

Application details

Ref: P/OUT/2023/01166	Applicant: Dudsbury Homes (Southern) Ltd.	Case Officer: Ursula Fay
Address: Land to the south of Ringwood Road, Alderholt		
Description: Mixed use development of up to 1,700 dwellings including affordable housing and care provision 10,000sqm of employment space in the form of a business park; village centre with associated retail, commercial, community and health faculties; open space including the provision of suitable alternative natural green space (SANG; biodiversity enhancements; solar array, and new roads, access arrangements and associated infrastructure (Outline Application with all matters reserved apart from access off Hillbury Road).		
Case Officer comments to Consultee:		
Consultee: Colm O'Kelly - Senior Landscape Architect - Infrastructure and Delivery Team		
Date: 27 April 2023		
Has a Pre-application discussion taken place with you?: Yes / No		
Support		
Support subject to condition		
Unable to support	Contrary to local plan policy	
No objection		
Request for further information		
Other		

Summary

The proposed development site consists of a large group of fields to the south of the settlement of Alderholt on either side of the Ringwood Road.

I have reviewed the submitted documentation and I am generally persuaded that the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development could be mitigated.

However the proposed development site is not currently allocated in the existing local plan and while it does feature as an option within the Consultation Draft of the Dorset Local Plan this also contains an alternative option which envisions no significant expansion and only limited additional housing for local needs.

I consider that the application is of a strategic scale and should not therefore be approved prior to the wider consideration of all strategic options via the local plan process.

I am also concerned that the outline application does not contain sufficient detail to consider issues relevant to landscape considerations and that should outline planning permission be granted it may not be possible to satisfactorily resolve these issues at the reserved matters stage.

Site description/context/significance

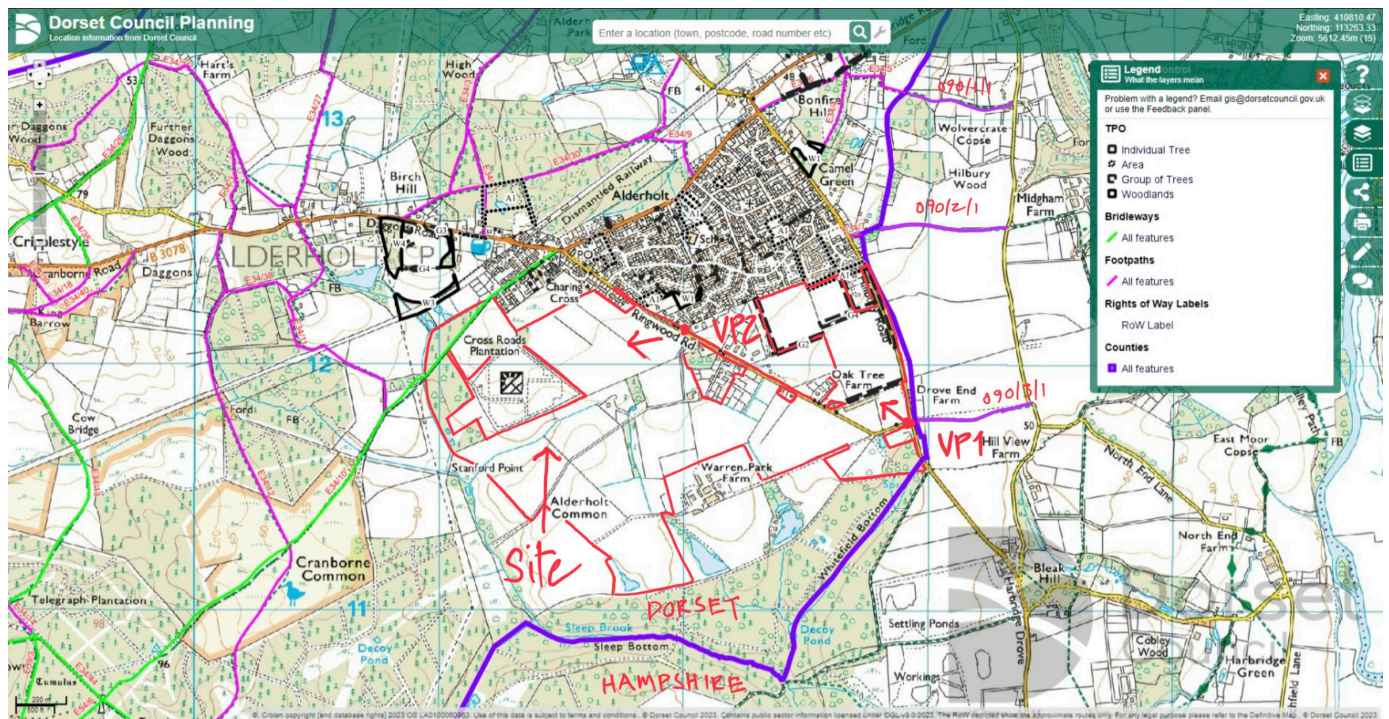


Figure 1: site in context

The proposed development site consists of a large group of fields to the south of the settlement of Alderholt on either side of the Ringwood Road. It is bounded to the north by residential development on the southern edge of Alderholt along the settlement boundary; to the east the Hillbury and Harbridge Roads and farmland; to the south by Plumley Wood; and to the west by a solar farm, farmland, woodland and Cranborne Common. The administrative boundary between Dorset and Hampshire lies just to the south and the east of the site.

A Public Right of Way (Dorset PRoW E34/10) crosses the northeastern corner of the site from which views may be possible. Views may also be possible from the open access land on Cranborne Common and from footpaths to the east of the site (East Hampshire PRoW 090/1/1, 090/2/1, 090/3/1) but because of the relatively flat topography and intervening vegetation views are more likely to be filtered or screened. There is also an extensive network of permissive paths within Plumley Wood to the south of the site but again, because of the intervening vegetation, views from these footpaths are likely to be filtered or screened.

The area to the west and south of the site is dominated by the extensive Ringwood Forest but there are also small copses and lines of mature trees on field boundaries within the site and a number of those located within the northeastern portion of the site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

The site slopes gently with ground levels rising from approximately 50m AOD in the south to approximately 60m AOD in the north with a high point of 65m AOD just to the south of Atwood Close. To the west of the site ground levels fall to Sleep Brook before rising across Cranborne Common to 96m AOD at Pistle Hill. To the east of the site the land is relatively level before falling sharply to approximately 25m AOD at the River Avon and its flood plain.

There are a number of drainage ditches within the site to the south of the Ringwood Road. There are three ponds on the southern border of the site one of which lies within the site boundary.

The boundary of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies approximately 2km to the northwest of the site. Cranborne Common, the western edge of which lies within 200m of the western boundary of the site, is part of the Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA). It is also a Ramsar Site and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Sleepbrook Farm SNCI and Ringwood Forest and Home Wood SINC lie to the west and south of the site respectively. The site also falls within the catchment of the River Avon SAC.

The site lies within the Heath/Forest Mosaic Dorset Landscape Character Type which forms part of the wider 'Poole Basin' an extensive and expansive area of former heathland on acidic and impoverished soils. It forms part of an elevated plateau cut to its west by the River Crane, to its north by the Allen River/Ashford Water, and to its east by the river Avon. The landscape type is characterised by a patchwork of farmland, heath, forest and scrub on sandy soils between straight roads with extensive blocks of conifer plantation. These plantations blanket former heathland sites but can help to soften the visual impact of development. Housing, military and industrial development have a significant impact on the area (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2: APGB 2m Digital Surface Model

Despite the presence of Alderholt to its northeast and the large poultry shed at Oak Tree Farm the site has an open, rural and agricultural character when viewed from the sections of Ringwood Road (**Figure 3** and **4**).

The 2021 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for the site (SHLAA Ref: LA/ALDE/007) notes that the extensive area of woodland south of Warren Park Farm helps to screen views of the site and concludes that the site is suitable for development subject to policy change but would require comprehensive masterplanning.



Figure 3: VP1 View northwest from junction of Ringwood Road and Hillbury Road



Figure 4: VP2 View northwest from junction of Ringwood Road

As shown on **Figure 5** below the site occupies the greater part of assessments areas ALD 2 and ALD3 of the Dorset Council East Dorset and Purbeck Areas Landscape & Heritage Study Stage 2 Assessments: Tier 3 Settlements (LUC 2021).

The overall assessment of landscape sensitivity for Area ALD2 notes that it consists of intensive farmland well screen by existing mature vegetation and that this together with its relatively flat landform and its strong connection with the existing modern settlement edge to its north reduced its prominence and sensitivity within the wider landscape. However its function as part of the setting for the settlement increases its sensitivity. Overall its landscape sensitivity was assessed to be low to medium.

The overall assessment of landscape sensitivity for Area ALD3 notes that the presence of priority woodland habitats, the intact hedgerow network, undeveloped skylines and the contribution the area makes to the rural character of the village and the surrounding area all present sensitivities to development. However the relatively flat and low lying landform and the enclosed nature of the area limit visibility. Overall its landscape sensitivity was assessed to be moderate.

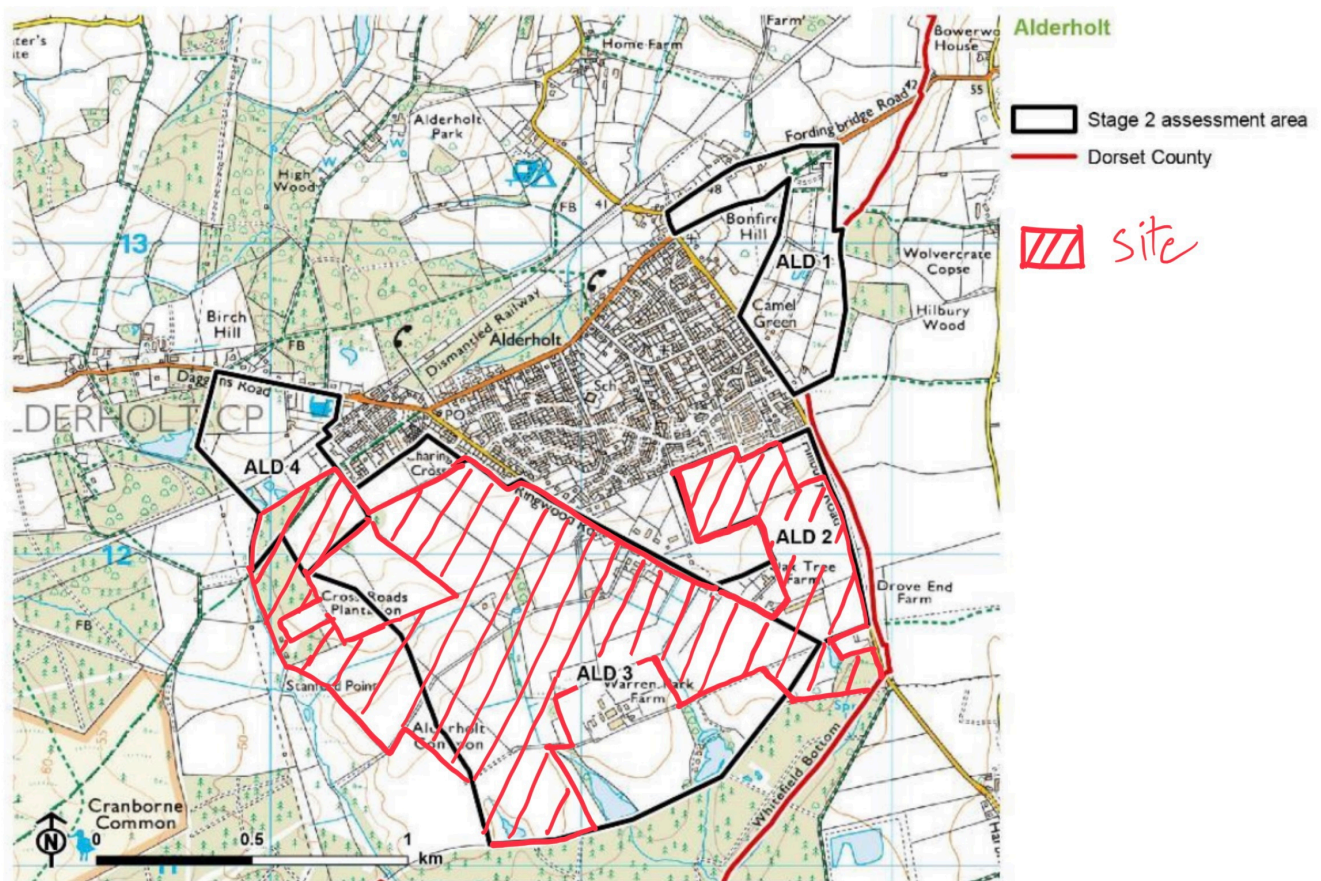


Figure 5: Site in relation to Landscape & Heritage Study Stage 2 assessment areas LUC 2021

The guidance for sustainable development within the document notes that any new development should retain the thick hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees and deciduous woodland; that new planting should utilise locally prevalent, climate resilient species and link to the existing habitat network; that the role of landscape as a rural edge to southern Alderholt should be preserved; that existing and new boundary vegetation should be utilised to help screen any new development and integrate it into the existing landscape structure; and that any new development should be integrated and linked with the existing modern development to the north utilising a similar layout and building style where possible.

Main issues

Would the proposed development avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty? (NPPF Paragraph 176)

Would the proposed development affect the setting of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty? (CEDLP Policy HE3)

Would the proposed development contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment? (NPPF Paragraph 174)

Would the proposed development protect and seek to enhance the landscape character of the area? (CEDLP Policy HE3)

Have the development proposals taken the following factors into account? the character of settlements and their landscape setting

1. Natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, water features and wildlife corridors
2. Features of cultural, historical and heritage value
3. Important views and visual amenity
4. Tranquility and. The need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise and motion (CEDLP Policy HE3)

Would the proposed development function well and add to the overall quality of the area not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development? (NPPF Paragraph 130)

Would the proposed development be visually attractive as a result of appropriate and effective landscaping? (NPPF Paragraph 130)

Would the proposed development be sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change? (NPPF Paragraph 130)

Would the proposed development optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development including green and other public open space? (NPPF Paragraph 130)

Would new streets within the proposed development be tree-lined or, in specific cases, have clear, justifiable and compelling reasons been given as to why this would be inappropriate; have opportunities been taken to incorporate trees elsewhere within the development; and have existing trees been retained wherever possible? (NPPF Paragraph 131)

Would the proposed development be compatible with or improve the surroundings in landscaping, visual impact and mature trees? (CEDLP Policy HE2)

Would the proposed development include the provision of sufficient open space for its anticipated population? (CEDLP Policy HE4).

The proposal

The outline application is seeking approval for access with matters of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale being reserved. However parameter plans for land use, density, and green infrastructure together with a indicative masterplan have been submitted with the application.

The proposed development includes:

- Up to 1,700 dwellings including affordable housing and care provision
- 10,000m² of employment space in the form of a business park
- A village centre with associated retail, commercial, community and health facilities
- Open space including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)
- Biodiversity enhancements
- Solar array
- New roads access arrangements and associated infrastructure

The masterplan overview (**Figure 6**) shows residential development divided into neighbourhoods on either side of the Ringwood Road with a local centre located in the southeastern most neighbourhood and an employment on the sites eastern boundary with the Hillbury Road.



Figure 6: Masterplan overview

The Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan (**Figure 7**) shows that these neighbourhoods would be surrounded and separated by amenity and semi natural green space, would contain public open spaces of varying sizes and that substantial Sites of Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) would be provided on the western and southeastern boundaries of the site.

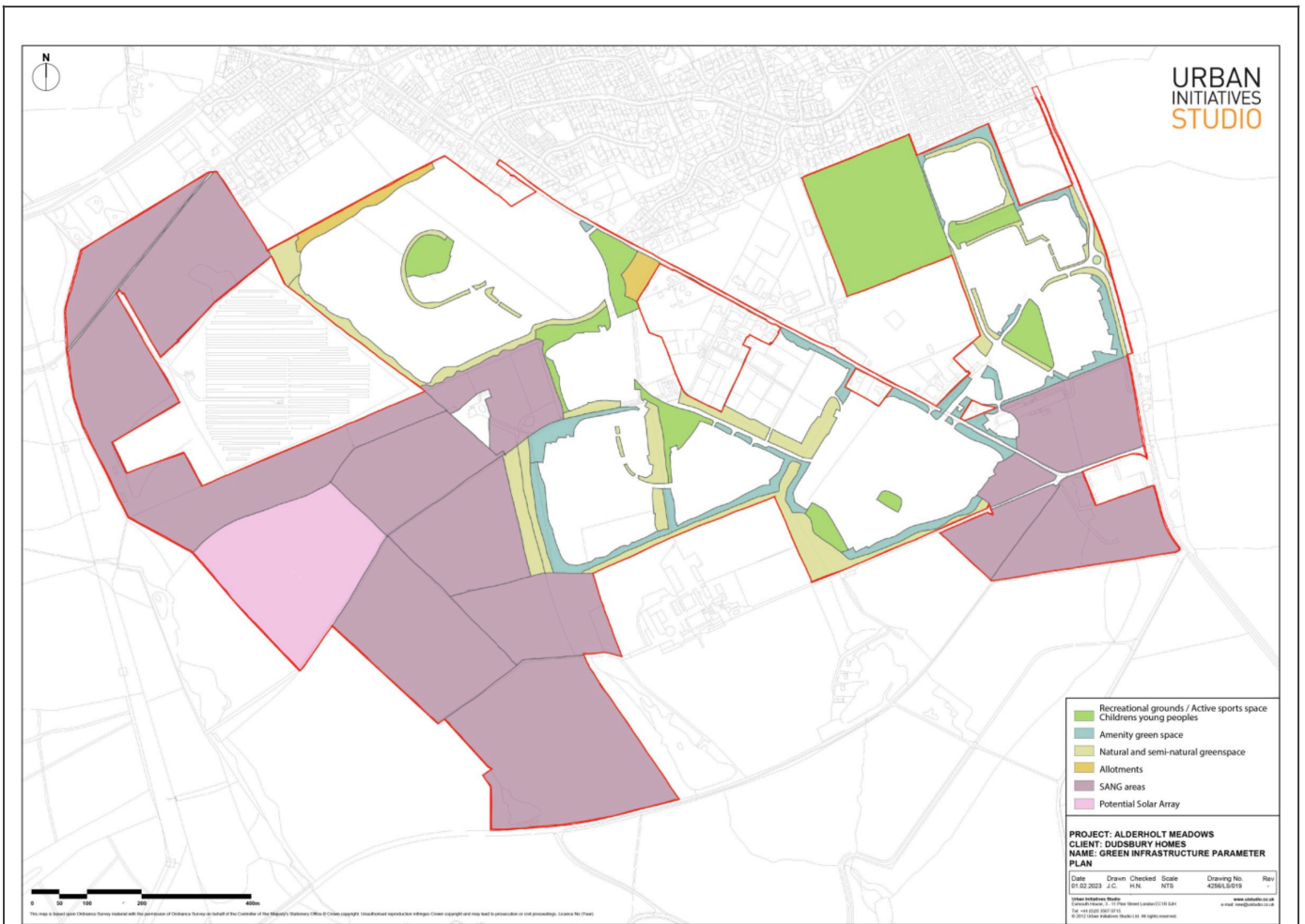


Figure 7: Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan

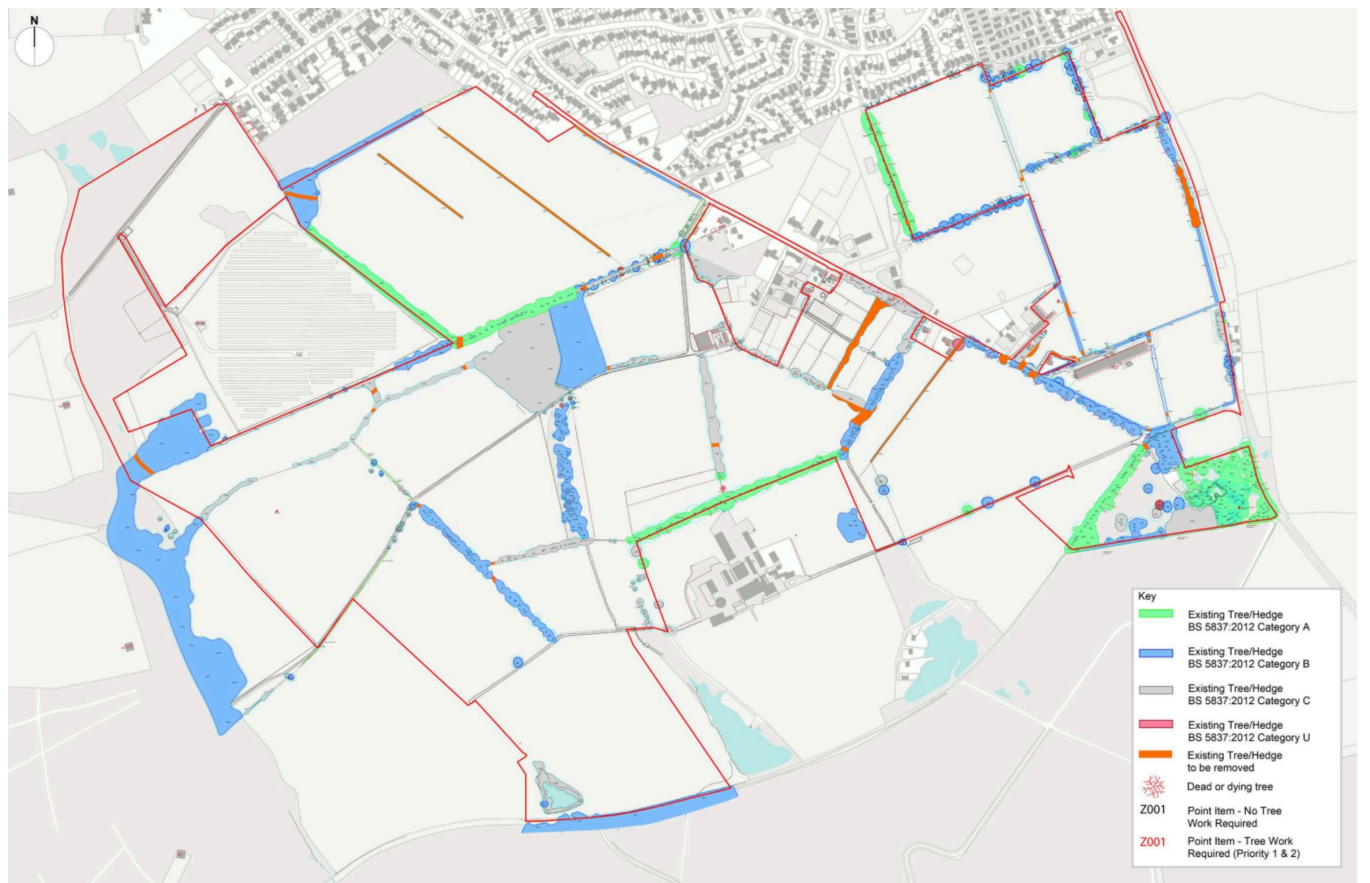


Figure 8: Plan indicating existing trees and shrubs to be removed

Figure 3.2 within the submitted landscape Strategy (Urban Initiatives Studio January 2023 **Figure 8**) shows that the intention is to retain the majority of existing trees and hedging within and on the boundaries of the site and that they would be incorporated into the proposed development.

The indicative Masterplan (**Figure 9**) also indicates a substantial amount of tree planting, within public open spaces, along some streets and within private garden spaces.



Figure 9: Indicative Masterplan

Comments on proposal

I have reviewed the Landscape and Visual chapter and associated appendices within the submitted Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Rapleys Environmental Statement Volume 1 and 4: Chapter 8, non technical summary and appendices 8.1 to 8.6 Ref: SRS/22/-00541 dated 09 February 2023).

I would agree that the physical landscape impacts that would give rise to perceived changes in landscape character are generally limited to some loss of vegetation within the site to achieve access and a change in the overall character from rural agricultural to urban residential. However I would note that while the former is of limited consequence the latter is highly significant because of the proposed scale and extent of development.

I would agree that the selected viewpoints and Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) within Appendix 8.4 of the EIA demonstrate that the visibility of the proposed development would be largely confined to a localised area.

I am also generally persuaded that the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development could be mitigated by the provision of SANGs and public open space, and significant amounts of tree planting within them and throughout the proposed residential areas.

However the proposed development site is not currently allocated in the existing local plan and while it does feature as an option within the Consultation Draft of the Dorset Local Plan this also contains an alternative option which envisions no significant expansion and limited additional housing for local needs.

In his response to the application (letter dated 26th April 2023) the Cranborne Chase AONB Principal Landscape and Planning Officer raises a number of concerns with regard to the proposed development and concludes that “..effectively the application is asking the development management process to pre-empt the strategic Local Plan process” and that “despite the obvious effort invested in the design work, the application is of a strategic scale and should not be approved prior to the wider consideration of strategic options via the local plan process” I would support this view.

Like the AONB Principle Planning and Landscape Officer I am also concerned that the outline application does not contain sufficient detail to assess issues relevant to landscape and visual considerations and that should outline planning permission be granted it may not be possible to satisfactorily resolve these issues at the reserved matters stage.

For example Section 5 - Landscape Strategy within the submitted Design Code (Scott Worsfold Associates Revision A dated 03.03.2023) states that the plan for Alderholt Meadows is landscape lead and that development would be set within a rich landscape of grasslands, meadows, woodlands and wetlands that would provide a resource for current and future residents and would also benefit wildlife. It sets out five key objectives namely greater connectivity ; enhanced biodiversity; a healthy landscape; a sense of place; and a beautiful place.

All the above a laudable and eminently achievable objectives but will depend upon detailed design at the reserved matters stage. *The document states that “where there is space, on the main streets and within parklands, large stature trees will be specified”; that “within more intimate spaces smaller stature trees will be more appropriate”; and that “each home will include a tree (of appropriate size within its plot)”* (page 61).

Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that planning decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined unless, in specific cases, there are clear, justifiable and compelling reasons why this would be inappropriate. The common dictionary definition of ‘tree-lined’ is “(of a road, path etc.) having a row of trees on either side” (OED).

While tabulated information within the Design Code includes a range of appropriate species for a variety of locations (page 62) and the typical street sections (pages 70 - 75) all show trees; specific, detailed, parameters have not been provided.

The viability and long term maintenance of newly-planted trees is, among other things, related to their distance from adjacent buildings and structures; the availability of sufficient un-compacted soil volumes; their relationship with adjacent hard surfaces; their integration with sustainable urban drainage systems; the coordination of their location with above and below ground services and structures; and arrangements for their long term maintenance.

I am therefore concerned that, as has been experienced on past outline planning applications, the well treed nature of the proposals as shown on the indicative masterplan may be eroded at the reserved matters stage if specific detailed parameters for tree planting and the relationship between trees, buildings, parking, services and lighting are not clearly set out within a design code at the outline stage through the use of clearly dimensioned plans and cross sections.

Policy consideration

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021

Paragraphs 130, 131, 174, 176

Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan - Core Strategy 2014

Policies HE2, HE3, ME1, ME2

Officer: Colm O’Kelly - BSc (hons), MPhil, CMLI, MBA, PGDip

Job Title: Senior Landscape Architect - Infrastructure and Delivery Team

Date: 27 April 2023