

Summary and Overview of Potential for Further Employment Development at Membury Industrial Estate

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Liz Allen EPLA was requested by West Berkshire Council to look at the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape surrounding Membury PEA with regard to its location within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The object of the report was to consider whether there was any potential, in landscape terms, for employment development within this area. Six sites were assessed in detail, which are located on the periphery of the three existing Protected Employment Areas at Membury. The findings of these individual assessments are set out within the following reports:

- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 1: Membury East
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 2: South of Trinity Grain
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 3: Membury West
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 4: Membury North West
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 5: Membury North
- Report LAM6

1.2 The PEA at Membury has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied individually and together and, as part of that process, an assessment made of the potential cumulative impacts of the development. This overview considers the overall landscape character of the area as set within the landscape character assessments for this area. In this context it then sets out a series of recommendations and more detailed guidance for any further development.

2.0 Landscape Character Areas

2.1 Membury PEA and the surrounding survey area is set within the North Wessex Downs AONB and the following landscape character areas:

- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002: The survey area is located within Character Area 2C: *Lambourn Wooded Downs*
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019: The survey area is located within Landscape Character Area: *WD1: Shefford Wooded Downland*
- Lambourn NPD Landscape Character Assessment 2020: The survey area covers two LCAs: *Membury Airfield (LCA3)* and *Ermin Street (LCA4)*

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002:

2.2 The site is located within Character Area 2C: *Lambourn Wooded Downs*:

Key Characteristics

- Strongly rolling chalk plateau landform incised by dry valleys with Clay-with-flint deposits capping higher sections of the plateau and softening landform
- A mosaic of woodland/mixed arable and pasture farmland. Large scale fields bounded by hedgerows, thick shelterbelts and distinctive ridge top woodlands. Unimproved chalk grassland retained on steep slopes
- Field patterns reflecting both formal and informal post medieval enclosure, plus many valley side woodlands which show signs of informal intakes by assarting
- High proportion of ancient semi-natural woodlands including ash-hazel coppice, with a rich ground flora
- A distinct landscape pattern around woodland St Mary and Lambourn Woodlands with a regular patterning of rectilinear fields, broad shelterbelts and ridge woodlands
- Isolated individual Bronze Age round barrows on ridgelines and a large prominent Iron Age Hillfort at Membury
- Settlement pattern typical of a wood pasture landscape, characterised by a high density of regularly spaced farmsteads, hamlets and loose collections of buildings along Roman Road, with few villages. Built form includes red brick, flint and render, weatherboard, tile and thatch
- A large number of equestrian centres, stud farms and increasing number of pony paddocks

Key Management Requirements

- 2.3 The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character of the Lambourn Wooded Downs. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open downland summits and views contrasting with the strong wooded horizons, historic features including archaeological sites, the historic field pattern and road and lane network. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands, sympathetic management of commercial forestry plantations and restoration of hedgerows. Remnant chalk grassland is a feature along steep slopes and should be conserved with opportunities for habitat restoration to link existing isolated sites. The distinctive pattern of settlements with dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and loose collections of buildings should be maintained.

North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

2.4 Key development issues with the potential to have significant influence on the special qualities of the AONB:

- The loss of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas)
- Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control)

- Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the landscape quality, heritage assets, and the sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g., Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets
- New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the AONB
- Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/ or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- Development that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019:

- 2.5 The survey area is located within *LCA WDI: Shefford Wooded Downland*. The key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy are as follows:

Key Characteristics

- Strong rolling landform with scarp and dipslopes, underlain by a chalk plateau
- Mixed farmland, divided into large-scale fields bound by mature hedgerows and broken up by blocks of woodland
- Ridgetop woodlands and calcareous grasslands form important semi-natural habitats
- Visible archaeological remains from various eras of history
- Sparse settlement, comprising hamlets and scattered farms, cottages and stud farms
- Access via a variety of routes, including motorway and major roads contrasting with a network of rural lanes, byways, tracks and footpaths
- Sheltered, wooded character restricts views and creates an enclosed landscape which contrasts with panoramic views experienced from vantage points
- A traditional rural landscape with few modern intrusions

Valued Features and Qualities

- Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Well-wooded character, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland
- Nationally and locally designated semi-natural habitats
- Strong rural character due to sparse settlement and limited modern influences
- Frequent archaeological features which create a strong sense of time-depth
- Expansive open views from higher ground
- Sense of enclosure and high levels of tranquillity

Detractors

- Over intensification of arable farming practices
- Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas
- Noise and visual pollution created by the M4
- Ongoing pressure for development
- Increased traffic near Membury motorway service area as well as on the rural lane road network
- Localised modern intrusions on the landscape

Landscape Strategy

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve woodland, trees and hedgerows within the landscape
- Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats including lowland calcareous grassland
- Conserve historic features within the landscape
- Conserve the sparsely settled and rural character of the landscape
- Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way

Lambourn NPD Landscape Character Assessment 2020

- 2.6 The survey area covers two LCAs: Membury Airfield (LCA3) and Ermin Street (LCA4). The Lambourn NDP LCA describes each LCA under the three headings: Natural, Cultural/Social and Perceptual for the key characteristics of each LCA. This is then followed by recommendations to plan, manage and protect distinctiveness of each LCA. The assessment for LCA3 and LCA4 are as follows:

Membury Airfield (LCA3)

- The complex of industrial buildings at this location is partially enclosed by hedgerows and trees whilst other parts are more conspicuous. Additionally, landscaping would help reduce visual impacts where they exist
- Some of the landscaping has used non-natives to create visual enclosure. Whilst effective, it does not look as appealing as native species and is less beneficial in terms of biodiversity
- The scale and planning of developments at this location needs much careful considerations of any further growth to help it avoid further change in character
- The tower at Trinity Grain is c.60 metre tall and is incongruent with the landscape. Tall structures should be avoided and not exceed neighbouring tree height where possible

- HGVs introduce noise and dust which can lead to synergistic adverse effects on character. These matters and the resolution of impact is a planning control matter. However, any proposals to increase and expand development at this location should be mindful of such in-combination effects as well as the direct effect of encroachment
- It might be useful to prepare a design guide for LCA3 that would help provide guidance on what is appropriate and elements which should be avoided in order to maintain a proportionate level of development which avoids detracting further from landscape character

Ermin Street (LCA4)

- Improve quantity of woodland cover to help reduce noise and visual impacts from the transport corridors
- Can potentially contain and hold more development than other parts of the NPD as landscape impacts would be likely to be less sensitive than elsewhere
- Optimise biodiversity in the woodlands and wider habitat mosaic of grasslands and hedgerows
- Safe crossing points need to be considered for horse riders and walkers alike. A number of bridleways and footpaths terminate at Ermin Street. Improved connectivity should be an aspiration for the LCA (as elsewhere in the parish)
- Recognise and where appropriate enhance the character and setting of the various Grade II listed buildings that are evenly distributed evenly throughout the LCA

3.0 Potential for development surrounding Membury PEA

3.1 As set out earlier, the PEA has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied individually and together and, as part of that process, an assessment made of the potential cumulative impact of development. This has been considered that there is potential for development on the following sites as set out in Figure 3:

- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 1: Membury East
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 2: South of Trinity Grain
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 3: Membury West
- Membury Industrial Estate - Site 4: Membury North West
- Report LAM6

3.2 Where a suitable site is identified as being appropriate for development in landscape terms, landscape buffers are proposed to ensure development would fit with the existing pattern of the landscape as well as to bring landscape enhancements to this area of the AONB. Any further employment development in this area beyond these individual sites would be considered unacceptable in landscape terms

4.0 Recommendations and guidance

- 4.1 In order to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the AONB, when considering any further development, it is important that the following guidance is followed. Further site-specific requirements can also be found within the individual reports.

Development:

- The visibility of new development needs to be carefully considered in order to be successful in not causing adverse visual effects on this area of the AONB. All new development must remain at least 5m below the height of the existing Trinity Grain silos or as stated within the individual site reports
- The location of tall structures/masts need to be carefully contained and not extend above the height of the Trinity Grain Silos and adjacent trees
- The colouring of new building facades should be controlled with the use of an agreed palette of colours which help mitigate the buildings to blend into the surrounding landscape. The North Wessex Downs AONB: Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development should be used as guidance
- The scaling, massing and outline of buildings also needs to be considered. Curved roofs, or a multiple of curved roofs would work well with the outline of tree canopies
- The access and routes for HGV will need to be considered to avoid an adverse effect on the landscape character of adjacent rural roads and the adjacent landscape. This will include any widening, the requirement for sight lines and the increase in traffic noise

Access, driveways and landscaping - Additional suburbanising influences must be avoided as follows:

- New fencing should avoid any type of close boarded fencing in visible locations, and where possible use traditional agricultural fencing, for example chestnut cleft fencing. Where needed for security the use of black coloured mesh fencing should be used.
- Entrances and driveways need to be rural in character and avoid overly large signage. The height of new signage in open areas, especially along the Ramsbury Road should not stand alone, but be set into a planted backdrop
- The additional overuse of extra signage should be avoided on the public highways to avoid the littering of signage in particular on the rural character of Ramsbury Road
- The impact of light pollution should be carefully considered. The North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting should be used to inform any proposed development
- Where sight lines are required, in particular on Ramsbury Road, hedgerows should be reinstated along the new location, with areas required for sight lines should be managed as native grassland



Chestnut cleft fencing enhances the rural character. Black mesh fence for a security fence can also be used in less visible locations

Green infrastructure:

- Positively manage all existing native woodland without any development encroaching into the root protection zone of existing trees. In addition, buildings need to be sited to allow retained and new trees to grow and attain their full potential.
- Propose areas of new woodland to link with existing woodland to positively expand these areas
- Use only native tree and shrub species within new planting areas
- Remove non-native and overly high percentage of conifers within existing woodland belts, replace with native tree species
- Include landscape and woodland management plans to positively manage trees and woodland within area

**Figure 3:
Membury Industrial Estate
Potential for further
Development**

Site Areas

Site 1: East





Site 2: South of Grain Silos

Site 3: West

Site 4: North West

Site 5: North of M4

LAM6

-  Protected Employment Area
-  Scheduled Monument
-  With potential for employment
-  Not suitable for development
-  Landscape buffer

