adverse	Medium
The landscape and visual impact of material stockpiles.	Medium Term	Slight Negative	Minor Adverse	Medium

## Operational Phase – Landscape Impacts

### *Impact on Landscape Character*

- 6.5 At the national level, Oswestry lies within the Oswestry Uplands Character area; at the regional level, it is defined as principal settled farmland. As outlined in the baseline section of this report, the site and immediate site context contain a proportion of the key characteristics identified as typical high quality features within the character area, these include hedgerows and hedgerow trees, small mixed woodlands and the hill fort setting. The development proposes the retention of existing hedgerows, and no loss of any woodland. The proposals incorporate new tree and hedgerow planting which will contribute positively to the reinforcement of landscape character, as defined at the national and regional level. The overall impact on national/regional landscape character is therefore predicted to be **minor adverse**.
- 6.6 At the local level, the area is characterised by, agricultural land used for grazing, small to medium scale, undulating fields with hedgerows, hedgerow trees and semi-natural woodland along with rising land up to the Hill Fort and recreational woodland. As part of the proposed development of the site, the development proposes the retention of existing hedgerows wherever possible, and will result in no loss of woodland. The proposals will also incorporate new tree and hedgerow planting to reinforce local character. Further, development is kept away from the sloping land up to the Hill Fort and is sensitively designed around the woodland area to emphasise changes in level.

- 6.7 In addition, the Design and Access Statement which accompanies the application describes how the new development will work with the existing ground levels within the site to create minimal need for topographic changes, whilst also minimising potential visual impacts of new housing on rising ground levels.
- 6.8 The proposed development will result in some inevitable loss of open agricultural land; however significant swathes of open space have been retained in order to retain the rural character around the Hill Fort. The overall impact on local landscape character is therefore predicted to be **minor adverse**.

#### ***Impact on Townscape Character and Conservation Area***

- 6.9 A key driver of the design proposals has been to develop a townscape character that fits with the key characteristics of those areas of value immediately surrounding the site. The quantity and extent of development within the site has been determined in order to minimise the potential for negative visual impacts on users of the footpaths from the Hill fort. The development aims to retain a significant proportion of the land as a green edge to the development, which has been identified as being the most visible part of the site due to elevated views, and forms an important backdrop to the Hill Fort and settlement.
- 6.11 The masterplan seeks to respond to the townscape characteristics identified in the local area, with particular reference to the rural characteristics within the context of the Hill Fort in terms of: structure and layout, levels of enclosure, and the typologies both of building form and streets and spaces within the proposals. The proposed high quality approach to both architectural design and materials will help to ensure that the development is a positive addition to the wider townscape character.
- 6.12 The historic development pattern within the eastern extent of the town is strongly influenced by more agricultural/rural character adjacent to the countryside. These characteristics are reflected in the masterplan, in the informal layout of the housing and proposed density, and will enable the

development to appear sympathetically integrated into the surrounding townscape.

- 6.14 The proposed street layout within site 4 will allow views to permeate the site towards the Hill Fort, and partial views towards the hill fort across site 1 would be retained. The layout responds positively to the natural ground level changes within the site, creating a loose and informal character to the housing.

The overall impact on the townscape is therefore predicted to be **negligible**.

### ***Impact on Designated Landscape Areas***

- 6.15 The site is designated Open Countryside, which states that new development should be in keeping with the surrounding landscape and townscape character. The masterplan vision has extensively explored the landscape and townscape characteristics, and aims to be in keeping with this principle. The masterplan responds to the local vernacular in terms of scale, style, architectural features and building materials. The overall predicted impact has therefore been assessed as **minor adverse**.

### ***Impact on Public Rights of Way and recreational routes***

- 6.16 The footpath route through the site will be retained within the proposals and set within a substantial rural parkland setting to minimise any potential impacts on view from the hill fort footpaths. The development also creates the potential to enhance the existing connectivity between the settlement and the hill fort. In addition, new linkages could occur through and between the sites, across the dismantled railway, forming connections with the existing residential neighbourhoods to the south, as well as along strategic vehicular routes.

Visual impacts on key viewpoints identified along the public footpath through the site are considered separately within this report. This section considers the impact on the existing network of public footpath within and around the site only, in terms of connectivity and sustainable patterns of travel. The overall impact is therefore predicted to be **beneficial**.

### ***Impact on Topography***

- 6.17 The Masterplan Vision will require only minor modifications to the existing topography. A key aim of the masterplan is to work the development into the existing natural topographic levels, in order to create a development that is appropriate to the context on the fringes of Oswestry. Minimum amounts of remodelling ground levels/cut and fill operations will be required in order to accord with current access regulations. The overall impact is therefore predicted to be **negligible**.

### ***Impact on other site features of value***

- 6.18 The masterplan proposes the retention and enhancement where possible of existing features of the site, including trees and hedges. The proposals seek to enhance the value of these features by retaining them within areas of green open space that will run through the development, which will be subject to ongoing management.
- 6.19 The landscape strategy for the site aims to create continuous linkages between existing tree belts and hedges, which is positive in terms of ecological potential and landscape character.
- 6.20 Landscape features are one element that contribute to the creation of a clearly defined landscape character. The impact on the overall landscape character of the site is considered separately above. The overall impact on these features of value is predicted to be **minor beneficial**.

### **Operational Phase – Visual Impacts**

#### **Principal Viewpoints**

- 6.22 A total of 11 views were agreed with the Council as early as 2006. These views were subsequently validated with the council at a meeting in March 2007. English Heritage were also asked to comment on the views, but

provided no formal response. The views represented a range of distant and closer views from around the site. The viewpoint locations are identified within Figure 5.

- 6.23 From these views, a number of Principal Viewpoints were selected for the production of photomontages, and this was agreed with the Council on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012. These were views that it was felt would best illustrate the potential impacts of the development from sensitive locations, or which illustrated the clearest views of the development. A total of 6 photomontages have been produced. The non-verified views (summer) are provided in Appendix 10.3, and the verified views (winter) in Appendix 10.4. Whilst the all the non-verified views are stitched, all the verified views are not stitched.
- 6.24 All viewpoint photographs have been taken in winter to show the maximum potential impact, or worse case scenario, with minimum tree cover. In views that are likely to look significantly different in summer and winter, summer photographs were also taken at a later date in order to fully assess the impact of the proposals when trees are in leaf.

#### **View 5: View south west from the A5**

- 6.25 View 5 is a distant view, which represents that likely to be experienced by vehicular traffic and cyclists approaching the town of Oswestry.
- 6.26 The viewpoint is located along the edge of the carriageway of the A5. The existing view is rural in character, and is partially screened by intermittent vegetation along the boundary of the carriageway as well as a number of the hedgerow field boundaries that forms a typical landscape feature of quality and value. The backdrop of the hill fort, beyond the site, forms a key feature of the view.
- 6.27 The proposals would not materially alter the character of the view, on the basis that development is partially screened behind the existing vegetation and hedgerows. Moreover, the context of the hill fort is largely unchanged, with significant areas of agricultural fields being retained in the foreground and middle ground.

- 6.28 Key mitigating factors will include: the retention of a hedgerow boundaries and the provision of a substantial planted buffer along the edge of the new development to soften the visual impact of development; generous spacing of properties to allow filtered views through; and high quality housing, designed using typical local materials.
- 6.29 The overall significance on this viewpoint in summer and winter is therefore predicted to be **negligible**.

#### **View 6: B5069 Looking South West**

- 6.30 View 5 similar to view 6, in that it represents that likely to be experienced by vehicular traffic and cyclists approaching the town of Oswestry from Gobowen Road.
- 6.31 The viewpoint is located along the footpath of Gobowen Road. The existing view is similarly rural in character, and is characterised by the rolling pastoral landscape, the wooded hill, hedgerow field boundaries and the Hill Fort itself. The roof line of the farm buildings associated with Old Port breaks the skyline above the hedgerow.
- 6.32 The proposals would not materially alter the character of the view, on the basis that development is partially screened behind the existing hedgerow and rolling landscape. Whilst there is small increase in the visibility of the roofscape above the hedgerow, it is barely visible within the context of the wider view. Again, the context of the hill fort is largely unchanged, with significant areas of open, rolling pastoral landscape dominating the view around the base of the hill fort.

The impact of the roofscape would be mitigated through the provision of substantial plating, integrated into the boundaries of the development further assimilating the proposals into the rural landscape. The roof forms and materials of the new buildings are carefully juxtaposed against the retained farm buildings creating congruous additions to the view.



- 6.33 The overall significance on this viewpoint in summer and winter is therefore predicted to be **negligible**.

#### **View 9 – Representative view from the footpath around the Hill Fort**

- 6.34 This viewpoint is located on a well-used public footpath around the top of the hill fort. The view looks south-east over the rural landscape across the northern fringes of the settlement, and takes in the landscape beyond the settlement, to the east. The rolling pastoral landscape in the foreground and mid-ground form a prominent feature, and contribute to the high quality landscape/character of the view.
- 6.35 The view incorporates features typical of the regional and local landscape character, such as undulating, rolling landform and small pockets of dense woodland in the form of the recreational woodland, which defines the edge of the view. However, the established built form of the settlement is also a significant feature of the view, particularly the Old Port Farm agricultural sheds and industrial buildings off Whittington Road and commercial buildings fronting Whittington Road. The whole site is clearly visible north of the existing settlement.
- 6.36 The photomontage indicates that the removal of around 50% of the poor quality out buildings and large scale agricultural sheds around the farm would have a significant benefit on the view.
- 6.37 The careful design of new additions, particularly in the roofscape, would create more compact and sympathetic rural cluster.
- 6.38 The proposals would also remove the poor quality buildings around the main house itself, de-cluttering the immediate context of this building, which has a distinct visual quality and adds to the overall character of the site.
- 6.39 Further, the new buildings would be of a much smaller scale and a higher design quality than the existing agricultural buildings they replace. Some of the fields immediately surrounding the residential units would be utilised as

domestic curtilage; however, a substantial area around the site would be kept as open fields to mitigate any impact of the residential use.

- 6.40 To the east of the view, whilst the residential development is visible. The extent of development has been nestled into the sloping hillside in order to screen the mass of development behind the existing woodland copse. Moreover, the overall extent of development clearly relates to the existing residential area to the west.
- 6.41 In the foreground of the view, the car park would be clearly visible and would introduce a change in the view, particularly when fully occupied with parked vehicles; however the impact of the car park is mitigated through the utilisation of planting, materials and the prudent of lighting, to soften the impact of hard surfaces and associated paraphernalia. Moreover the introduction of the car park would be viewed in conjunction with the reduced building mass around Old Port Farm.
- 6.42 Within site 4, the existing settlement edge will be extended northwards, but from this perspective appears in line (drawn at an angle) with existing commercial development and electricity sub station along Whittington Road and the large industrial sheds; on this basis, the proposals would become a salient infill. Further, the provision of a substantial planted edge and the central rural open space, which is drawn back in to Whittington Road, serves to retain a degree of openness.
- 6.43 The A5 by-pass, and electricity pylons form a major detractor to the view, and the proposed industrial/commercial development beyond this line is knitted into the existing landscape framework, which comprises substantial field boundaries and woodland copses. The large format buildings are not out of character with the some of the existing industrial buildings in the foreground, or the larger buildings at the Oswestry Show Ground.
- 6.44 On this basis, the proposed development would assimilate into the settlement when perceived from this viewpoint. The use of locally appropriate materials, considered layout, appropriate scale and massing, along with a strong landscape framework to embed the development into the landscape, as detailed within the Design and Access Statement that accompanies the

application, will facilitate this assimilation.

- 6.45 The proposed development will form the context/setting of the Hill Fort. However the proposals do not have a material impact above that which occurs already from the existing industrial and suburban development prevalent within the view. Please refer to the Heritage Impact Assessment for a full assessment of the predicted impacts on the Hill Fort SAM.
- 6.46 The proposals will result in a loss of a proportion of open countryside, and visual receptors will be relatively sensitive to visual change from this viewpoint. However, the proposed development will be in sensitively positioned to relate to existing built detractors and improved the relationship between built development and open countryside. With or the without the improvements to Old Port Farm, it is considered that the overall significance of the visual impacts on this viewpoint is predicted to be **moderate adverse** in winter and summer. Should site 1 be removed from the proposals, it is also considered that there would be no material alteration to the impact on the view. The magnitude and significance of impacts is likely to reduce to some extent over time as the landscape grows and matures to the extent that the **moderate adverse impact** would become **minor adverse**.

#### **View 11: A5 Looking North West**

- 6.47 View 11 is located along the A5, looking north west towards the site 4. View 5 is close to the boundary of site 4 and represents what likely to be experienced by vehicular traffic and cyclists approaching/leaving the town of Oswestry.
- 6.48 The viewpoint is located along the edge of the carriageway of the A5. The existing view is urban edge in character, on the basis of the presence of the existing industrial buildings on the opposite side of Whittington Road; it is well screened by hedgerow vegetation in summer, and partially screened in winter by vegetation along the boundary of the carriageway.
- 6.49 The proposals would not materially alter the character of the view on the basis that development is substantially screened behind the existing vegetation and hedgerows. In the winter view, where development is partially screened, it is

positioned along the lower levels of the site, as well as having a substantial open space buffer between development and the boundary of the site.

- 6.50 The overall significance on this viewpoint in summer and winter is therefore predicted to be **minor adverse** in winter and **negligible** in summer.

#### **View 12: View from Whittington Road looking north west**

- 6.51 Viewpoint 12 is located along Whittington Road, which is approximately 150 metres from the development edge. The view looks north west along the boundary of the site, and represents the views of vehicular traffic, cyclists and pedestrians travelling east along Whittington Road.
- 6.52 The view is rural in character, and is characterised by presence of the good quality hedgerow in the foreground, the Hill Fort and the recreational woodland in the distance.
- 6.53 The presence of the roofscape of the proposed housing development would remove the views of the sloping land up to the woodland, but not the woodland itself. Moreover, as the roofline drops away with the topography, the view of the Hill Fort is largely unaffected.
- 6.54 Whilst the sloping land to the edge of the view is removed, it is considered to be of a moderately valued landscape component, and does not impact upon the viewer being able to understand the importance of the woodland within the context of the Hill Fort. Moreover, careful design of the roofscape and the integration of planting into the layout will help to break down the roofline; on this basis, the overall impact is therefore predicted to be **minor adverse**.

#### **View 13 – B5069 Looking North**

- 6.56 View 13 is located at the only break in the hedge on Gabowen Road, and is considered to the worst case view of the proposed development (site 1) and the hill fort within the same context. The view approximates the view likely to be experienced by private pedestrians, vehicular traffic and cyclists travelling northwards from the settlement, and by pedestrians walking along the roadside footpath on Gabowen Road.

- 6.57 The existing view is dominated by the hedgerow field boundary that runs along the length of the site's interface with Gabowen Road along with a partial view of the woodland, sloping pasture land and the hill fort. The majority of the site is, therefore, currently screened by the hedge. The view is rural in character, and includes landscape features typical of the local landscape character, including hedgerows, sloping pasture land, hedgerow trees, woodland and the Hill fort.
- 6.58 The non verified photomontage indicate that, due to the proximity of the site in relation to the viewpoint, the character of the view is likely to change substantially. However, the photomontage demonstrates that a high quality design, and sensitive design approach will be able to maintain key visual links along the edge of the development to the hill fort and create development that is in keeping with the wider townscape context. Landscape proposals including the hedge planting will visually 'break up' the edge of the new housing to ensure it appears embedded in the landscape, and an appropriate extension of the character of Oswestry. The presence of development is reduced within the verified montage, on the basis that the view is not stitched.
- 6.59 The proposed dwellings do represent a change in the character of the view; however the impact is not out of character when considered in the context of the existing settlement. Due to this the overall impact is likely to be **moderate adverse**. The magnitude and significance of impacts is likely to reduce to some extent over time as the landscape grows and matures to the extent that the **moderate adverse impact**, would become **minor adverse**.

## **7.0 MITIGATION & ENHANCEMENT MEASURES**

- 7.1 The design proposals have been formulated through a lengthy, iterative process involving environmental assessment and stakeholder consultation. This process has allowed site constraints and opportunities to directly influence the evolution of the masterplan and the landscape proposals. As a result, mitigation measures form an inherent component of the detailed design of the landscape and surrounding built form.

7.2 The principal mitigation measures can be summarised as follows:

### **Design and Layout**

- The proposed dwellings and employment uses will be designed to a high standard in order to achieve a high quality overall development, thus minimising any potential landscape or visual impacts. The buildings will also be sensitively sited within the defined masterplan area, with careful consideration of topography and existing landscape features to minimise visual impact and potential negative impact on landscape character. The layout of the buildings facilitates green linkages through the site, to create visual permeability and create green linkages into the surrounding countryside and woodland.
- Building design, plot layout and masterplan arrangement have all been informed by a careful townscape analysis, to reflect high quality and characteristic elements present within the rural site context. This will ensure the proposed development will sit well within the local landscape and townscape setting.
- The potential for additional agricultural development at the foot of the Hillfort will be avoided and the rationalisation will have a positive benefit on the setting of the Hillfort through the removal of the poor quality, large scale sheds and outbuildings around the farm thus serving to enhance the setting of the Hillfort and proving a long term legacy for the site and town in place of intensive agricultural development.
- The plans demonstrate how the allocation of these sites will enable the creation of an attractive, high quality and sustainable development which responds sensitively to its setting and complements the Hill fort.

### **Open Space**

- The opportunity for significant levels of new publicly accessible open space, creating a positive edge to the settlement of Oswestry, to be vested in the

control of the Hillfort guardians, which will form new, well overlooked publicly accessible facilities available to the wider community.

### **Landscape and Visual**

- Incorporation of existing landscape features, such as the existing trees and hedges, will ensure the proposals are well integrated into the landscape, and will also help to minimise landscape and visual impacts.
- Additional planting proposed as part of the masterplan will provide further screening and softening of proposed development, and will also contribute to the overall habitat and ecological value of the site.

### **Access and Linkages**

- The re-development of Oldport provides a major opportunity for enhanced public access and linkages to the Hillfort, opening up an eastern pedestrian access route and locating a new (landscape sensitive) visitor car park facility located appropriately at the northern gateway to the town.
- The proposals will have the potential to enhance connectivity into the wider footpath and cycle route network. Links into the adjacent residential neighbourhoods and new residential sites off Whittington Road are available; these provide access to the Cambrian Rail line and through to the Showground at Park Hall. The development will promote and establish new walking and cycling links, which will connect people and places.

### **Heritage Tourism**

- Promoting the heritage of the Hillfort with a greater sense of place and purpose will allow it to become the destination that stakeholders have longed for, in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Linked to other cultural heritage and recreational tourism opportunities in the local area (Cambrian Rail and Showground) the cultural heritage and tourism offer within the immediate neighbourhood and for the town will be enhanced as a result.

### **Educational Resource & Lifestyle**

- By providing enhanced access and facilities for visitors the Hill fort and its linked assets offer educational experiences and site learning opportunities; connecting people with the site's local history and the town's own heritage importance.
- Active leisure and healthy lifestyle choices will be extended and promoted within the wider community through the enhanced range of public access routes and linkages provided.

### **Environmental**

- The sites will protect the setting and character of the Hillfort, which will remain intact, and its value as a heritage asset will not simply be maintained, but enhanced. The proposed development will not harm the natural, built or historic environment but will help to improve site biodiversity, the local landscape and heritage assets as well as using natural resources prudently and addressing climate change through the design of the proposed buildings.

### **Sustainability**

- The sites are entirely suitable to be allocated for residential development due to the proximity of services and facilities; they are considered to be highly accessible and sustainable given their proximity to key public and community infrastructure support services and facilities and they will tie into and complement the existing and historical settlement pattern and provide significant public access, tourism and recreational opportunities.

## **8.0 RESIDUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 Consideration has been given to the potential residual effects of the proposals and includes any negative landscape or visual impacts, and the identification of the potential long-term enhancements as a result of the proposals.
- 8.2 Residual negative landscape impacts as a result of the proposals include:



- Loss of areas of improved pasture fields. In addition to providing potential ecological and habitat value, the fields contribute to establishing a rural landscape character to the site, which incorporates features typical of the wider surrounding area. However, the landscape assessment has concluded that, despite some loss of pasture, the proposals will retain key existing features of the landscape, such as hedgerows and trees. In addition, the proposals will introduce areas of planting to complement the development, the surrounding local landscape character and add visual screening. This will provide some mitigation against loss of pasture.
- Cut and fill requirements to accommodate development and access requirements. There will be minor alterations to the topography of the site at a local level; however, the impact assessment has concluded that these will be kept to a minimum due to the masterplan working with the existing levels across the site.
- A number of views will suffer adverse visual impacts. However for a high proportion of these views any adverse impacts will be significantly reduced or completely avoided when trees are in leaf. Impacts are likely to reduce further as the proposed landscape matures.

8.3 The proposals will potentially deliver a number of enhancements on the site and the surrounding area. The residual enhancements can be summarised as follows:

- potential habitat/ecological value from the proposed planting and retention of existing landscape features within the site;
- commitment to the long-term management of the site to ensure that the landscape works are preserved over the long term;
- creation of high quality new homes/employment opportunities for Oswestry within a sustainable location, and reinforce local townscape character and quality; and the

- creation of a high quality open space for wider community use.

## 9.0 SUMMARY

- 9.1 This assessment has examined the landscape and visual impacts in relation to the development proposals to the north of Oswestry. The potential impacts have been thoroughly assessed through a combination of desk study research and walkover surveys of the site and the surrounding context.
- 9.2 The aim of the proposed scheme is to create a high quality residential/employment development for Oswestry that is sustainable and responds appropriately to its surrounding landscape and townscape context.
- 9.3 The proposals for the site have been formulated through an iterative process, which has included comprehensive survey and assessment work along with consultation; as a result, the landscape and visual impacts have been kept to a minimum.
- 9.4 The proposals will result in the following landscape impacts:
- a **moderate adverse** impact on landscape character;
  - a **moderate adverse** impact on townscape character;
  - a **minor adverse** impact on designated areas;
  - a **minor beneficial** impact on public footpaths and recreational routes;
  - a **negligible** impact on topography;
  - a **minor beneficial** impact on other site features of value.
- 9.5 The visual impacts of the development proposals have been assessed through a process of identifying principal viewpoints, using observations on site, and through the creation of photomontages to illustrate the proposed development from a total of 6 of the identified principle viewpoints. Photomontages of both winter (verified) and summer (non verified) views have been produced where this was deemed relevant, due to a substantial change in the character of the view over the course of the seasons. Examination of the photomontages and onsite/desktop study has concluded that from the

majority of identified key viewpoints the extent of visual impact will be minor adverse or negligible, dependent on the time of year.

- 9.6 A total of 2 views have been assessed as having a moderate adverse impact, all of which are likely to become minor adverse over time, as the landscape mitigation matures and the development becomes assimilated into the landscape. The assessment largely relates to the inevitable change in the character of medium/close range views from rural to developed, and long-range views from the Hill Fort. However, it must be noted that the assessment does take into account represents the worst case scenario. The magnitude of change in the Hill Fort view is also likely to be less over time as the landscape matures and provides further additional screening.
- 9.7 This assessment demonstrates how extensive mitigation measures have been employed throughout the design process, along with good design principles, to identify and retain features of value, or important visual linkages, to ensure that the potential landscape and visual impacts are minimises or avoided where possible.