



LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

White Cross Farm, Wallingford

On behalf of Oxfordshire County Council

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1. Introduction

Expert Witness

- 1.1 My name is Graham Woodward. I hold a degree in Landscape Architecture and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Manchester Polytechnic. I obtained my full professional qualification in 1986 and I became a Fellow of the Landscape Institute (FLI) in 2022.
- 1.2 I have over 40 years' experience as a landscape architect. I have undertaken the role of Expert Witness over the last 25 years in Public Inquiries, Local Plan Inquiries, Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiries and at Development Consent Order Hearings.

Scope of evidence

- 1.3 My evidence covers the potential landscape and visual effects of the Scheme in relation to the reasons for refusal by OCC in September 2024:

Due to its location, the proposed development would have an adverse landscape and visual impact on the River Thames, the Thames Path National Trail and on the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), contrary to the provisions of policy C8 of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Part 1 Core Strategy and policy ENV1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Declarations

- 1.4 I hereby declare that the evidence which I have prepared and provide in this Proof of Evidence is true and has been prepared, and is given, in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.
- 1.5 The following sections provide a summary of my Proof of Evidence of the likely effects of the Scheme on Landscape and Visual Amenity.

2. Site Overview

- 2.1 The application site is located to the south of Wallingford on a site bound by the A329 Reading Road, A4130 Nosworthy Way and the River Thames.
- 2.2 The site itself comprises of four fields currently used for arable and pastoral farming. The adjoining roadsides are generally bound with tall trees and shrubs, and the river boundary is generally more open, with irregular groups of shrubs or trees lining the bank. Internally, the fields are most often bordered with large shrubs. The southern boundary has a more woodland-like character creating a visual barrier south.
- 2.3 The two adjoining roads, Reading Road (A329) and Nosworthy Way (A4130), are busy and noisy; however, the roadside vegetation provides some visual disconnection, whilst the raised level of the Nosworthy Way works to reduce the noise of the road from within the site. This is particularly noticeable adjacent to the river, aided by the attractive river environs, giving a good sense of tranquillity.
- 2.4 The Thames River National Trail runs along the eastern edge of the site and has a tranquil visual amenity, bird song, the rustle of trees and gentle splash of passing boats can most often be heard.
- 2.5 The western bank of the River Thames forms the boundary of the Chilterns National Landscape (CNL). The landscaped grounds of the former Carmel College are on the opposite bank of the River Thames. The grounds contain several listed buildings including St John the Baptist Church, and at least one building – the Wet Boat House – is thought to be currently occupied.

- 2.6 Beyond the site, the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) can be seen rising in the distance.

3. The Scheme

- 3.1 Following an initial enabling period, the site would be quarried and restored over progressive phases, with the total project timescale estimated to be 6 years to the end of the restoration period.
- 3.2 A 30m wide buffer from the River Thames is proposed to be left undisturbed by the works but will include a line of straw bales 4m high, a 2m high post and wire security mesh fence with signage and a living willow fence. These features are intended to provide security and visual and auditory screening for receptors to the east.
- 3.3 The restoration plan proposes that the western part of the site would be restored to agriculture with field hedgerows. The eastern part of the site would be restored to nature conservation, incorporating reedbeds, marshland and floodplain grazing marsh.

4. Landscape Effects

Landscape Designations

- 4.1 It is considered that there would be no significant adverse effects upon the NWDNL.
- 4.2 However, in terms of the CNL there is anticipated to be significant adverse effects upon the following two special qualities:
- *Unspoilt countryside with relative tranquillity and on the doorstep of 10 million people.*
 - *A network of 2,000 km of rights of way, including two national trails and numerous ancient routeways.*
- 4.3 The River Thames (within the CNL) and the Thames Path National Trail (just outside the CNL) would both be affected by changes in tranquillity and visual amenity. Thus, the special qualities of the CNL, as well as the setting of the CNL would be affected, altering how this valuable landscape is perceived and experienced.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that during the Phased Work and Progressive Restoration there would be a **Large Adverse and significant** effect upon the special qualities and setting of the CNL.

Landscape Character

- 4.5 In terms of the published landscape character areas covering the site, it is considered that there would not be any significant adverse effects upon the National Character Area (as defined by Natural England); the Regional Landscape Character (as defined by Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study 2004), nor the District Landscape Character (as defined by South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 1998, the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 2017 and the South Oxfordshire District Council and White Horse District Council Character Assessment 2024).

- 4.6 However, the more local site-based landscape character, as defined following my own site visit, would be more affected. The Eastern half of the site is considered to have a high value and sensitivity due to the tranquillity, sense of place and visual amenity of the surrounding river, woodland and meadow fields. During the Phased Work and Progressive Restoration, a **Large Adverse and significant** effect is expected.

5. Visual Amenity Effects

- 5.1 It is considered that there are not anticipated to be any significant adverse effects upon any visual receptor except for the users of the Thames Path National Trail, the River Thames and Carmel College Wet Boathouse.
- 5.2 Each of these visual receptors would have open and direct effects upon their visual amenity. The existing attractive open views across the site that these receptors currently enjoy would be prevented by the presence of straw bales, security fencing, signage and willow fencing, reducing the extent of the view to a narrower corridor. The tranquillity experienced by the receptors, both aural and visual will be adversely affected.
- 5.3 It is considered that during the Phased Work and Progressive Restoration a **Large Adverse and significant** effect would be expected for all these receptors.

6. Landscape Policy

National Level

- 6.1 NPPF, Paragraph 189 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.
- 6.2 The site is immediately within the setting of the CNL and would have adverse landscape and visual impacts on the River Thames, the River Thames National Trail and the setting of the CNL and thus be contrary to the NPPF.

District and County Policy

- 6.3 Policy C8: Landscape of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Part 1 Core Strategy requires that minerals and waste development shall demonstrate they respect and where possible enhance local landscape character.
- 6.4 The development is clearly within the setting of the CNL and affects the CNL and therefore is at odds with Policy C8.
- 6.5 The South Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan, Policy ENVI: Landscape and Countryside, requires that the highest level of protection should be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- 6.6 The harmful nature of this development is demonstrated by the **Large Adverse and significant** effect on the special qualities of the CNL during the Phased Works and Progressive Restoration stage.

- 6.7 In addition, at a local site-based landscape character level the Phased Works and Progressive Restoration stage would result in a **Large Adverse** effect, which is considered significant
- 6.8 The Proposed Development is therefore considered contrary to this policy.
- 6.9 Views into and out of the Chilterns NL would in some locations be significantly affected, and this of course is contrary to The Chilterns Position Statement on Setting and is at odds with the Chilterns AONB Management Plan Policy DP4.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The sensitivity of the eastern component of the site is high in landscape terms, and also high for users, such as those on the Thames Path National Trail and those enjoying the River Thames, as well as for visual receptors within the CNL. During the Phased Works and Progressive Restoration stage there will be a **Large Adverse significance of effect for all three of these receptors, and this is therefore significant.**
- 7.2 Importantly, the site is in the immediate context of the CNL, and the Scheme would have a **Large Adverse effect**, on the setting of the CNL, which is considered **significant** during the main mineral extraction activities.
- 7.3 Overall, I judge that the Scheme, which is industrial in its nature, would have a **significant landscape and visual effect** on the most sensitive parts of the site, adjacent to the River Thames and along the Thames Path National Trail, and within the setting of the Chilterns NL.
- 7.4 The Scheme will be contrary to the provisions of national policy in NPPF Para 189, Policy C8 of the Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan and Policy ENVI of the South Oxfordshire District Local Plan. All these policies seek to protect the National Landscapes.
- 7.5 I also consider that the mitigation measures will not have sufficient time to be effective in screening the site operations during the 6 year extraction period, especially from Reading Road and Nosworthy Way. Other measures along the River Thames boundary combined with security fencing will in themselves be intrusive and result in **Large Adverse visual effects, which will be significant.**
- 7.6 On this basis, I support the refusal for permission of this development by Oxfordshire County Council.

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