

Appendix 5

Design Review

Landscape Design Review

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)

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Prepared by LUC



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Project

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)
Landscape Design Review

Client

Blaby District Council (BDC) and Hinckley and Bosworth
Borough Council (HBBC)

LUC Project Number

12554

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August 9th 2023

Note

This document and its contents have been prepared by LUC for Blaby District Council (BDC) and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) and is intended solely for use in relation to assessment of the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) project.

LUC, BDC & HBBC assume no responsibility to any other party in respect of or arising out of or in connection with this document and/or its contents.

Cover

Front cover - Hinckley NRFI ES Figure 11.16 - Proposed Photomontages_Page_107

Rear cover - Hinckley NRFI ES Figure 11.16 - Proposed Photomontages_Page_075

Contents

Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Core Documents	6

Chapter 2 Appraisal of Proposals

2.1 Context	10
2.2 Identity	12
2.3 Built Form	14
2.4 Movement	16
2.5 Nature	18
2.6 Public Spaces	20
2.7 Uses	22
2.8 Homes & Buildings	24
2.9 Resources	26
2.10 Lifespan	28

Chapter 3 LUC Opinion & Suggestions

LUC Opinion & Suggestions	31
---------------------------	----

Chapter 4 Executive Summary

Executive Summary	38
-------------------	----

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, several tree trunks are visible, some with light-colored bark and others with darker, textured bark. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of leaves above, creating bright highlights and deep shadows. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and green undergrowth. A large, semi-transparent white rectangle is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image, containing the title text.

Chapter 1

Background

1.1 Background

'Well-designed places influence the quality of our experience as we spend time in them and move around them. We enjoy them, as occupants or users but also as passers-by and visitors. They can lift our spirits by making us feel at home, giving us a buzz of excitement or creating a sense of delight.'

NATIONAL DESIGN GUIDE
P2

Introduction

LUC was appointed by Blaby District Council (BDC) and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) in July 2023 to undertake a review of the Landscape Design for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI) Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).

The Development Consent Order (DCO) application, is at the pre-examination stage of the National Infrastructure Planning process, was submitted by Tritax Symmetry (the applicant) on 17 March 2023.

Purpose of the review

The purpose of the review is to help inform BDC and HBBC's judgement on the HNRFI proposal with respect to the quality of the landscape design within both local authority areas. LUC have been instructed to assess and give a professional opinion on the following in particular:

- Assessment of the design merits of the scheme and how it sits within the wider landscape
- Assessment of the submitted Design Code
- Commentary of orientation of the proposed buildings regarding sustainability
- Treatment of the elevations of the warehouses

Fundamentally the purpose of the review is to establish if the applicant's scheme can be deemed as 'good design' in relation to the national and local planning policy it will be assessed against.

The findings of this assessment will also form part of the evidence for preparation of a Local Impact Report.

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Landscape Design Assessment Report
03.08.23

Structure of the review

Our approach to undertaking the review has been informed by the guidance contained within national and local planning policy. The appraisal of proposals in Chapter 2 is structured to reflect the characteristics set out in the National Design Guide. The applicant's proposals will be critiqued using each characteristic as a framework. The critique for each section will be based on both national and local level policy explained further overleaf.

Chapter 3 of this report provides advice to BDC and HBBC on what are likely to be the key landscape design issues to consider when they provide their advice to the Planning Inspectorate during the DCO application, along with additional mitigation measures which could be considered. It covers LUC's overall opinion and recommendations on the scheme measured against the requirements for 'good design' (National Policy Statement - National Networks (paragraphs 4.28-4.35)).

The report shall conclude with an executive summary of findings as well as LUC's opinion. This is intended to be included as part of the Local Impact Report.

1.2 Core Documents

Core documents

Our review and appraisal of the proposals shall be carried out through the lens of the following core documents ranging from the national to the local level.

National Design Guide

The national design guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It forms part of the government's collection of planning practice guidance and should be read alongside the separate planning practice guidance on design process and tools.

National Model Design Code

The purpose of the National Model Design Code is to provide detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide, which reflects the government's priorities and provides a common overarching framework for design.

National Policy Statement for National Networks

The National Networks National Policy Statement sets out the Government's policies to deliver, development of nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) on the national road and rail networks in England. It provides planning guidance for promoters of NSIPs on the road and rail networks, and the basis for the examination by the Examining Authority and decisions by the Secretary of State.

The Draft NPS (March 2023) has also been considered while reviewing the applicant's information.

The Good Design Guide - SPD

The local SPD aspires to raise design quality in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough whilst ensuring that the local identity and heritage of the borough is preserved and enhanced.



National Design Guide

The National Design Guide and National Model Design Code are based on the principles set out in the NPPF which are 'an important and relevant consideration in decisions on nationally significant infrastructure projects' (NPS NN p.8) and gives a means of interpreting the UK planning system in the form of guidance as to what constitutes 'Good Design' as called for on page 36 NPS NN.



National Model Design Code

Department for Transport

National Policy Statement for National Networks

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 9(8) and Section 5(4) of the Planning Act 2008

December 2014

NPS for National Networks

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

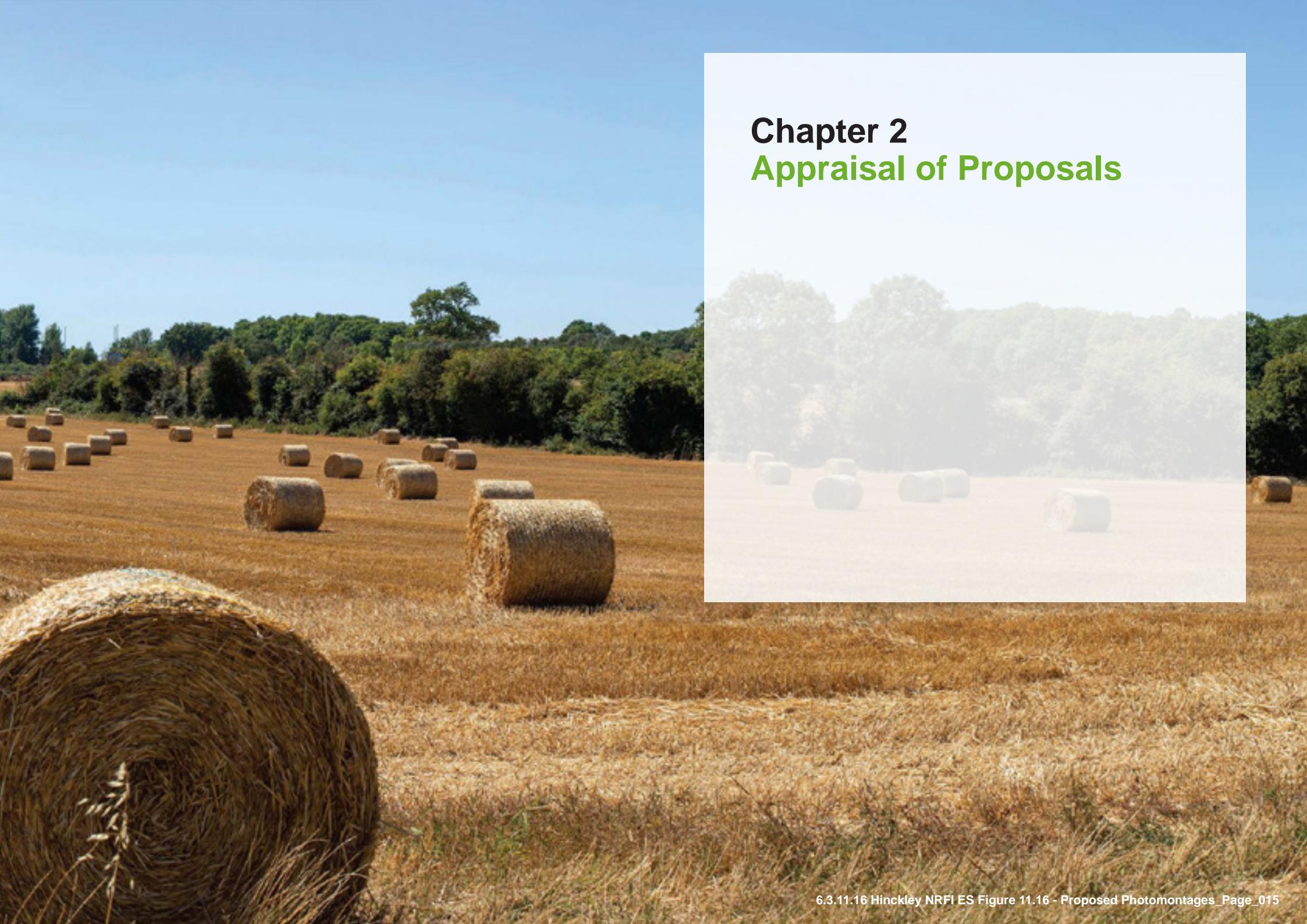
Landscape Design Assessment Report
03.08.23

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

The Good Design Guide

Supplementary Planning Document
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
2020

The Good Design Guide SPD



Chapter 2

Appraisal of Proposals

Chapter 2

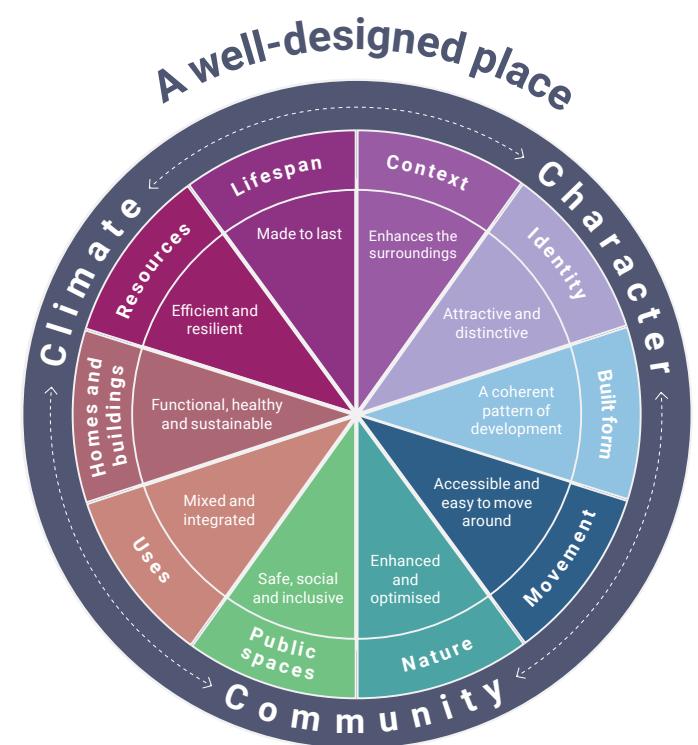
Appraisal of proposal

Ten characteristics of a well-designed place

The National Design Guide states that these Ten Characteristics all reflect the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, highlighting the importance of community and environmental issues.

Our approach within section 2 is to assess the design proposals against the national & local policy and guidance set out on the previous pages using the criteria set within the Ten Characteristics of a well designed place as a framework to conduct the review. These categories are:

- 2.1 **Context** - enhances the surroundings.
- 2.2 **Identity** - attractive and distinctive.
- 2.3 **Built form** - a coherent pattern of development.
- 2.4 **Movement** - accessible and easy to move around.
- 2.5 **Nature** - enhanced and optimised.
- 2.6 **Public spaces** - safe, social and inclusive.
- 2.7 **Uses** - mixed and integrated.
- 2.8 **Homes and buildings** - functional, healthy and sustainable.
- 2.9 **Resources** - efficient and resilient.
- 2.10 **Lifespan** - made to last.



2.1 Context

Enhances the surroundings

"Context is the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate, local and regional surroundings"

Well-designed places are:

- *Integrated into their surroundings so they relate well to them;*
- *Influenced by and influence their context positively; and*
- *Responsive to local history, culture and heritage.*

p3-13 National Design Guide

4.34 Whilst the applicant may only have limited choice in the physical appearance of some national networks infrastructure, there may be opportunities for the applicant to demonstrate good design in terms of siting and design measures relative to existing landscape and historical character and function, landscape permeability, landform and vegetation.

s. 4.34, NPS for National Networks

One of the key factors for design in the Borough is acknowledging that it is predominantly rural...To protect this natural landscape environment, development should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services

p. 20, The Good Design Guide SPD



The existing site. Hinckley NRFI ES Figure 11.16 - Proposed Photomontages, p. 50.



Proposed Illustrative Scheme after 15 years. 6.3.11.16 Hinckley NRFI ES Figure 11.16 - Proposed Photomontages, p. 51

Applicant's Proposals

The site lies in National Character Area (NCA) 94 'Leicestershire Vales', which comprises of an open landscape of gentle clay ridges and valleys used for a mixture of pasture and arable agriculture, bisected by small watercourses.

The context of the landscape character is rural arable and agricultural farm land, which contains a strong pattern of field boundaries defined by continuous hedgerows. Just outside the site area there is a portion of ancient woodland. To the south west of the site there is an area designated as SSSI for its woodland. Within the site area there are a number of heritage assets of local importance which are proposed to be removed including farm buildings and ridge and furrow earthworks with evidence of Roman remains.

The applicant's design code states "The HNRFI, will be an exemplar rail connected warehousing development of strategic importance, not only locally, but regionally and nationally. It is therefore critical that the proposals are of the highest quality in terms of materials, finish and landscaping with the site planned so that it maximises the benefits for the occupiers, users and neighbours alike. Key to this objective will be the consideration given to the design of the access, landscaping, ecology, layout, scale, massing and building form, colour, and material of each part of the development."

It also adds "The Landscape Masterplan has been developed iteratively to maximise the potential for betterment at the site."

Assessment

Landscape Character

The proposed design is not sensitive to its landscape context, in terms of scale, massing, local vernacular, or general materiality. The site sits within a predominately rural area and the proposals introduce a new urban character that does not relate to the current. This sits awkwardly within its setting and has a significant negative affect on the surrounding area.

Although there has been an optioneering process to arrive at the current scheme which is welcomed, the process does not appear to have challenged the parameter plan (annex 1) which is fundamental in setting the development down it's current trajectory.

2.2 Identity

Attractive and distinctive

"Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods."

Well-designed places:

- have a positive and coherent identity that everyone can identify with, including residents and local communities, so contributing towards health and well-being, inclusion and cohesion;
- have a character that suits the context, its history, how we live today and how we are likely to live in the future

p14-17, National Design Guide

Good design enhances local culture and character and supports local ecology

s. 4.24, draft NPS for National Networks

All new buildings should take into account the architectural character and materials of the surrounding area.

p. 23, Part 1, National Model Design Code SPD

Existing character [...] must be understood as a starting point for the design of layouts and buildings so that they fit into and also enhance the character of the local area.

p. 42, Part 2, National Model Design Code SPD

Existing aesthetic



Drone image of Burbage Common © Paul Kavanagh



Footpath to Woodhouse Farm from Elmesthorpe Plantation © Mat Fascione

Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI)
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

Landscape Design Assessment Report
03.08.23

Proposed aesthetic



HNRFI Draft Design Code V3 - page 23



HNRFI Draft Design Code V3 - page 24

Applicant's Proposals

The applicant's design code states that the design vision "Key to achieving [a development with strong identity] will be the realisation of a high-quality environmental setting and public realm organised around strong design principles."

Additionally it states the scheme will "work in combination with the proposed architecture to create a high-quality development. In line with the 'contemporary' vision for the wider site, this will involve creating simple, yet aesthetic, development plots with landscaping at a scale which respects the development scale. There will be the opportunity to use a variety of species, and the different functional areas (on plot, estate roads, landscape buffer, etc.) will have their own identity as a result"

Assessment

The proposals do meet the applicant's aim to propose a strong identity for the site. However the identity proposed is foreign within its setting and imposes a new corporate, industrial character that jars with the adjacent rural landscape.

Sense of Place

The proposed development does not reflect the local distinctiveness of the area identified within the landscape character descriptions or the local vernacular expressed within the local design guide. The proposals for the development are visually generic and similar to the developer's previous schemes elsewhere in the country. Although this generates a strong brand identity it's to the detriment of the local area contributing to an erosion of local character.

Heritage

The existing site functions as a mixture of pasture and arable agricultural land and the current design proposal will significantly impact the identity of the local area. The design code proposes a 'simple' and 'contemporary' aesthetic as opposed to keeping original site features such as the existing veteran Oak tree, or hedgerows which form part of the sites existing character. Retention of these elements would help integrate the scheme into it's context.

2.3 Built form

Enhances the surroundings

"It is the interrelationship between [blocks, streets, buildings and open spaces] that creates an attractive place to live, work and visit, rather than their individual characteristics"

Well-designed places are:

- Compact forms of development that are walkable, contributing positively to well-being and placemaking;
- Recognisable streets and other spaces with their edges defined by buildings, making it easy for anyone to find their way around, and promoting safety and accessibility; and
- Memorable features or groupings of buildings, spaces, uses or activities that create a sense of place, promoting inclusion and cohesion.

p18-21, National Design Guide

Plot ratio: Calculated by dividing the gross floor area of the building by the area of the plot, plot ratios along with site coverage should be used alongside good urban design principles to regulate the density of mixed-use and non-residential uses (example below)

Town Centres: Plot Ratio >2

Urban Neighbourhoods: Plot Ratio >1

Suburbs: Plot Ratio <0.5

p. 20, Part 1, National Model Design Code SPD



Overlay of existing OS map & proposed development. Illustrating differences in urban grain & scale.

Applicant's Proposals

The main built form of the applicant's proposals are comprised of up to 850,000 square metres (gross internal area or GIA) of warehousing and ancillary buildings with a total footprint of up to 650,000 square metres and up to 200,000 square metres of mezzanine floorspace, including the potential for some buildings to be directly rail connected if required by occupiers.

The applicant's design code states the aim of the buildings is "To sit harmoniously when seen from long views, building façades will include horizontal elements to assist in anchoring the building into their setting. This can be achieved with combinations of horizontal cladding and/or bands ribbon glazing;" and "To present an attractive and well considered design when seen from shorter views within the public realm, buildings will use a combination of horizontal and vertical elements to avoid a monolithic appearance."

Assessment

Scale & Massing

The proposals are set within predominantly greenfield land, the majority of this land take is spread between 9 building units, making the scale of the built form out of proportion when compared to the urban grain within the locality. The massing and orientation of the built form erodes the existing character of the site, for example, the removal of field boundaries.

Hierarchy

The layout (Annex 2) and architectural massing lacks hierarchy and is not conversant with the local area. The streets proposed are of a similar scale to each other with no distinct features. The streetscape lacks legibility with little means for natural wayfinding or orientation.

Urban Grain

The parameter plan (Annex 1) dictates site clearance within its primary development zone and creates one large development plateau. This forms the majority of the site and removes the current grain of the landscape which integrates it into its context. Without this common grain the development is rather inward looking proposing a new layout that is more uniform lacking cohesion with its surroundings. The creation of a series of development plots responding to the existing levels of the site rather than to the rail levels appears not to have been considered.

Relationship

The proposals allow for buffer planting and screening to the edge of the development. In principle this is good practice yet the areas required to sufficiently screen the scale of the development are currently inadequate. Bolstering of planting within these areas alongside stronger green infrastructure within the site itself would assist in lessening the development's impact and integrate it more effectively into its surroundings.

2.4 Movement

Accessible and easy to move around

"Successful development depends upon a movement network that makes connections to destinations, places and communities, both within the site and beyond its boundaries."

Well-designed movement network:

- is safe and accessible for all;
- limits the impacts of car use by prioritising and encouraging walking, cycling and public transport, mitigating impacts and identifying opportunities to improve air quality;
- promotes activity and social interaction, contributing to health, well-being, accessibility and inclusion; and
- incorporates green infrastructure, including street trees to soften the impact of car parking, help improve air quality and contribute to biodiversity

p22-25, National Design Guide

In considering revisions to an existing right of way consideration needs to be given to the use, character, attractiveness and convenience of the right of way. The Secretary of State should consider whether the mitigant are acceptable and whether requirements in respect of these measures might be attached to any grant of development consent.

s. 5.184, NPS for National Networks

Development should reflect and integrate the surrounding pattern of blocks and streets, providing effective and logical links to the movement network in the wider area.

p. 60, The Good Design Guide SPD



Applicant's Proposals

The masterplan proposes a new network of vehicular routes on site primarily to serve the buildings & railport.

The proposals also include remodelling of the existing site access & PRoW's with pedestrian, equestrian and cycle access routes and infrastructure. Most routes are adjacent to the proposed highways apart from a new dedicated route for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders from a point south of Elmesthorpe to Burbage Common.

Pedestrian level crossings serving footpaths that connect Burbage Common Road to Earl Shilton and Barwell are proposed for closure with the associated footpaths being diverted.

The design code states one of the five principles guiding the design process is "To realise a walkable environment which is equestrian, pedestrian and cycle user friendly, pedestrian and cycle routes will be provided throughout the development, which link to individual plots and the wider landscape where possible, with equestrian public bridleways around the perimeter of the site. Key routes will pass through the key green spaces and the existing footpaths and bridleways will be diverted and new routes provided as necessary to respond to the layout proposals."

The code also includes:

"All carriageways, including the footpath / cycleways are to be surfaced in bituminous macadam"

"A dedicated bus-layby complete with shelters and standing for buses off the main carriageway".

Assessment

Existing Public Rights of Way

The existing public footpath and bridleways give varied rural routes permeating much of the site area. The proposals are to stop up and remove these PRoW, with re-provision being on the basis of pavements and cycleways running along large main roads, which will present an entirely different character (Annex 5). A new bridleway is proposed to the south of the site away from roads, this is welcomed but does not equate to the existing provision.

Permeability & connectivity

Due to the scale of the built form, railport and new infrastructure such as the A47 link road there will be an increase in severance particularly impacting the residents of Elmesthorpe. Users will be able to permeate the site along the series of large main roads, which does improve access for all although these have not been proposed in a sensitive fashion. There is a focus on the proposed east - west connection to A47 and M69 but there is a lack of integration and connection with the surrounding area.

Scale

The scale of the roads and hard landscaping encourages car and vehicular use, and has not been designed at the human scale for a pedestrian priority. The layout of the routes is rigid and mostly linear not commensurate with the grain of the towns and villages within the wider area.

User Experience

The existing routes have a rural aesthetic linking towns and villages to large green infrastructure such as Burbage Common & Woods. The development changes this aesthetic and diminishes the user experience from encountering rural tracks to the proposed footpaths adjacent to roads. As a result there is a general loss of attractiveness to the end user.

2.5 Nature

Enhanced and optimised

"Nature contributes to the quality of a place, and to people's quality of life, and it is a critical component of well designed places."

Well-designed places:

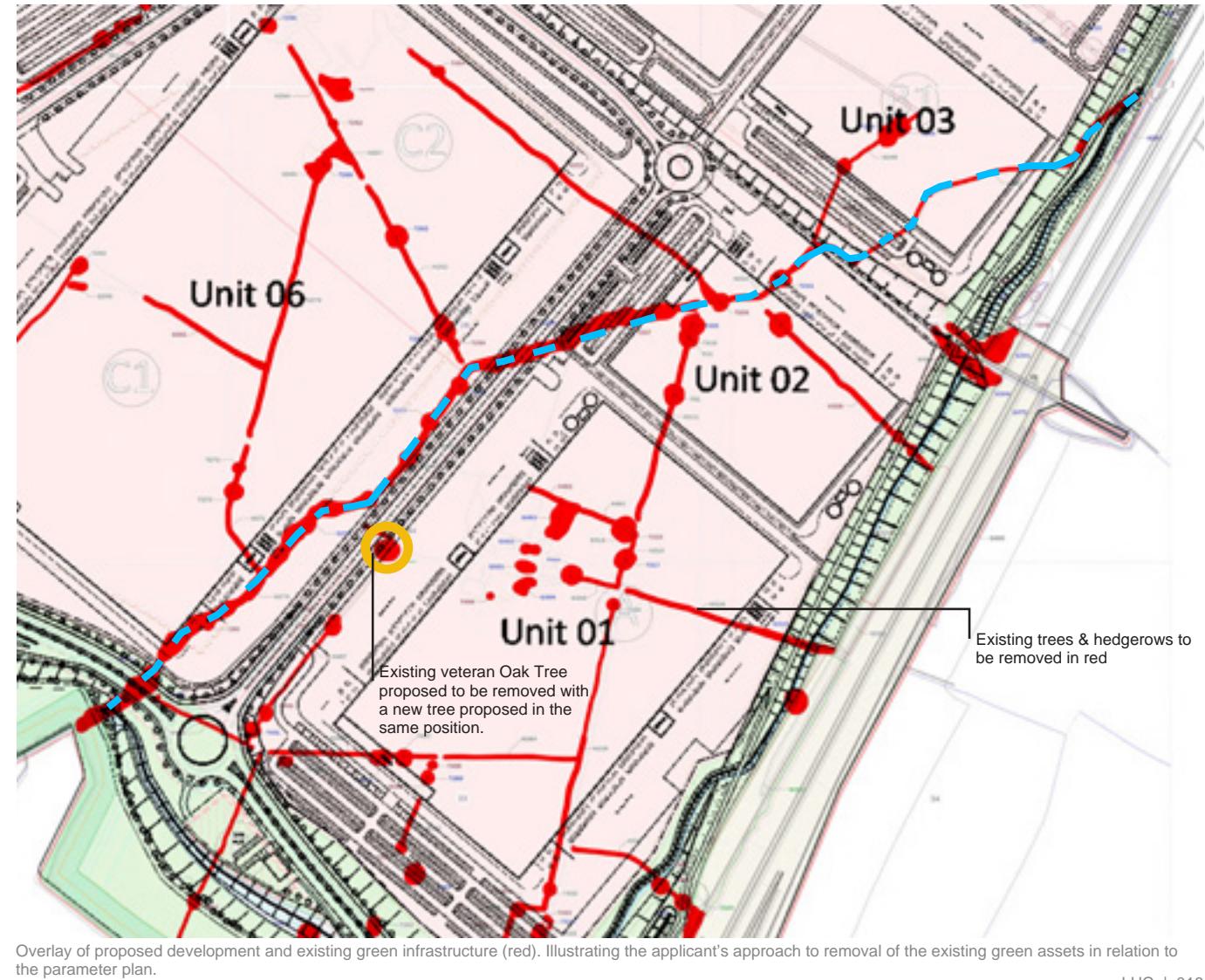
- prioritise nature so that diverse ecosystems can flourish to ensure a healthy natural environment that supports and enhances biodiversity;
- provide attractive open spaces in locations that are easy to access, with activities for all to enjoy, such as play, food production, recreation and sport, so as to encourage physical activity and promote health, well-being and social inclusion.

p26-29, National Design Guide

5.32 Ancient woodland is a valuable biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and for its longevity as woodland. Once lost it cannot be recreated.

The Secretary of State should not grant development consent for any development that would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the national need for and benefits of the development, in that location, clearly outweigh the loss. Aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland are also particularly valuable for biodiversity and their loss should be avoided. Where such trees would be affected by development proposals, the applicant should set out proposals for their conservation or, where their loss is unavoidable, the reasons for this.

s. 5.32, NPS for National Networks



Applicant's Proposals

The schemes proposals include:

Habitat creation and enhancement, and the provision of publicly accessible amenity open space at the south-western extremity of the HNRFI near Burbage Wood and to the south of the proposed A47 Link Road between the railway and the B4668/A47 Leicester Road.

Terrain remodelling, hard and soft landscape works, watercourse diversion, amenity water features and planting.

The applicant's design codes states that "The development has been designed to respond to the arboriculture, ecological, landscape, visual, hydrological, and topographical constraints of the site, and where possible, retain and enhance the existing green infrastructure as part of the development proposal."

It also claims "The landscape proposals developed for individual plots within the development which reflect the rationale of the proposed strategic landscaping for the proposal and ensure a similar specification of native species of local importance. This will ensure continuity of the overall scheme, preservation of landscape mitigation measures as well habitat enhancement, along with enhancing local landscape character"

The applicant states a +10% Biodiversity net gain will be achieved through on and offsite improvement works.

The scheme also proposes a new SuDS network with associated attenuation.

Assessment

Existing designated green infrastructure

The site and adjacent area contains existing irreplaceable habitat including T486 Veteran English Oak which is set to be removed. The applicant has not provided sufficient information on mitigation measures for protecting adjacent Ancient Woodland. The proposed 50m buffer is unlikely to form sufficient protection with the proposals having a direct negative impact on these receptors.

Prioritise nature

The majority of the open space within the design (annex 2) is hard landscaped, which will cause a significant effect to the ecosystems and loss in biodiversity on site not aligning with prioritising nature. The inclusion of SuDS is welcomed but this opportunity could have been taken further in integrating into existing networks.

Support and enhance biodiversity

The scheme states off site mitigation will be provided to achieve +10% biodiversity net gain, but lacks any detailed information on how this will be achieved. Given the scale of this development, the impact of providing the majority of mitigation off site will be significantly detrimental to the locality and have an adverse impact on the neighbouring ecosystems.

Easy access attractive open spaces

The scheme focuses the majority of the green space around the fringes of the site, there is very little in terms of incidental green space throughout the primary development zone (annex 1) giving the proposals a disproportionate feel. The scheme lacks variety in the uses of green space, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing of site users. Spaces that are proposed appear more as left over following design of the primary infrastructure rather than landscape led design, thus fragmenting the landscape masterplan (annex 4).

2.6 Public Spaces

Safe, social and inclusive

"The quality of the spaces between buildings is as important as the buildings themselves."

Well-designed places:

- include well-located public spaces that support a wide variety of activities and encourage social interaction, to promote health, well-being, social and civic inclusion;
- have a hierarchy of spaces that range from large and strategic to small and local spaces, including parks, squares, greens and pocket parks;
- have trees and other planting within public spaces for people to enjoy, whilst also providing shading, and air quality and climate change mitigation.

p30-33, National Design Guide

The quality of public space is partly about the way it is designed and partly about the way it is enclosed by well-proportioned buildings.

p. 26, Part 1, National Model Design Code SPD

Streets and other public spaces such as public squares have an important social function to bring people together and to act as a focus for community life. Parks and other green spaces [...] also contribute towards social interaction. Special consideration needs to be given to safety, multifunctional and generational spaces and reducing the risk of crime.

p. 58, Part 2, National Model Design Code SPD



Extract from the good design guide SPD illustrating a pleasant public space between buildings.



Extract of the applicant's illustrative masterplan illustrating the heavily programmed site layout offering little opportunity for rest or amenity.

Applicant's Proposals

Both local and national policy call for public spaces between buildings to give relief to the streetscape and offer opportunities for rest and amenity.

The external spaces within the masterplan are primarily orientated towards the sites function and supporting infrastructure. The publicly accessible routes and areas tend to follow proposed new roads or are located towards the extremities of the site.

The masterplan allows for the provision of publicly accessible amenity open space at the south-western extremity of the HNRFI near Burbage Wood and to the south of the proposed A47 Link Road between the railway and the B4668/A47 Leicester Road.

Assessment

Well located public spaces

The majority of the external space has been designed solely for operational benefit, with little regard to the design of communal public spaces for amenity. The masterplan is led by the infrastructure and offers little in regard to the experience of everyday users and pedestrians passing through the site.

Support a wide variety of activities and social interaction
There is minimal provision for activities or gathering opportunities within external spaces. A few features are placed to the edge of the site such as outdoor exercise equipment and seating but these do not feel integrated into the design and appear isolated. The masterplan (annex 2) currently offers limited opportunities for social interaction.

Hierarchy and connectivity of spaces

The road network in and out of the site dominates the spacial hierarchy, and appears to have been designed solely for functional use. The proposed green infrastructure on the road network exacerbates the linear form of the road rather than softening it. Large areas of parking lack flexibility for any secondary use or future adaptation, fragmenting the public open space and limiting wider site legibility and connectivity.

Furniture, Signage, and Lighting

The examples of furniture shown in the proposals are generic and do not encourage a sense of wellbeing or interaction, or cater to a differing range of users. The signage is imposing and feels oversized for the existing character.

Sense of safety

The lack of passive surveillance, large areas of blank façades, and lack of diversity of site uses means users are less likely to feel safe on site on public routes, particularly at night time.

2.7 Uses

Mixed and integrated

"Sustainable places include a mix of uses that support everyday activities, including to live, work and play."

Well-designed places have:

- A mix of uses including local services and facilities to support daily life;
- well-integrated housing and other facilities that are designed to be tenure neutral and socially inclusive.

p34-36, National Design Guide

Successful places generally contain a mixed community and mix of uses creating variety and activity. The degree will vary within different area types, but opportunities need to be sought in all circumstances to make efficient use of land, promote a mix of uses that meet local needs and create vitality through activity in compact development.

Using land efficiently means getting the maximum possible benefit from a site or area, taking into account relevant constraints. This can help to achieve desirable social and environmental outcomes, facilitate the efficient use of resources and infrastructure and reduce pressure on greenfield sites.

Efficient land use could involve:

Providing substantial, accessible, useable green/public spaces rather than multiple small strips and verges.

Consolidating surface parking infrastructure into multi-storey car parks or car barns. Building over surface car parks.

p. 64, Part 2 National Model Design Code SPD



Extracted image of the proposals from the promotional video on the Tritax Symmetry website.

Applicant's Proposals

The proposed primary site functions are for business and industrial use. Broadly the proposals include:

New rail infrastructure including points off the existing Leicester to Hinckley railway providing access to a series of parallel sidings.

An inter-modal freight terminal or 'railport' capable of accommodating up to 16 trains up to 775m in length per day, with hard-surfaced areas for container storage and HGV parking and cranes for the loading and unloading of shipping containers from trains and lorries.

Up to 850,000 square metres (gross internal area or GIA) of warehousing and ancillary buildings with a total footprint of up to 650,000 square metres and up to 200,000 square metres of mezzanine floorspace.

A lorry park with welfare facilities for drivers and HGV fuelling facilities.

A site hub building providing office, meeting space and marketing suite for use in connection with the management of the HNRFI and ancillary car parking.

The masterplan (annex 2) offers minimal public amenity or use. A new network of footpaths is proposed primarily along roadsides. Public open space is proposed to the south west of the development and to the south of the link road. The detail for these areas is high level but appears to consist of planting, an outdoor gym and some seating.

Assessment

Site uses

It is accepted that the sites primary use is proposed to be a rail freight terminal. This does not automatically mean the proposal should be solely focused on this use and currently it does include a number of public amenities including replacement PRoW's, welfare areas with some seating and outdoor gym equipment. However the proposed uses within the landscape feel as if they have been proposed through necessity to fulfil requirements rather than a purposeful design striving to achieve a high quality environment that would support a diversity of incidental uses. The lack of this social infrastructure including nodes, gathering spaces or opportunities for engagement with nature would put additional pressures on the surrounding amenities and result in the site becoming detached and under utilised.

Increasing potential for additional uses to occur including ephemeral activities within the landscape on the site would encourage interaction within the wider area and fundamentally integrate the proposals more seamlessly.

Community and inclusivity

The proposed replacement footpath network will provide better access for less able bodied individuals compared to the existing network. However this greatly impacts the character and changes the user experience, the materiality not in line with the existing rural aesthetic. Furniture proposed within the design code although not fully specified appears not to allow for inclusivity and lacks accessible features.

2.8 Homes and Buildings

Functional, healthy and sustainable

"Successful buildings also provide attractive, stimulating and positive places for all, whether for activity, interaction, retreat, or simply passing by."

Well-designed places have:

- provide good quality internal and external environments for their users, promoting health and well-being;
- relate positively to the private, shared and public spaces around them, contributing to social interaction and inclusion; and
- resolve the details of operation and servicing so that they are unobtrusive and well-integrated into their neighbourhoods

p38-40, National Design Guide

It is essential to avoid the encroachment of generic modern forms and instead focus on the development of contextual design. This should not be taken to discourage architectural innovation and contemporary design. This often has a significantly more positive impact on an area than pastiche replication. The key issue, however, is that innovation should be appropriate to a place and context.

p. 23, The Good Design Guide SPD



HNRFI Draft Design Code V3 - page 27



HNRFI Draft Design Code V3 - page 31

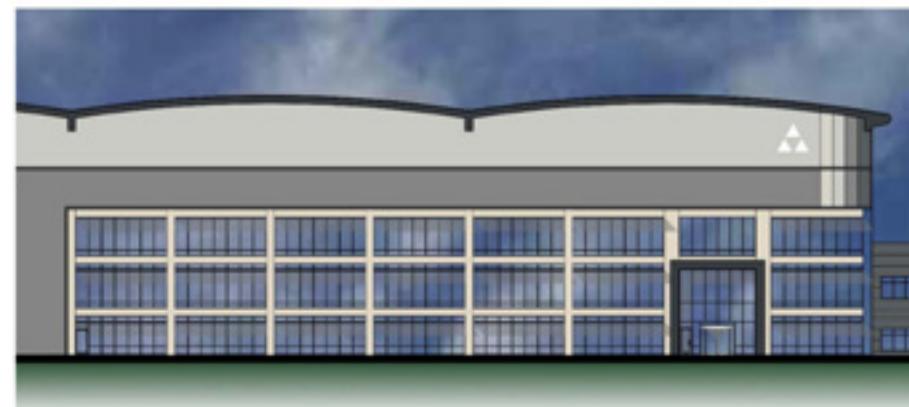


Fig. 28 – Typical Office Material Application

HNRFI Draft Design Code V3 - page 29

Applicant's Proposals

The main built form of the proposals comprises: Up to 850,000 square metres (gross internal area or GIA) of warehousing and ancillary buildings with a total footprint of up to 650,000 square metres and up to 200,000 square metres of mezzanine floorspace, including the potential for some buildings to be directly rail connected if required by occupiers. They will also incorporate roof-mounted photovoltaic arrays;

The applicant's design code states "The development will target BREEAM – Very good and an EPC A rating as is standard for Tritax Symmetry buildings;" and with regard to the building's design "It's impact can be mitigated using a subtle banding from a suitable colour palette, balanced with sensitively designed vertical elements, in order to break up the long expanses of elevation. The roof scape was also a key consideration in order to assist in assimilating the built forms within their immediate context."

Assessment

Promoting health and wellbeing for all

There is very little outdoor provision for health & wellbeing integrated into the overall masterplan (annex 2), the areas of outdoor gym and seating make up a small proportion of the site. There is little integration for users and pedestrians between the buildings creating large areas of dead space.

Unobtrusive: well integrated into neighbourhoods

As can be seen the development photomontages the proposals are not well integrated into the locality and can be clearly seen from the surrounding receptors. Due to its size the green buffer can only provide a limited amount of screening. Many proposed trees within visualisations have been depicted at what appears to be full maturity, this level of screening wouldn't be realised for a number of years. The modern design of the buildings and materiality looks stark within its setting and against the context of the local vernacular. This contradicts both national and local policy which seeks a more integrated approach.

Relationship with public space

The majority of the building frontages have a sterile relationship with the adjacent spaces. The masterplan (annex 2) has prioritised servicing and function over aesthetics. This need not be the case and a more sensitive design could achieve both. Smaller associated architectural elements such as gatehouses are opportunities to link the proposals to the local vernacular. The proposal fails to do this giving the masterplan a cold, generic feel to users. The developments position will impact neighbouring local assets such as Burbage Common & Woods. The juxtaposition between the remaining Common and Woods area and the new build will be incredibly incongruous such that it will significantly diminish the attractiveness of the Common and Woods area as a place of recreation and tranquillity.

2.9 Resources

Efficient and resilient

"Well-designed places and buildings conserve natural resources including land, water, energy and materials."

Well-designed places have:

- *have a layout, form and mix of uses that reduces their resource requirement, including for land, energy and water;*
- *are fit for purpose and adaptable over time, reducing the need for redevelopment and unnecessary waste;*
- *use materials and adopt technologies to minimise their environmental impact..*

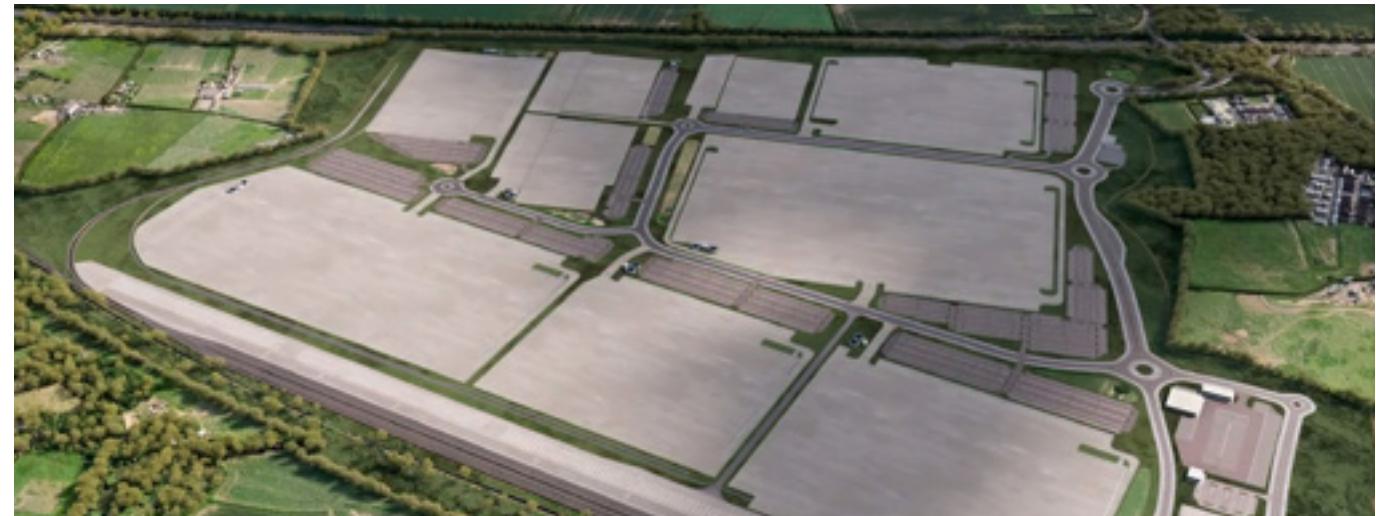
p34-45, National Design Guide

The Secretary of State needs to be satisfied that national networks infrastructure projects are sustainable and as aesthetically sensitive, durable, adaptable and resilient as they can reasonably be (having regard to regulatory and other constraints and including accounting for natural hazards such as flooding).

s. 4.32, NPS for National Networks



The existing site - developers promotional video



The proposed hardstanding / built area - developers promotional video

Applicant's Proposals

The development covers a large area most of which introduces new hardstanding or built form into an environment that is currently greenfield.

The applicant's design code states 'Having regard to policy, environmental and economic matters, it is the intention that this new development pay high regard to energy efficiency and sustainability' the following are proposed in attempt to fulfil this aim within the landscape:

- Materials will be locally sourced wherever practicable and the use of non-recyclable plastics will be avoided.
- Water requirements for the scheme will provide a drainage scheme which will be compliant with the requirements of CIRIA guidance on SuDS. These manifest as drainage works including surface water retention ponds, underground attenuation tanks and swales.
- External lighting will be designed to ensure no lighting is installed facing towards the perimeter boundaries and all lighting will be installed with non-translucent covers.

Assessment

Reducing resource requirement

When looking at land as a resource, the scale and massing of the development has a high consumption, particularly in relation to its context and could be regarded as over development. Though measures have been taken to buffer the development and integrate it into the local green infrastructure the development does not sensitively sit within its setting nor enhance local green networks.

Adaptability and lifespan

The masterplan (annex 2) sets out a rigid grid that is suited to its proposed intended use. Green infrastructure proposed is similarly rigid and bound to the street layout or on the fringes of the site. There is little scope for this to mature into anything with significant environmental benefit in the future. With pressure from extreme climatic events the site must have the future capacity to accommodate increases in flooding without impacting neighbouring sites such as the adjacent ancient woodland, it is unclear if such a strategy is in place.

Materiality

The materials chosen for the streetscape are generic and primarily functional. These lack any real environmental benefit, or climate resilience. Although the current palette does not meet the existing character of the local area, if the proposals reduced impermeable hardstanding in favour of increased soft landscape or permeable areas the proposal would be more sustainable and resilient.

SuDS

The hardstanding and built footprint proposed puts pressure on local drainage. The inclusion of a SuDS system is welcomed however this could go further to meet best practice. The scheme would benefit from less hardstanding, the inclusion of rain gardens and more permeable paving as would be expected in best practice.

2.10 Lifespan

Made to last

"Well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term. They add to the quality of life of their users and as a result, people are more likely to care for them over their lifespan .."

Well-designed places have:

- *designed and planned for long-term stewardship by landowners, communities and local authorities from the earliest stages;*
- *robust, easy to use and look after, and enable their users to establish a sense of ownership and belonging, ensuring places and buildings age gracefully;*
- *adaptable to their users' changing needs and evolving technologies;*

p46-49, National Design Guide

Well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term. They add to the quality of life of their users, and as a result, people are more likely to care for them over their lifespan. They have an emphasis on quality and simplicity.

Places designed for long-term stewardship are robust and easy to look after, enable their users to establish a sense of ownership, adapt to changing needs and are well maintained

p. 82, Part 2 National Model Design Code SPD



Blyth Valley Park in Solihull aerial view - referenced as exemplar design within The Good Design Guide SPD for working with the existing landscape & providing a green setting. The development is surrounded by a generous green buffer, plots and architecture are distinct from one another. Green infrastructure runs throughout and is fully integrated into the proposal using the existing as the backbone to the framework. This ensures longevity and the maturation of a successful place.

Applicant's Proposals

The development proposes to remove all green infrastructure from the primary development zone (annex 1 & 3) of the site and proposes a new layout for this in line with the site infrastructure.

The applicant's design code states "Tree planting will be arranged within informal groupings, and designed to provide a long-term solution to filter views of, and lighting from, new buildings and external yards.

The hedgerows will establish green connections across the site linking the landscape buffer with the green infrastructure at the core of the development along the internal distributor roads and A47 Link Road. These hedgerows will support a network of habitat routes and environments, whilst promoting local landscape character;"

Assessment

Lifespan and adaptation

The project proposes materials which are very durable, but are somewhat generic and will age differently to the surrounding area. As mentioned, the materials used and scale of the project mean that maintenance of the large areas of hardstanding will become a future burden impacting on the long term sustainability.

Local ownership

The development lacks integration into the local area and seems unlikely to develop any positive connection to local communities. The masterplan (annex 2) allows for little scope to instil a local sense of ownership through the spaces and amenities offered with a weak relationship to its context.

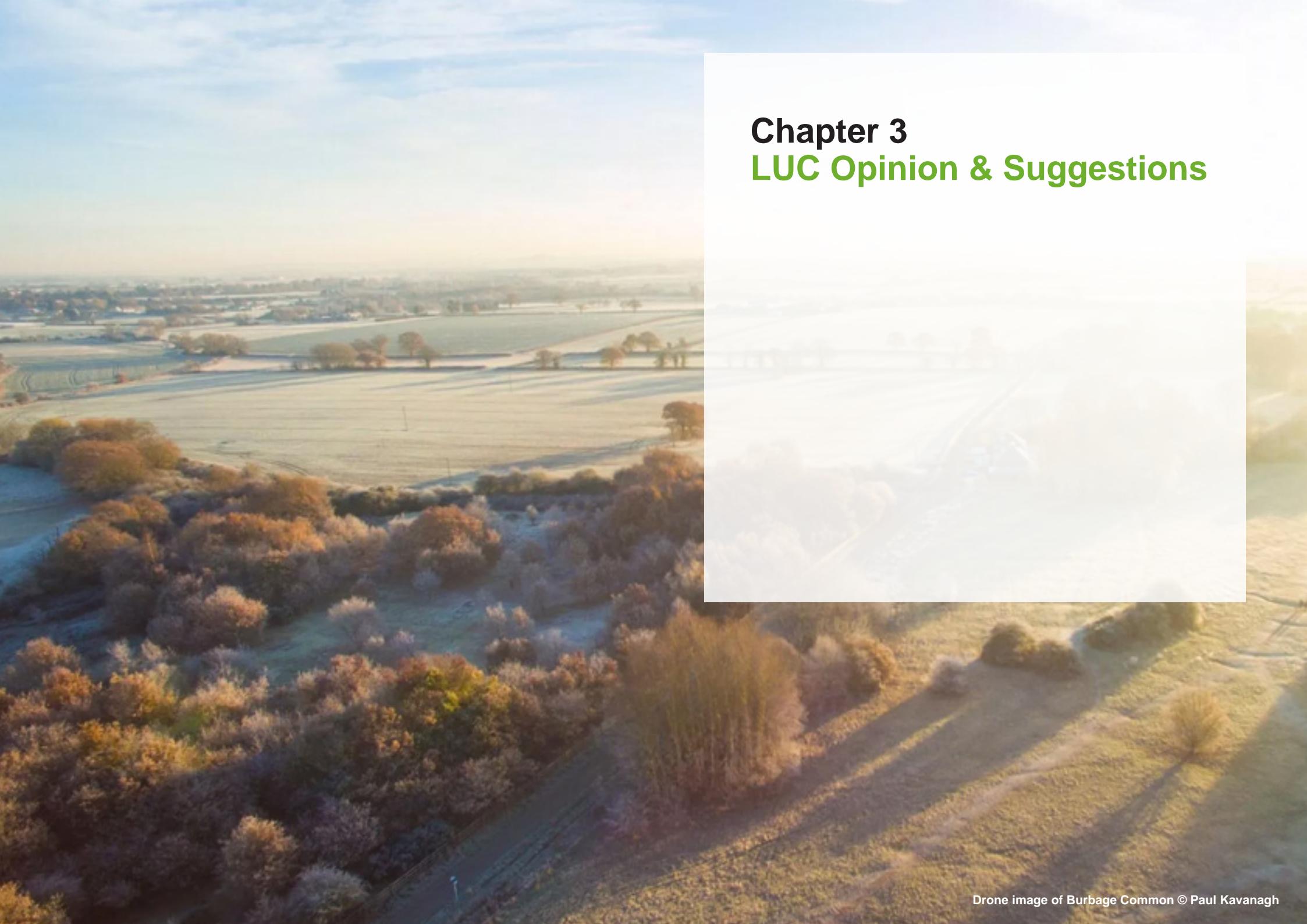
User needs

This development has been designed for its current intended purpose and due to its rigidity in layout and high density offers little opportunity for flexibility and adaptation in terms of the landscape and public realm.

Climate resilience

The scheme proposes a large amount of built form and hard standing. The applicant's design code states that a green buffer and green connections will support future habitat, however this does not discuss the importance of the existing site habitats that are proposed to be removed.

The site contains an existing water course which is proposed to be culverted. The removal of the majority of the existing on site vegetation will have a detrimental impact on the site and adjacent areas which over time may never recover to the current environmental equilibrium.



Chapter 3

LUC Opinion & Suggestions

Chapter 3

LUC Opinion & Suggestions

Components of Good Design

3.1 'Good Design' can be measured within the following components set within the National Design Guide:

- Layout
- Form
- Scale
- Appearance
- Landscape
- Materials
- Detailing

These components form the basis for all development and design decisions made from the 10 characteristics as set out previously.

Layout

3.2 The masterplan (Annex 2) adopts a heavily engineered approach and although logical for its primary use lacks connection to its local context. Although wider connections are made these are of a poorer spatial quality than existing. The proposed is not sufficient in '*connecting communities, addressing community severance and integrating into its surroundings*' (4.24 *Draft NPS National Networks*) at times it exacerbates severance particularly with the inclusion of the new link road and removal of existing PRoW connections across the railway.

3.3 The proposal would benefit from a clearer street hierarchy creating a legible public realm that is distinct yet related to the wider area. The proposals should strengthen existing connections avoiding severance and provide an enhanced quality of the existing rural character, not diminish it. Proposals would benefit from accommodating a more diverse range of spaces giving relief to the monotony of the streetscape.

Form

3.4 The built form is out of proportion to its context and makes little attempt to follow the existing grain of the landscape or surrounding settlements. The draft NPS (4.24) states development's should; '*makes a positive contribution to local landscapes within and beyond the project boundary.*' This cannot be stated regarding the current proposal which negatively impacts the surrounding local landscapes both visually and physically.

3.5 The proposals would be improved through showing more cohesion with the existing grain and field pattern of the landscape and surrounding settlements to properly integrate into its surroundings. The architectural form could also be improved upon to avoid the current monolithic aesthetic.

Scale

3.6 The scale of the development is set by the parameter plan (Annex 1). This designates the primary development zone as well as areas forming a landscape buffer. The latter are in reality fringe pieces of land that due to lack of space fail to accommodate the necessary mitigation on site to appropriately screen the development. The NPS states '*the Secretary of State may decide that the benefits of the mitigation to reduce the landscape effects outweigh the marginal loss of scale or function.*' (5.159 *NPS National Networks*). The found significant visual effects are certainly cause to review the scale and overall density of the development that currently cannot adequately be mitigated by the landscape proposals.

3.7 The proposal could be improved by reviewing the parameter plan (Annex 1) to ensure that proper allowances are made for green space both to buffer the development and accommodate replaced green infrastructure (if removal of the exiting is unavoidable). Currently the scale of green space provided is not commensurate with the scale of the surrounding built environment. The masterplan (Annex 2) should provide meaningful green space that is integrated throughout helping to lessen the scale of proposals and soften the scheme from within as well as when viewed from the outside.

Appearance

3.8 Applying good design should '*produce sustainable infrastructure sensitive to place, ... matched by an appearance that demonstrates good aesthetics as far as possible.*' (4.29 NPS National Networks). The scheme proposes a strong corporate identity for the area, this is foreign within the existing rural setting and creates an odd juxtaposition. The streetscape and architecture makes no apparent attempt to be sensitive to the existing place preferring to create it's own version of one.

3.9 The proposals could be improved by studying local vernacular and making reference to the existing character of the built form within surrounding settlements. The development can still meet the applicant's desire to be contemporary but shape proposals in a more sympathetic way to its context. This is particularly true in the landscape where furniture, signage and boundaries can all have a stronger connection to the development's setting and local vernacular.

Landscape

3.10 The proposals are largely formed by the parameter plan (Annex 1). All of the existing landscape features within the primary development zone are proposed to be cleared (Annex 3 Illustrative phasing and works plan). This includes a number of high value trees including a veteran Oak, a watercourse and an extensive hedgerow network. The draft NPS states '*The Secretary of State should not grant development consent for any development that would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees unless there are wholly exceptional reasons...*' (5.58 Draft NPS National Networks). This is reflected in the current NPS which makes clear that the removal of veteran trees are only acceptable where loss is proven to be unavoidable. The approach to the existing green infrastructure appears dismissive of the existing and the proposed new landscape framework is inadequate in

compensating for its loss. The proposed structure is formal in most places dictated by the infrastructure. Much of the proposed landscape is fragmented severed by large extents of hard standing offering little ecological or amenity value.

3.11 The landscape design should respond to its context and enhance the local green infrastructure. The scheme could be improved through exploring options to retain the existing site assets including the veteran Oak tree, removal is only acceptable once loss is proven to be unavoidable. Proposed green infrastructure should focus on connectivity to the local area and avoid 'islands' of green. Landform and the creation of SuDS is welcomed but these features should avoid an engineered approach and have a more naturalistic aesthetic. Attenuation tanks could be minimised through integration of rain gardens and areas of permeable paving.

Materials

3.12 Materials chosen both in the external proposals and in the architectural design have a large impact on the quality of the overall scheme. The NPS states '*Adverse landscape and visual effects may be minimised through appropriate siting of infrastructure, design (including choice of materials), ... Materials and designs for infrastructure should always be given careful consideration.*' (5.160 NPS National Networks). Materiality proposed in the design code and within the detailed proposals appears to be generic giving the character of the streetscape a lack identity and sense of place.

3.13 The masteplan would benefit from a general reduction in the amount of hard standing and integrate more soft landscaping into the proposals. Proposing a material palette that is in keeping with the local area and rural character would increase the proposals identity and sense of place. The proposals should be robust, high quality but also reference the local character.

Detailed

3.14 The design code sets out some of the principles of the landscape design in more detail and gives guidance on the proposed development. Much of the detailing appears to be generic and lacks originality within the design code. The detailing appears to focus on function and neglects the opportunity for good design. Good detailing would lead to '*giving places a strong sense of identity, creating a sense of place*' (4.24 Draft NPS National Networks)

3.15 The detailed design of the scheme would benefit from aligning more closely with the local vernacular and use the local SPD and similar policy to inform proposals. The detailing should show sensitivity to existing features on the site and the sites context. To achieve a high quality scheme the material palette must enrich the local vernacular whilst being robust and low maintenance.

3.16 Providing a green setting

A common thread between large scale projects illustrating qualities of good design is the green setting they sit within. This consists of both the contextual buffer to the development but also the landscape design within.

Ideally the masterplan should be landscape led and work within the existing landscape grain prioritising local green infrastructure. Retention and enhancement of existing green infrastructure is a tried and tested placemaking technique that leads to more distinct schemes. Proposals could be improved by striving to retain as much of the existing green network as possible including irreplaceable habitats such as the veteran Oak tree.

The landscape should appear seamless and encourage a pedestrian priority. Within pocket spaces opportunities for play or amenity should be integrated.



Westergasfabriek Park by-Gustafson Porter © Thomas-Schlijper



Rosa Luxemburg Garden © Jourda architects



Park am Gleisdreieck by Julien Lanoo, © Atelier LOIDL



Park am Gleisdreieck by Julien Lanoo, © Atelier LOIDL

3.17 A considered, sensitive approach

Both national and local level policy call for a sensitive approach to development. This would enhance the identity of the area and reinforce its sense of place.

The Good Design Guide SPD sets out these principles early as a set of principles underpinning all development.

The proposal would benefit from a clearer street hierarchy avoiding monotony. The form of the street layout should avoid large linear routes and respond to the existing grain.

Efforts could be made to retain more existing features such as the watercourse, hedgerows and trees including the veteran tree. It is not acceptable to propose a blanket removal of all features within the primary development zone (annex 1) until removal is proven unavoidable.

The inclusion of nodes would afford users the opportunity for rest and give relief to an otherwise highly programmed layout. Focal points and landmarks should be included in the public realm to enhance the streetscape and make each area more distinct from the next.

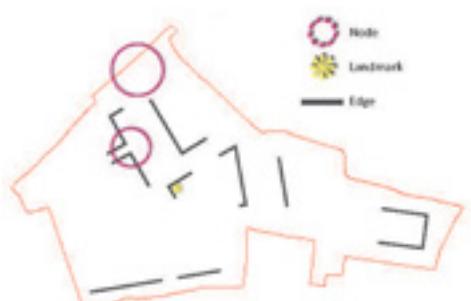
Retention of some of the existing trees would automatically help to do this which can be supplemented with other feature tree planting at key points.



A series of legible routes that form a clear hierarchy aiding wayfinding and enhancing the development's urban grain.



Retaining existing features illustrates a sensitive approach and ensures the scheme retains some of its current character.



The creation of nodes, focal points and edges create good places and ensure users are drawn through spaces as well as having the opportunity to dwell.



3.18 Reinforcing the rural character

The proposals should reinforce and enhance the character of the local area. This is predominately rural and therefore a natural aesthetic and use of natural materials would be appropriate.

Efforts could be made to reduce the amount of hard surface and lessen its impact. Using natural tones and high quality natural materials all would contribute to a strong sense of place.

Insertions into the landscape including furniture, signage and the architecture should be sensitively integrated and also be sympathetic to a natural aesthetic.

The proposed landform and ponds currently appear purely functional and should consider aesthetics. These elements could be an opportunity to introduce contemporary features into the design which add to the quality of the landscape proposal and in turn make it more distinct.



Use of Grass Crete paving to soften large extents of hard surface.



Routes using a buff tone to integrate with rural aesthetic and assist with hierarchy



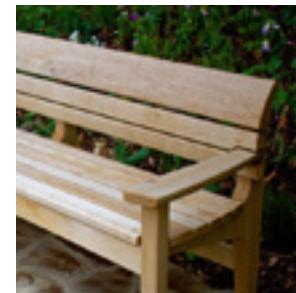
Brick is within the local palette and should be considered in detailing and smaller built elements.



Timber deck & boardwalks to allow for access to the SuDS features.



Routes should avoid linear routing and be set within a generous soft.



Furniture should be made of natural materials, accessible. Potentially reusing felled timber.



Feature trees used on the streetscape as a device to create distinctiveness and act as focal points.



Art can be used in key places as focal points and add character.



Signage should be sensitive to place and not intrusive.



Lighting along pedestrian routes should be low levels and integrate with the rural aesthetic.



Landform & ponds created can be contemporary and sculptural rather than their form dictated by the left over land associated with infrastructure.



Interpretation should be integrated within key nodes and enhance local identity.

3.19 Facade treatment

The treatment of the architectural design & facade is critical to achieving a successful development that integrates into its setting. To meet the criteria for good design the architectural treatment needs to be sensitive to the local scale and form and offer a high quality proposal that contributes positively to the local area. Below is the culmination of a few treatments and devices which the applicant could incorporate into the proposal to reduce the scheme's negative impacts.



3.20 Assessing Good Design

Based on the prior critique of the landscape design and to assist in assessing overall 'good design' specific for this site we have cross referenced the components with characteristics within the National Design Guide to give an indication of the quality of the proposals.



Characteristics of a Well Designed Place

Components of Good Design

	Context	Identity	Built Form	Movement	Nature	Public Spaces	Uses	Homes & Buildings	Resources	Lifespan
Layout	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	●	○
Form	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	●	○
Scale	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○
Appearance	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○
Landscape	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	●	○
Materials	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○
Detailing	○	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●



Chapter 4

Executive Summary

Chapter 4

Executive Summary

Overall, following assessment of the landscape & urban design aspects the proposals significantly fail to meet the criteria for good design as set out in both national & local policy. The applicant's design code states:

The HNRFI, will be an exemplar rail connected warehousing development of strategic importance, not only locally, but regionally and nationally. It is therefore critical that the proposals are of the highest quality in terms of materials, finish and landscaping with the site planned so that it maximises the benefits for the occupiers, users and neighbours alike. Key to this objective will be the consideration given to the design of the access, landscaping, ecology, layout, scale, massing and building form, colour, and material of each part of the development. (HNRFI design code p. 4)

The proposals fail to deliver on the above statement and do not propose a landscape scheme of the highest quality or maximise benefits for users and its neighbours.

The proposals would lead to over development of the site and the proposed landscape is alien to the surrounding landscape character. This would in turn significantly damage the setting to the site and sensitive areas such as Burbage Common, Burbage Woods & Aston Firs SSSI. The masterplan appears to have been designed in an insular fashion disregarding local urban grain and vernacular. The parameter plan outlines a primary development zone too large for its context and relies on insufficient fringe areas to adequately buffer the development.

The intended approach to clear all existing natural site assets (including a veteran tree, hedgerows & watercourse) in the primary development zone is typical of the proposals and illustrates the general lack of sensitivity.

There is a loss of both visual and physical amenity. The scale and massing of the development and its position make it visible from a large number of receptors. This is worsened by the architectural design that has made little attempt to blend into its surroundings. The severance of existing PRoW's particularly impact the residents of Elmesthorpe. The proposed diversions are inadequate in quality and poorly laid out. The experience of the user changed from encountering a natural aesthetic to an urban one as a result of the majority of the proposed routes being adjacent to proposed roads.

The streetscape is repetitive and has limited legible hierarchy. Hard surfaces dominate the landscape including large, uninterrupted areas for parking.

The detailed proposals are vague in areas some of which are set out within the design code. Wording within this document is not definitive enough and lacks certainty in what will be delivered.

Green infrastructure is largely focussed on the fringe areas of the site. The proposed green areas within the masterplan are disproportionate to the scale of the development and often occur as fragmented leftover spaces with little ecological value. The inclusion of SuDS in the scheme is welcomed but the layout and form is dictated by the infrastructure. The SuDS scheme appears to have missed opportunities to include other features that would assist in promoting on site biodiversity.

The proposed materiality is generic and lacks sensitivity to the local area. The large amounts of hardstanding and built form will lead to a future maintenance burden that will likely impact on the schemes overall sustainability.

To improve the quality of the scheme the parameter plan, illustrative landscape masterplan & proposed DCO requirements (document reference 3.1) in respect of design codes could be revisited to:

- Incorporate the design suggestions laid out in Chapter 3 as well as more detailed principles.
- Add a requirement for a new design code masterplan to be submitted prior to any development (including site clearance). To ensure the principles set out are being successfully integrated.
- Allow for a series of phased design codes submitted ahead of submission of full details under requirement 4.

LUC

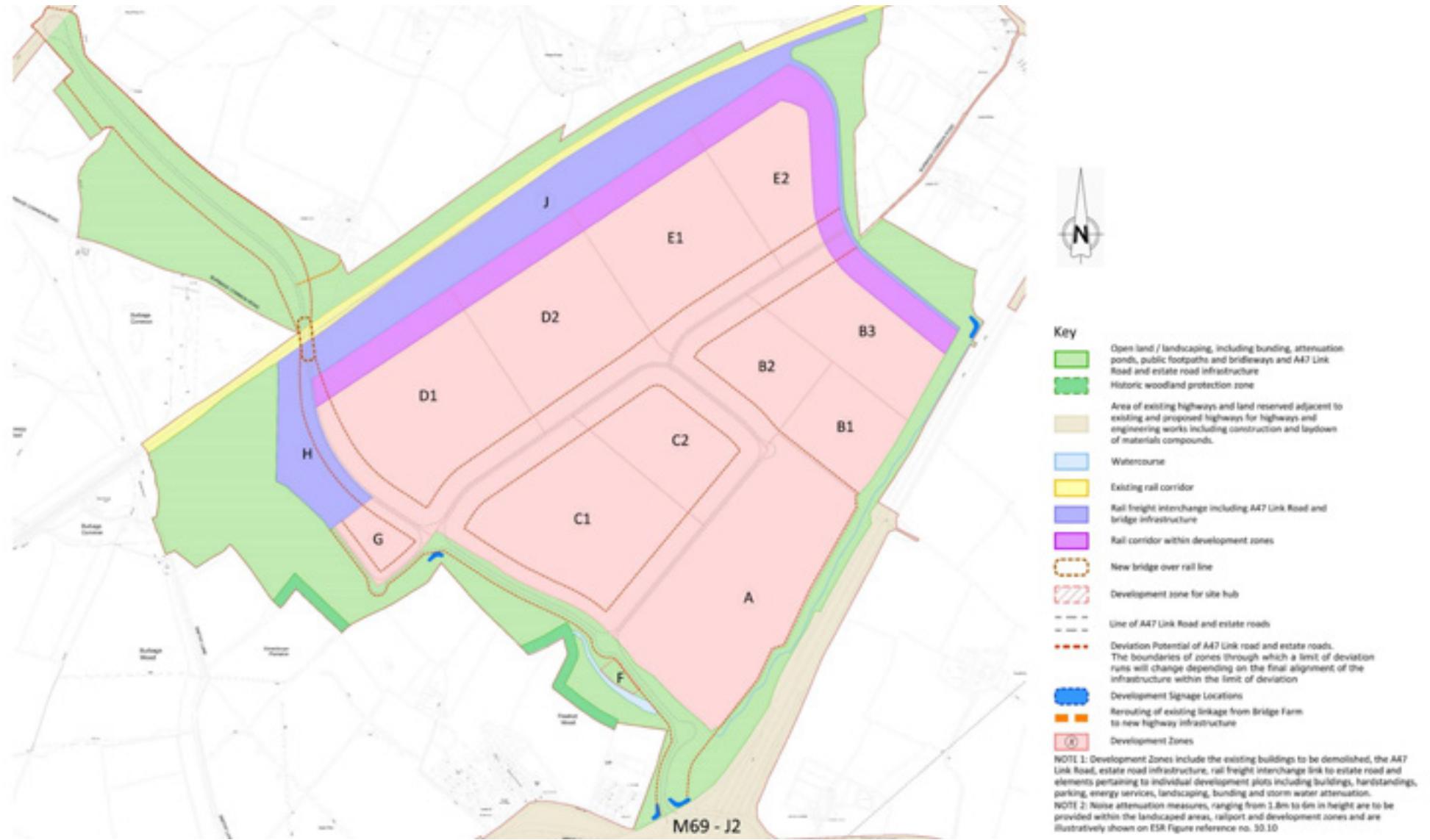
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Annex



Annex 1

Scheme Parameter Plan

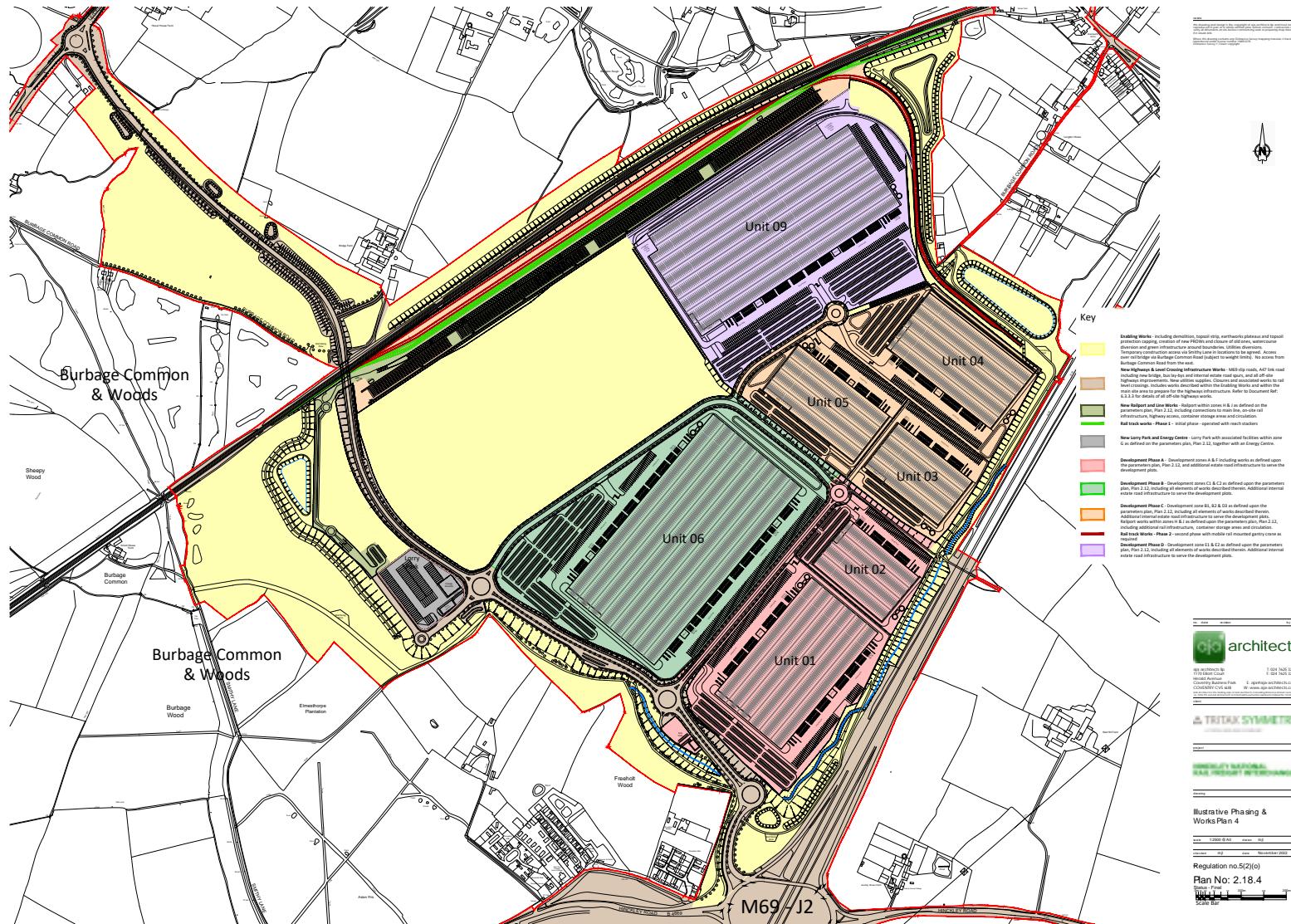


Annex 2 Illustrative Masterplan



Annex 3

Illustrative phasing and works plan



Annex 4

Illustrative Landscape Masterplan



Annex 5

Illustrative Landscape Section



