Tamworth Golf Course Development

Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Report

Tamworth Borough Council

Date: 21.10.14
1.0 Introduction

Atkins has been commissioned by Tamworth Borough Council to produce a Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Report to inform the masterplanning process of the proposed residential development on the site of Tamworth Golf Course. The site is located within the urban fringe of Tamworth, approximately 2.5 miles east of the town centre.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the landscape and visual constraints and opportunities of the site and its surrounding area. It aims to map key landscape and visual features and comments on the site's specific landscape and visual opportunities and constraints. In addition relevant landscape policies have been reviewed to inform the planning context for the development site.
Figure 1

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

KEY
- Main Woodland Blocks
- Key Golf Course Planting
- Coventry Canal
- Marina
- Employment Land Use
- Residential Land Use
- Rural Land Use
- Isolated Buildings
- Existing woodland blocks to be enhanced and retained if possible
The site lies within the National Character Area (NCA) No. 72 (Mease/Sense Lowlands) and adjoins to the west NCA 97 (Arden).

A site visit confirmed that the site and the surrounding landscape share some of the key attributes and character qualities of NCA 72.

'A gently rolling agricultural landscape centred around the rivers Mease, Sence and Anker. The area is predominantly rural with only a small percentage of urban development. Small villages, red brick farmsteads and historical parkland are scattered throughout.'

The landform of the site itself is manmade as it is composed of restored soils from mining spoil which is now used as a golf course. The topography has been altered to create variations in landform typical of a golf course landscape.

Located east of Tamworth town centre, the site lies within the context of residential and employment areas to the west and south. Large expanses of rural land are located to the north-west, north and south-east.

The golf course landscape combines local variation to the topography with visual screening provided by woodland belts and pockets. These, along with hedgerows line the boundaries of the site providing a dense screen to views in and out of the site. Longer views are obstructed in many places by the undulating landform beyond the site boundaries, combined with the presence of various landscape elements including built up areas of Tamworth. Key features of the landscape that can be seen in the surroundings include power-lines/pylons that run along the eastern boundary and into the site in some areas. Some trees on the site are tall enough to be seen from distant viewpoints.
ROUTES AND ACCESS
Direction: North-west
Description: The clubhouse is connected to the road network and other residential areas. Although well enclosed by vegetation there are potential views from the car park and golf clubhouse access road which make this area more visible.

Direction: South-east
Description: Undulating topography and dense belts of vegetation are present on the site.

Panorama 1

Panorama 2

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Panorama 3

Open Countryside

Direction: South
Description: The site is sectioned into linear strips reflecting its golf course land use. Segregation is created by trees, vegetation, and topography. There are open views to the south-east into the open countryside.

Panorama 4

Clubhouse beyond existing trees
Overhead powerlines
Eastern boundary

Direction: North
Description: Openness and landform varies strongly from wide and open to enclosed linear spaces.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Direction: North-east
Description: The entire site is lined by belts of trees and hedgerows. Small openings allow views out of the site to the surrounding landscape.

Direction: North-east
Description: Dense tree blocks define the site boundary. They range from single hedgerows/lines of trees to groups of trees or woodland.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Direction: North
Description: Existing embankments offer opportunity for landscape remodelling if required or function as screening features to block views into the site.

Direction: West
Description: The southern end of the site is relatively flat in comparison to the west of the site and offers easier construction potential.
Panorama 9

Direction: North

Description: At this location landform partially obscures adjacent buildings such as Hampton Knight.

Panorama 10

Direction: North-east

Description: To the north-east of the site the land opens up to an increased sense of openness. Access from road networks is not viable here without the creation of new infrastructure that would change current land use.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Panorama 11

Direction: South-west
Description: Trees belts at this location are dense and tall.

Panorama 12

Direction: East
Description: From here views can be seen out of the site looking towards the ridgeline onto agricultural land (approximately 200 metres from the site boundary).

Typical Viewpoints  (see location plan)
Panorama 13

Direction: West

Description: The golf course here is surrounded by residential land use. Houses are not easily visible as trees provide a dense screen.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Direction: North-east
Overhead powerlines run above the site on the eastern border.

Direction: South-east
Where the site boundary thins, a nearby property (Chatom Signs Ltd) can be seen. Views are of a car park and storage area of adjacent employment site.

Direction: East
Views of Woodhouse Units are restricted and only overlook the car parking area. Views could easily be obscured by planting of trees etc.

Direction: South-east
Longer distance views are available where there is no framing vegetation, such as this one looking south-east over open countryside.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Existing mound partially screen adjacent buildings.

Existing mound obscures views of industrial estate.

An indoor bowling green is located to the west of the site. Creating the access to development here may increase visibility of this local facility and businesses located further along the road.

Existing road entrance to the clubhouse off Eagle Drive.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Direction: North
Image taken next to clubhouse looking north-east with downward gradient.

Direction: North
Poplar trees at the northern boundary of the site as it abuts the Coventry Canal.

Direction: East
Pylon located in the north-east part of the site.

Direction: South-west
The site feels open and expansive when viewed from particular areas.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
Direction: East
Coventry Canal (just north of the site) is attractive, tranquil and well maintained.

Direction: South
Foot and cycle paths run in close proximity to the site. They appear well utilised.

Direction: South-east
Hodge Lane Nature Reserve is situated to the north. The golf course is accessible through the reserve.

Direction: West
Cycle and footpaths follow alongside the Coventry Canal towpath.
Canal towpath forms part of national traffic-free cycle route.

Typical Viewpoints (see location plan)
2.0 Opportunities

2.1 Topography

The undulating topography of the site presents opportunities for the residential development to be integrated within the surrounding landscape. The landform of the site is manmade as it was remodelled in the past to create typical landscape features found on golf courses. The landform of the existing site is therefore less susceptible to change and is likely to accommodate the development platforms better than a greenfield site. The topography of the golf course also influences views available in and out of the site and these vary in extent and composition.

2.2 Vegetation

The site has a good framework of vegetation. Where possible vegetation should be retained to create ecologically rich parkland and green spaces incorporated into the residential development.

The surrounding landscape contains landscape elements which are of high landscape and ecological value. These include Hodge Hill Nature Reserve which contains oak woodland to the north-west and Alvecote Pools, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), adjacent to the site immediately to the north beyond the Coventry Canal.

The nature of the existing site offers an opportunity to incorporate green spaces and parkland within the development. The redevelopment of the site would increase its overall use, which is limited to golfers at present. A sensitive approach to planning and design could retain and incorporate key blocks of trees found throughout the site. Retention of vegetation along boundaries of the site would minimise visual impact on nearby residents.

2.3 Land use

The current land use results in views being obscured both in and out of the site. The adjoining employment sites are generally well screened from the site and the main opportunity is to further separate them from the future residential development. There are valuable landscape elements in the surrounding area which include Alvecote Pools (SSSI) and Hodge Hill Nature Reserve.

2.4 Designations

There are no landscape designations on the site, however it is worth noting that nearby there is a Scheduled Monument (Alvecote Priory and Dovecote). There are ecological designations in the immediate area. These include: Alvecote Pools (SSSI) which adjoins the Coventry Canal to the north and the Hodge Hill Nature Reserve to the north-west. These ecological designations are also valuable landscape resources which should be enhanced through the provision of wildlife links into the proposed development.

2.5 Landscape policies

Currently the revised local plan is in a draft stage and until its adoption the saved policies of the Tamworth Local Plan 2001-2011 guide the decision making process with regards to planning applications.

Table 1. Summary of relevant policies (Tamworth Local Plan 2001-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENV7: Habitats and Biodiversity outside Designated Nature Conservation Sites</td>
<td>“.....In all cases where development or land use change is permitted, development proposals will be expected to avoid or minimise any adverse effects by retaining and safeguarding linear and any other landscape features that are of major importance for wildlife....”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV9: Protection of Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows</td>
<td>“The Borough Council will resist development that would involve the removal of any tree, woodland or hedgerow, which contributes significantly to the character of the landscape or its surroundings, unless the need for development is sufficient to warrant the loss and the loss cannot be avoided by appropriate siting or design”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| ENV19: High Quality Design | All development proposals will be expected to achieve a high standard of design: 

  i) Be well related and make a positive contribution to its surroundings and landform in terms of siting, mass, scale, proportion and appearance. 
  ii) Result in a safe and secure environment by creating pleasant, convenient and safe routes through an area, and incorporating natural surveillance, lighting, boundary and landscape treatments and other measures to improve security. 
  iii) Minimise the impact of vehicles, parking and servicing areas. 
  iv) Incorporate appropriate landscaping and boundary treatments as an integral part of the proposal using native species wherever possible. 
  v) Consider detailed matters relating to lighting, signing, street furniture and decoration as an integral part of the overall scheme.” |

See Appendix 1 for relevant polices from the Tamworth Draft Local Plan 2006-2031

2.6 Other opportunities

The following points regarding opportunities are worth considering:

- Use of hard landscape materials which contribute to local distinctiveness;
- Provide attractive open space areas for the enjoyment of residents;
- Enhance the biodiversity value of the site through the inclusion of native species together with other species of wildlife interest.
3.0 Constraints

3.1 Topography
The existing landform would have to be remodelled to accommodate the development platforms and road infrastructure. This potentially will have an effect on views available in and out of the site. Landform features which could help to integrate the proposed development into the surrounding landscape should be retained where possible.

3.2 Vegetation
Trees and woodland form an important character of the site and as such are a constraint to areas of new development.

3.3 Land use
The key issue that could arise from developing the site would be the loss of a local golf course facility and change of land use from recreational to residential.

3.4 Landscape Character
Landscape Character at a national level is described in National Character Area Profiles. The site lies within the NCA 72: Mease/Sence Lowlands National Character Area. Landscape character profiles at national level cover extensive areas and therefore are of limited relevance to the relatively small scale of the site. At local level the landscape character of Staffordshire is described in a ‘Planning for Landscape Change’ Supplementary Planning Guidance, produced by Staffordshire County Council. The site however lies within the urban landscape character and as such its key attributes and qualities are not covered in this document. This however highlights the strong links between the site and the urban area of Tamworth.

3.5 Access and Public Rights of Way
Currently a public right of way (PRoW) wraps around the south-western boundary of the site and continues along the southern and south-western boundaries around the adjacent disused karting track. The Coventry Canal towpath also provides a traffic-free cycle route. The proximity of the site to the Coventry Canal is both a constraint and an opportunity for the proposed development. The design should endeavour to create pedestrian links with the Coventry Canal but also to respect the views of people walking and cycling along the towpath.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to assume that as long as a substantial part of the boundary vegetation is retained, the landscape and visual impact of a proposed residential development would be minimal. The most important opportunity is to create a residential development that benefits from the well treed character of the site. In this way therefore new development should integrate with the existing landscape features and not work against them.

4.0 Conclusions
The site benefits from a strong framework of vegetation both along its boundaries and within the site along the fairways of the current golf course. Hodge Hill Nature Reserve is located immediately to the north-west of the site and is valuable for its oak woodland habitat. This strong framework of vegetation means that the site is well enclosed and integrated with the surrounding topography. The site is generally well screened from outside views. Where there are limited views in they are from nearby farm properties to the east and from employment land to the west. Adjoining residential use to the west and south is well screened from the site.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to assume that as long as a substantial part of the boundary vegetation is retained, the landscape and visual impact of a proposed residential development would be minimal. The most important opportunity is to create a residential development that benefits from the well treed character of the site. In this way therefore new development should integrate with the existing landscape features and not work against them.
Appendix 1

Summary of relevant priorities and policies from the Tamworth Draft Local Plan 2006-2031

(Any references to maps, figures and tables relate to the Draft Local Plan documents available from Tamworth Borough Council.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SO7: Strategic Spatial Priority</th>
<th>To encourage active and healthier lifestyles by providing a network of high quality, accessible green and blue linkages and open spaces and formal indoor and outdoor recreation facilities that meet identified need and link neighbourhoods to each other and the wider countryside.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SO8: Strategic Spatial Priority</td>
<td>To protect and enhance statutory and non-statutory areas of nature conservation, ecological networks and landscape value on the doorstep of Tamworth residents, for their biodiversity, geological, historical and visual value and for the opportunities they provide for education and leisure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO10: Strategic Spatial Priority</td>
<td>To create safe, high quality places that deliver sustainable neighbourhoods and reflect Tamworth’s small-scale and domestic character using a blend of traditional and innovative design techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO12: Strategic Spatial Priority</td>
<td>To promote sustainable transport modes for all journeys by improving walking, cycling and public transport facilities throughout the Borough and to neighbouring areas and beyond.</td>
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Policy SP6: Strategic Urban Extensions

The following sites, as shown on the Policies Map will be allocated for housing:

b) Golf Course

- The site is located on Tamworth golf course and will form an urban extension to the east of the borough up to the administrative boundary with North Warwickshire. It will provide at least 1,100 new dwellings and associated infrastructure as detailed below.

- Development must take into consideration the existing oil pipeline and electricity pylons and adhere to guidelines for development.

- Two points of vehicular access must be established onto Mercian Way.

- The existing access to the golf club along Eagle Drive is suitable for one, with a second point of access coming directly onto Mercian Way south of the Woodland Road – Mercian Way roundabout.

- Development must avoid any impact on the nearby Alvecote Pools SSSI and mitigation should ensure there is no waste or run-off.

- Development should take into consideration the Hodge Lane Local Nature Reserve, which could be achieved through wildlife areas, additional planting of native species to provide a buffer and green linkages by pedestrian or cycleway.

- On-site open space and green links to the Hodge Lane Local Nature Reserve, Coventry Canal and the wider green infrastructure network.
Policy SP8: Environmental Assets
Tamworth's network of green and blue infrastructure, including the green linkages which contribute to Tamworth's character as 'Urban Green' (as shown on Figure 4), open space and green belt, will be protected, managed and enhanced. The emphasis will be on making the best use of existing open space through enhancement and appropriate management and ensuring that links are maintained between spaces to protect the integrity of the network. Priority will be given to:

a) Maintaining the Green Belt boundary (defined on the policies map) during and beyond the lifetime of the Local Plan and allowing uses in accordance with national planning policy
b) Restoration of the Broad Meadow SBI primarily for biodiversity but also to incorporate opportunities for public access
c) Reinforcing links between green spaces and habitats, particularly where there are gaps and the wider green infrastructure network beyond the borough boundary
d) Increasing the amount of semi-natural green space at Wigginton Park
e) Enhancing the quality and accessibility of the canal corridor and rivers, particularly in the town centre
f) Creation of a new open space network and links in the strategic housing allocations
g) Delivering initiatives associated with The Central Rivers Initiative, the extent of which is shown in Figure 4.
h) Safeguarding and enhancing the character and setting of areas of historic assets of acknowledged national and local importance, including statutory and locally listed buildings, conservation areas (defined on the policies map), scheduled ancient monuments and archaeological remains.

CP9: Open Space
Open space should be multi-functional and should contribute to a range of objectives such as; measures to reduce climate change and flood risk, recognise the potential for recreation and improving health and enhancing biodiversity and landscapes. All new housing development should be within 400m of accessible high quality open space. Developer contributions towards improving the quality and accessibility will be sought. The Council's priority list of schemes contained in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan should be referred to. Where there is no accessible open space within 400m of a new housing development, on-site provision should be made where appropriate.

New developments should incorporate existing landscape features and promote links for cycling and walking to the wider green infrastructure network within and outside of the borough, through existing or new green and blue infrastructure linkages.

Biodiversity opportunity mapping (figure 6) should be used as a guide when considering the best way to protect and enhance open space for biodiversity.

Proposals for development that would result in either loss of open space or which would adversely affect open spaces will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:

a) The strategic benefits of delivering the Local Plan outweigh the negative impact or loss.
b) There remains access to good quality publicly accessible open space. Where alternative sites are not of good quality contributions to improving their quality will be expected.
c) The integrity of the open space network and in particular its role in providing green links is maintained.
CP 12: Protecting and enhancing biodiversity

Development will be supported that preserves sites and species of value, incorporates existing biodiversity features and creates and reinforces links between semi-natural habitats. Proposals which result in a detrimental impact on biodiversity will be refused, unless adequate mitigation can be demonstrated. When dealing with an application that impacts on a site of biodiversity value, a distinction will be made between statutory and non-statutory sites (defined on the policies map) as follows:

- **Statutory sites (SSSI):** will be protected from any development that would have an adverse impact.

- **Non-statutory sites (SBIs, RIGS, LNR and BAS):** no development should have an adverse impact on a site that is designated as having local importance for nature conservation or as a green link, except in exceptional circumstances where the importance of the development outweighs the harm. In these circumstances, the opportunity should be taken to create compensatory habitat of equivalent type and standard in an appropriate location.

- **Non-designated sites:** that provide the opportunity for habitat enrichment to create more robust and functional ecological units will be safeguarded, particularly if they form part of a green link, including links to the wider network outside the borough. The opportunity will be taken through the planning system, funding, developer contributions and community engagement to enhance the biodiversity resource through habitat creation and restoration, particularly where it comprises Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. The Council will support habitat restoration proposals on existing and future sites of biodiversity importance using biodiversity opportunity mapping as a guide to restoration (Figure 6).

Where appropriate housing and employment allocations will be expected to incorporate natural features beneficial to biodiversity, promote habitat creation and connectivity to existing biodiversity sites in line with biodiversity mapping. Development will not be permitted that has a negative impact on the water quality of the Alvecote Pool SSSI.

Development that would involve the removal of any tree, woodland or hedgerow, which contributes significantly to the character of the landscape or its surroundings, will be resisted unless the need for development is sufficient to warrant the loss which cannot be avoided by appropriate siting or design. Where removal is necessary, suitable mitigation is required to prevent a net loss of these features.
Planning permission should be granted for development which provides measures to:

a) Prioritise access by walking, cycling and public transport,

b) Improves highway safety and reduces the impact of travel upon the environment

A Transport Assessment and comprehensive Travel Plan must accompany all major development proposals as set out in Appendix G. Development proposals will be required to make appropriate provision for off street parking in accordance with adopted parking standards. In considering the level of provision regard will be had to:

a) the anticipated demand for parking arising from the use proposed, or other uses to which the development may be put without needing planning permission;

b) the scope for encouraging alternative means of travel to the development that would reduce the need for on-site parking. This will be particularly relevant in areas well-served by public transport;

c) the impact on highway safety from potential on-street parking and the scope for measures to overcome any problems, increase highway capacity where appropriate; and

d) the need to make adequate and convenient parking provision for people with disabilities.

The Council’s parking standards are set out in Appendix 3. The Council will require the provision of sufficient, safe, weatherproof, convenient and secure cycle parking within developments to assist in promoting cycle use where viable and appropriate. Development with lower levels of parking provision may be acceptable in locations that are highly accessible by walking, cycling and public transport, including Tamworth’s network of centres.

New developments will be required to contribute towards public realm improvements where appropriate. They should also provide active street frontages to create attractive and safe street environments. New roads, both public and private, should be designed to meet Manual for Streets specifications and any design guidance set out in a design focused SPD.

Proposals for new development will be expected to demonstrate how they will address the effects of climate change and where feasible and viable, achieve zero carbon development through:

a) maximising energy and water efficiency

b) supporting opportunities for renewable and low carbon energy generation

c) promoting efficient and effective use of land

d) ensuring development is located in accessible locations which promote the use of sustainable modes of transport

e) appropriate sustainable design, layout, orientation and use of construction materials/methods

f) encouraging the retrofitting of the existing building stock

g) exploiting opportunities for energy from waste, combined heat and power and district heating schemes subject to appropriate measures to mitigate any environmental, social and economic impacts.

h) promoting landscaping and tree planting to provide shade, reduce local temperatures and carbon capture.

Development will be required to contribute towards the Tamworth Waste Strategy, providing site waste management plans as appropriate and incorporating suitably located on-site facilities. The Council will work with neighbouring authorities to identify and promote the provision of appropriate waste management, treatment and disposal sites.