

Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

Land at White Cross Farm, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

Summary Proof of Evidence

On behalf of London Rock Supplies Ltd.

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Author: Neil Furber BSc (Dual Hons), PGDip LA, CMLI



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1. Summary

Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Neil Robert Furber. I am a Landscape Director at Pegasus Group. I became a Chartered Landscape Architect of the Landscape Institute in 2002 and have over 25 years' continuous experience as a Landscape Architect, including extensive experience of the design and assessment of mineral extraction and associated restoration schemes.
- 1.2. My evidence on landscape and visual matters addresses the single Reason for Refusal (RfR) issued by Oxfordshire County Council and also covers landscape matters raised in the Rule 6 Statement of Case.
- 1.3. I am familiar with the methodology adopted by the authors of the LVIA, noting that best practice guidance is not prescriptive.

Landscape Character Baseline updates

- 1.4. I have reviewed the most recent published landscape character assessment (**CD 16.02**) and tranquillity assessment (**CD 16.03**) that were adopted by South Oxfordshire Council in 2024, and these documents post-date both the planning application submission and the consultation responses.
- 1.5. The Site and the parts of the study area from where there is any potential for significant effects upon Landscape Character are solely located within Landscape Character Type LCT 13: Lower Vale and more specifically Landscape Character Area LCA 13D: South Thames Lower Vale.
- 1.6. The key characteristics of the South Thames Lower Vale LCA includes low-lying, gently undulating landform to the west of the River Thames. The assessment describes a rural agricultural landscape of predominantly open large-scale arable farming, albeit with some smaller-scale permanent pasture concentrated in wetter areas next to the River Thames. Riparian woodland and smaller-scale field pattern along the river and other watercourses results in a greater sense of enclosure. The recreational access to the landscape is highlighted, including the Thames Path. The landscape is described as predominantly rural, tranquil, in character, although busy transport corridors, railway infrastructure and electricity pylons are visual and aural detractors in the landscape.
- 1.7. The published strategies and guidelines include maintaining the valued recreational use of the landscape and consider opportunities to introduce additional public rights of way connectivity. There is a guideline that requires consideration of the impact of development on both close and distant views from both the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the Chilterns National Landscape, and how any new development would impact on the special qualities of both. The guidelines go on to cover the management of grazing marsh habitats to enhance their biodiversity value and appearance and seeking opportunities to enhance connectivity with other habitats nearby by creating green corridors and networks. Finally, there is a strategy to maintain existing woodland cover and look to increase this to provide ecological value.
- 1.8. With reference to the 2024 Tranquillity Assessment, the majority of the Site is located within an area of lower than average tranquillity. The northern end of the Site closest to the A4130,

including the area of the proposed temporary plant site, is located in the least tranquil category. The majority of the remainder of the Site is located in the next lowest category of tranquillity with only very limited areas to the southwest and southeast of the Site recording average tranquillity (level 3 on the 5 point scale).

Visual Amenity Baseline updates

- 1.9. I have presented a range of updated material including a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) prepared using LiDAR, Annotated Photoviews, and Visibility Cross Sections.
- 1.10. Review of the ZTV in the field in May 2025 has assisted the selection of representative viewpoints and receptors.
- 1.11. The key public receptors where there would be the potential for any significant visual effects, including my professional judgement of winter visibility, are identified as users of the Thames Path and River Thames, visitors to St John the Baptist Church and users of the connecting Public Footpath 181/36/10, users of the A4130 and A329, users of Wallingford Road, users of the A4074, and users of Church Road, Cholsey Hill and nearby public rights of way.
- 1.12. The potential for private views has been estimated from nearby publicly accessible locations and/or from the Site looking back towards the receptors.

Landscape Mitigation Proposals

- 1.13. In line with similar minerals applications, the precise details of the landscape mitigation scheme would typically be subject to submission of further details in order to discharge a landscape condition to any planning consent. Notwithstanding this fact, in light of this appeal and to assist the Inspector, I have provided further details to develop the Concept Restoration Plan (**CD 9.04**) and clarify what could be delivered to achieve '*an enhanced amenity experience along the Thames Path*'.
- 1.14. For the avoidance of doubt, the location of the extraction boundary and all other scheme elements including processing plant, stockpile, and soil storage bunds remain unchanged from the submitted scheme.
- 1.15. On the eastern side of the temporary straw bales it is proposed to plant a double or triple staggered row of willow that can achieve 3m height in the first season when planted as tall rods. The temporary willow screen would partly filter views of the bales from the Thames Path, and should address the Landscape Officer's concerns, however I do not personally consider that temporary straw bales in themselves would be incongruous elements within an agricultural landscape, and do not require planning permission.
- 1.16. A circa 200m long section of the Thames Path to the east of the Site has been diverted from its definitive route by the growth of blackthorn scrub. The informal diversion of the Thames Path along the edge of the field, does not currently allow users to enjoy clear views of the River Thames, unlike sections of the path further north that follow the definitive route. It is proposed that the blackthorn scrub that has encroached along the definitive footpath is removed to enhance views to the river.
- 1.17. There is an opportunity to seed the 30m wide corridor with a wildflower meadow mix to improve biodiversity and amenity.

- 1.18. There were three rounds of Regulation 25 requests during consideration of the application and the Appellant adopted changes to the landscape restoration proposals in response to consultee comments.

Effects Upon Landscape Character: Within the Site

- 1.19. My assessment approach follows best practice guidance and reports the effects upon landscape character at different geographical levels i.e. the Site, the immediate context of the Site and at the wider landscape context.
- 1.20. In terms of landscape value, I conclude that the Site that would be directly affected by the Proposed Development has an overall Medium value, with only the functional link to a designated landscape and public accessibility value raising it above an otherwise low value with respect to all other indicators of value suggested by best practice guidance.
- 1.21. In terms of susceptibility to change to the type of development proposed i.e. the extraction of sand and gravel and progressive restoration over a 6 year period, I assess that the landscape of the Site within the South Thames Lower Vale LCA has a Medium (or Moderate) Susceptibility to Change. The most susceptible landscape to the type of change proposed would typically be those landscapes that retain a higher level of intactness, would be in very good condition and typically contain distinctive elements of high historic or natural value.
- 1.22. A medium value and medium susceptibility to change result in a medium landscape sensitivity of the Site.
- 1.23. Considerations related to the magnitude of change upon landscape character within the Site during the operational phase have considered best practice guidance, where an effect is assessed in terms of its size or scale, the geographical extent of the area influenced, and its duration and reversibility.
- 1.24. The scale of the change to the Site would be moderated by the limited area of ground disturbance due to the phased extraction and restoration design of the scheme. The majority of the perimeter hedgerows and tree planting and internal belt of planting comprise the principal structural vegetation elements would be retained.
- 1.25. There would be some temporary and intermittent adverse impact upon tranquillity experienced by the users of the Thames Path, however the effects should be judged in the context of the recognised low baseline levels of tranquillity and the specific mitigation measures designed to minimise adverse effects i.e. the straw bales and willow screen planting.
- 1.26. In the context of an already low tranquillity baseline and a technical assessment that indicates any increase in noise level would not be unacceptable to the highest sensitivity receptors, in the wider locality (**CD 1.14**), the effects upon tranquillity experienced by transient users of the Thames Path within the Site could not legitimately be considered 'large' in magnitude.
- 1.27. In terms of the geographical extent of the Site that is influenced any one period of time, the direct changes to landcover are considered localised due to the phased extraction and progressive restoration.

- 1.28. In terms of the duration and reversibility considerations, the extraction phase of the Proposed Development would comprise progressive restoration. In practice this means that Phase 1 and 2 of the extraction closest to the Thames Path would each last approximately a year (see Mr Toland's Proof- Appendix 1), noting that mineral extraction can't happen in winter when the Site floods. The extraction of mineral is considered a 'reversible activity' because the land would be infilled and restored back to the original or improved land cover. Furthermore, the concept restoration scheme would result in the landscape character of the Site being restored to an improved state relative to the baseline.
- 1.29. In conclusion I assess that there would be a Medium (moderate) magnitude of change and a temporary Moderate adverse effect (not significant) on the landscape character of the Site, during the extraction/restoration phase.
- 1.30. My assessment conclusions broadly align with the judgement made by the Head of Strategic Planning of Oxfordshire County Council, who stated that they were "*...satisfied that the most significant landscape impacts would be temporary for a relatively short time period*". The changes made by the Appellant during the consultation period, were acknowledged including removal of the haul road and restrictions with external lighting.
- 1.31. The restoration scheme would include reinstatement of land levels to the same or similar level to existing. There would be restoration of BMV farmland at the slightly higher western part of the Site and damp meadow to the east of the Site to enhance ecology and landscape character. There would be strengthening of the boundary planting with new trees and shrubs, including an area of woodland. Watercourses would be enhanced including scrub clearance along the River Thames. Permissive footpath access across northern end of the site created linking Reading Road and the Thames Path.
- 1.32. All of the landscape restoration and enhancement measures outlined above accord with the landscape strategy and guidelines for the character area contained within the latest published Landscape Character Assessment (2024) adopted by South Oxfordshire Council.
- 1.33. In terms of the long term effects upon the landscape character of the Site, I conclude that the above measures collectively would represent a Medium (moderate) beneficial magnitude of change (not significant) and a Moderate beneficial effect, that would clearly outweigh the temporary adverse effects of the operational phase over a relatively short period of time.

Effects Upon Landscape Character: in the immediate context of the Site

- 1.34. The effects of the Proposed Development upon the landscape character, beyond the Site boundary would be indirect. This means that there would be no physical changes to any landscape elements or features that characterise the landscape beyond the Site, and any indirect changes would be perceptual.

Outside the Chilterns National Landscape

- 1.35. Views from the north would include fleeting glimpses of the extraction and infilling from the A4130 crossing the River Thames, with more restricted views of the processing plant and stockpile potentially available from the entrance to the Site to the east of the junction with the A329. Views from the west would be restricted to a short section of the A329 south of the roundabout junction with the A4130. The upper parts of the processing plant and stockpile would be partially visible seen through retained boundary planting and above the

grass seeded soil bunds. Further south along the A329, views of these elements would be increasingly screened, even in winter, due to the maturity and height of this existing planting.

- 1.36. It was agreed by the Appellant that a planning condition would be agreed to limit the use of artificial lighting. The restricted and controlled use of external lighting at the northern end of the Site would have a minimal additional effect upon tranquillity upon the landscape beyond the Site. The noise assessment considers the predicted worse-case noise levels upon nearby sensitive receptors to the north and east of the Site, including Elizabeth House. The predicted noise levels arising from both short term and normal operations would be well below the acceptable limits outlined in the PPG. Whilst perceptible at times relative to existing background noise, elevated noise levels would only have a modest contribution to the overall magnitude of change upon landscape character.
- 1.37. It is predicted that an overall Low magnitude of change would be experienced upon the A4130 corridor to the north and the A329 corridor to the west, resulting in a Slight adverse effect upon landscape character that is not significant.

Within the Chilterns National Landscape (CNL)

- 1.38. Public views from the east within the CNL include the River Thames, however unlike views from the Thames Path within the Site that have been assessed above, the perception of the proposals would be reduced by intermittent planting along the banks of the river. The viewing elevation of people in boats, including rowers, is generally predicted to be lower than walkers using the Thames Path, further restricting views towards the Site.
- 1.39. Intermittent views of extraction/infilling activity in Phase A would be filtered by the advance planting of the willow screen. The extraction/infilling of Phases 1 and 2 would be screened by temporary straw bales set behind the willow planting.
- 1.40. Views east of the River Thames from the public footpath 181/36/10 near St John the Baptist Church would be screened in summer and heavily filtered in winter by mature trees in Mongewell Park and further restricted by planting along the riverbank, retained blackthorn scrub west of the realigned Thames Path, the willow screen planting, and temporary straw bales when in place for Phases 1 and 2.
- 1.41. I consider that the reduction in tranquillity from the River Thames and publicly accessible locations within the CNL, including public footpath 181/36/10 and St John the Baptist Church, whilst perceptible at times relative to existing background noise, would only have a modest contribution to the overall magnitude of change upon landscape character.
- 1.42. The indirect magnitude of change experienced from the landscape covered by the CNL to the east of the Site, including the River Thames and the enclosed landscape of Mongewell Park, would be Very Low. The overall temporary indirect effect on landscape character, considering the elevated sensitivity of the CNL, would be Moderate adverse and not significant.

Indirect landscape character effects upon the wider landscape

- 1.43. It is concluded that the magnitude of change upon landscape character resulting from the Proposed Development from Cholsey Hill to the west within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and a section of the A4074 Port Way from the Chilterns National Landscape to the east, would be so minimal as to be considered Neutral i.e. no perceived

change in character of the receiving landscape. The resulting degree of effect upon the landscape character of the wider landscape is assessed to be Neutral.

Effects upon the Special Qualities of the National Landscape Designations

- 1.44. In conclusion, I assess that there would be some temporary effects during the extraction and infilling period, however of the 13 Special Qualities (SQs) identified for the Chilterns National Landscape only two SQs would be affected temporarily and to a not significant level (i.e. tranquillity and views from the Thames Path). Following full restoration of the Site, there would be Moderate indirect benefits on the setting of the National Landscape.
- 1.45. I assess that the Proposed Development would have no adverse effect upon any of the 8 Special Qualities (SQs) identified for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Effects upon Public Visual Amenity

- 1.46. During the extraction/infilling and restoration phase of the project, lasting 6 years, there would be the following visual effects:
- a) Users of the Thames Path and River Thames experiencing a Moderate adverse temporary visual effect that is not significant;
 - b) Visitors to St John the Baptist Church and users of connecting Public Footpath 181/36/10 experiencing a Slight adverse temporary visual effect that is not significant;
 - c) Users of the A4130 and A329 Reading Road experiencing a Slight adverse temporary visual effect that is not significant; and
 - d) Users of Wallingford Road experiencing a Minimal adverse temporary visual effect that is not significant.
- 1.47. Following restoration I assess that there would generally be neutral visual effects from the majority of receptors, relative to the current baseline, with users of the Thames Path and River Thames experiencing a Moderate beneficial permanent visual effect that is not significant.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

- 1.48. I consider that there would be sequential cumulative visibility of New Barn Quarry and the Proposed Development from the A4130, however the road corridor is flanked by mature tree cover that separates the two schemes. I do not consider that the addition of the Proposed Development would be significant, either on its own, or as a sequential effect experienced with the ongoing extraction at New Barn Quarry.
- 1.49. In terms of other receptors set between New Barn Quarry and the Proposed Development any views of both schemes are likely to be restricted to upper floor views from private dwellings. In all cases the presence of significant tree and shrub planting close to the buildings is predicted to largely prevent views from ground floor main living space and gardens, and any limited and temporary cumulative effects experienced are not predicted to be significant.

Effects upon Private Visual Amenity

- 1.50. It is not uncommon for development to have a significant effect on visual amenity and in itself this does not necessarily cause planning concern. It is however, recognised that there are sometimes situations where the changes are so great that it is not generally considered to be in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur where they did not exist before.
- 1.51. Following careful review of the private receptors from publicly accessible locations in the field, I have assessed the height and proximity of proposed temporary bunds, straw bales, stockpiles, the processing plant and vehicle movements to these receptors. I have also produced supplementary cross sections to illustrate the relationship between the buildings and the Proposed Development, including the mitigation measures proposed.
- 1.52. In terms of the Wet Boathouse, which appears to currently be unoccupied, the magnitude of change during the extraction /restoration phase would be Low and the effect Moderate and not significant. I assess that there is no potential for the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold to be breached, and following restoration the visual effects would be Neutral.
- 1.53. From Elizabeth House Day Nursery and Pre-School, I assess the overall magnitude of change during the temporary extraction/infilling period would be Low to Medium adverse and the overall effect Moderate adverse and not significant. I assess that there is no potential for the (Residential) Visual Amenity Threshold to be breached, and following restoration the visual effects would be Neutral.
- 1.54. From any future residents of the redevelopment of Carmel College, the magnitude of change during the extraction /restoration phase would be Very Low and the effect upon potential future residents Slight and not significant. I assess that there is no potential for the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold to be breached, and following restoration the visual effects experienced by any future residents would be Neutral.

Landscape Planning Policy

- 1.55. I leave it to Mr Toland to undertake a judgement of policy compliance in the context of the whole development plan and the weight of any compliance or non-compliance to be afforded in the planning balance. In order to assist the Inquiry, I set out my interpretation of how the Proposed Development would perform against policies cited in the reason for refusal, in relation to landscape and visual matters only. The policies comprise Policy C8 of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Part 1 Core Strategy, and Policy ENV1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.
- 1.56. In terms of Policy C8, overall I consider that the Proposed Development in both its operational and restoration design has had regard to the Chilterns AONB (National Landscape) Management Plan, noting a range of measures that would minimise adverse temporary effects on the designation would be adopted, and long term enhancement of the landscape character of the Site, within the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape, would be achieved.
- 1.57. In terms of Policy ENV1, I consider that the Proposed Development would broadly comply with part 1 of the policy, acknowledging that whilst the Proposed Development is not within an AONB/National Landscape it would temporarily affect to a not significant degree, a very localised part of the designation's setting. In terms of part 2 of the policy, the Proposed



Development would comply with all criteria that seek to protect and where possible enhance landscape valuable features.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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