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A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for:
East Cambridgeshire Crematorium

Discover what's beneath

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.i Background

The Cemetery Development Services Group (CDS) has been commissioned by East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) to provide design, ecology and planning services to support development of what was previously the Mepal Outdoor Centre.

The origins of the site are in gravel extraction from which the lake, bunds and general contours of the surrounding land have historically been formed. This has resulted in the creation of sand and gravel based habitats in the wider south-east section of the site.

It should be noted that since the Outdoor centre closed in 2017 the various buildings and structures have been vandalised and attacked by arsonists and are now in poor condition. A number of anti-social activities have been recorded on site and late summer 2020 saw trespass by the travelling community.

Following a Pre-Application, ECDC indicated that CDS proceed with a full planning application for the development, to include this Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

1.ii The Proposal

The project would provide construction of a crematorium and associated service and administration building, function building, memorial garden, natural burial areas, pet cemetery, car parking, new vehicular access from the A142 to the north of the site and landscaping.

The proposal would introduce a secondary means of vehicular access from the A142 to the north of the Site. This access would be created by upgrading an existing, but disused, vehicular access in the same location and would lead to a car park for 6 cars. It is proposed that this access point would facilitate shared recreational use of the Site which is segregated from the main crematorium use. Proposed activities would include bird watching, walking and fishing.

1.iii Site Characteristics

The aerial view (Fig 1 across) details two lakes, one each side of the A142 Ireton way.

The proposal site is the western lake, and the red line site boundary (Fig 2 next Page) encompasses the lake, the perimeter of the water and adjacent vegetation, extending further into land at the south east corner. It also includes the section of Blockmoor Drove that runs along the western and northern lake boundary.

The main project focuses on land at the east of this lake, between the water and A142, within the area circled in yellow across that was previously developed by the Mepal Outdoor Centre. Current vehicle access into this area from the A142 would be retained.

Access to the northern end of the water will provide facilities for peaceful activities such as walking, fishing and bird watching, but access into the body of water will not be permitted. Visitors arriving car will drive along the track at the northern end of the water, turning left down Blockmoor Drove where pull-in parking will be available.

In general the site within the red line boundary can be characterised as:

- East shore: To the north of the earlier development the ground banks up toward the A142 and is covered with dense overgrown vegetation and trees;
- North shore: More open, less dense vegetation and a beach-like open area;
- West Shore: Narrow, steep bank covered in vegetation;
- South shore: Water edge and wider vegetation area identified as being of highest ecological value, especially to the South-East

1.iv Purpose of this LVIA

This LVIA provides an appraisal of the effects of the proposed development on the landscape of the site and its overall wider context.

The proposed design and identified mitigation measures are informed by the findings of the appraisal which has assessed:

- effects on features identified as important to the scenic quality
- effects on peoples’ views of the site and its setting, or visual amenity

The LVIA objectives are to:

- describe and evaluate the landscape of the site and surrounding landscape context
- describe and evaluate the visual amenity of the surrounding area, which would potentially be affected by the proposed development
- analyse potential effects on the landscape and visual amenity associated with the scheme’s design or operation
- provide an assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development with integral mitigation measures in place.

Fig. 1 – Aerial view



Fig. 2 – red line boundary



2. APPRAISAL METHODOLOGY

2.i General Approach

This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is based on the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (Third Edition, 2013) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in 2013.

The Report examines various landscape mitigation, compensation and enhancement proposals that would form an integral part of the overall project design

Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment are separate but interlinked procedures:

– **Landscape Character** impacts primarily derive from modifications to the physical landscape, which may give rise to changes in character and how this is perceived and experienced by users.

– **Visual impacts** relate to changes arising from the modification of the composition of views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes, and the overall effects in respect of visual amenity

2.ii Thresholds and Criteria

From the 2013 guidance, an LVIA is summarised as being

'a tool used to identify and assess the significance of and effects of change resulting from development, on both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity'

This summary addresses the relationship between people and the landscape, a relationship that can be reflected in the two main LVIA components:

- **assessment of the landscape effects** i.e. effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right;
- **assessment of visual effects** i.e. effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people

The 2013 Guidance emphasises a reliance on professional judgement rather than the results of potentially complex, pre-determined formulae and matrices. Such an approach has been followed in undertaking this assessment.

GLVIA 3 (para. 1.20) states that the guidance is

'not intended to be prescriptive, in that it does not provide a 'recipe' that can be followed in every situation. It is always the primary responsibility of any landscape professional carrying out an assessment to ensure that the approach and methodology adopted are appropriate to the particular circumstances.'

2.iii Study Area

Guidance is provided by GLVIA3 on the area of landscape that needs to be covered in assessing landscape effects i.e. the 'Study Area'. (Scope -para. 5.1 & 5.2 page 70).

'The study area should include the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape around which the proposed development may influence in a significant manner. This will usually be based on the extent of Landscape Character Areas likely to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly.

However, it may also be based on the extent of the area from which the development is potentially visible, defined as the Zone of Theoretical Visibility, or a combination of the two.'

The preliminary study area for this LVIA has as such been set at an approximate radius of 4km from the site. This is considered sufficient to account for the likely impacts that will be generated by the proposed development. It was assessed that the potential for impacts on specific landscape resources from identified viewpoints fell within this 4km radius.

2.iv Desk Study

A desk study has been completed, informed by site visits which analysed the Landscape Character Area relevant to the scheme and in the context of local and national planning policies.

In addition, QGIS software, Ordnance Survey data and Google Earth were used to identify areas potentially affected by the proposed Development.

The QGIS area extending 4.2km from the site was deemed to be appropriate, with no potential of visual effect from the development beyond this zone and indeed very little within it

3. Proposed Development

Details of the proposed development are provided on the application plans and the documents accompanying the application. This chapter describes the main aspects of the proposed development which may affect the landscape and/or visual amenity. It also identifies features of the proposals which will assist in mitigating adverse landscape and visual impacts.

Fig. 3 on page 09 includes a copy of the layout plan as submitted in the planning documents

3.i The project consists of:

- a new crematorium building with electric cremator
- natural burial plots set within an existing and developing open mosaic habitat
- ash interment
- provision for ash scattering within a defined area
- a memorial garden
- a pet cemetery

Also incorporated into the proposal are :

- car parking facilities including disabled parking and electric car charging points
 - clearly defined, safe, accessible pedestrian routes through the car park, with a Copenhagen crossing at main building entrance
 - a flower walkway and boardwalk.
 - a multi-function building for private gatherings
 - an adjacent boardwalk and viewing platform at the waterside providing contemplative views across the lake
 - Entrance to the new crematorium would be via the existing site entrance from A142, to be secured out of hours by gates
 - Pedestrian entry is via a separate adjacent gate
 - a secondary means of vehicular access from the A142 to the north of the Site, upgrading an existing, but disused, vehicular access in the same location
 - this would lead to a car park for 6 cars
 - this access point would facilitate shared recreational use of the Site which is segregated from the main crematorium use.
-

3.ii Habitats:

Habitat protection on this ecologically significant site has been a key element in developing the proposal, and the design for the new facilities has, to a great extent, been confined to the previously developed areas, leaving the remaining, majority of the site, unaffected and protected. Ecology consultants have worked closely on the project throughout and recently The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire (from now on referred to as The Wildlife Trust) has become involved in finalising concepts and developing a vision for the wider site's future management and protection. The Trust will produce a Landscape and ecology Management Plan (LEMP) to support this.

Fig. 3 – Proposed Layout (drawing D200004 – CDS – EN – ZZ – DR – L – 001-001 dated December 2020 in the planning application documents)



Fig. 4 – Section A-A'

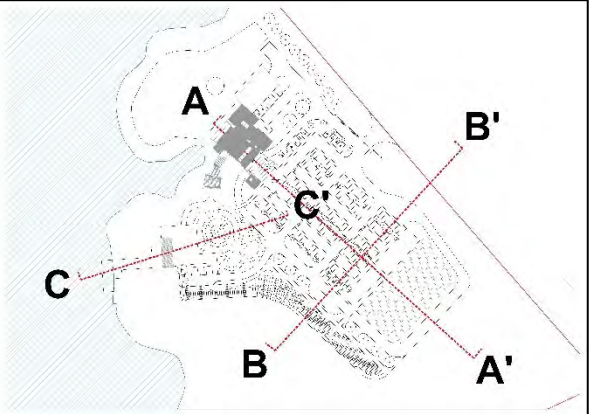


Fig. 5 – Section B-B'

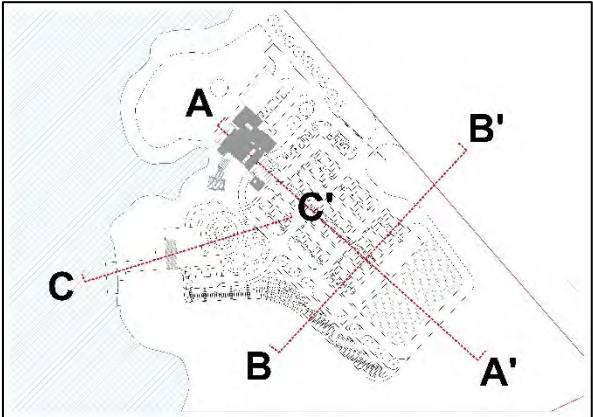
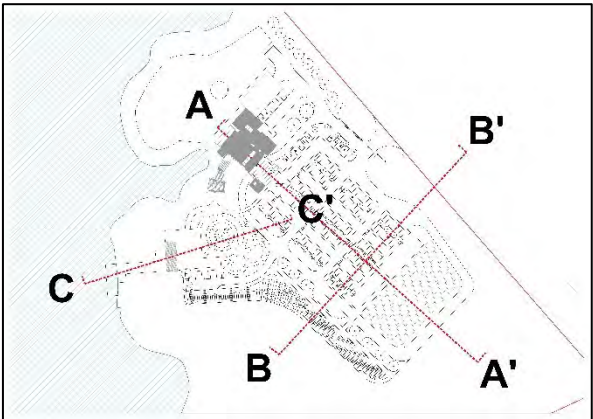


Fig. 6 – Section C-C'



3.iii Potential Effects on Landscape and Views

The main potential visual impacts are:

- construction activities including temporary hoarding;
- change of use from the previous outdoor pursuits to a community crematorium;
- a more managed landscape surrounding and weaving through the car park;
- disruption to the site's ecology in developed areas;
- re-organised car parking areas.

3.iv Mitigation Measures

The potential for adverse effects, temporary and permanent, on landscape and visual amenity has been recognised, and mitigation measures incorporated in the scheme to avoid or reduce adverse effects or to offset or compensate for unavoidable adverse effects.

These comprise:

- ensuring the new building and hard surfaces site within the existing constructed areas
- including detailed instructions within tender documents to ensure construction processes respect and support existing site ecology
- communicate to contractors the value and delicacy of the site ecology, ensuring no workers trespass beyond controlled areas
- employing an ecological consultant to supervise and approve all clearance work
- restricting working hours and minimising night-time lighting levels
- ensuring temporary hoardings will be replaced by permanent boundary structures and hedges at early construction stage
- planting design that will respect the character of the site and transition into the natural setting
- recreating sensitive habitats elsewhere in the site
- ensuring new natural burials are staged in order to protect and re-create the open mosaic habitat
- ensuring the water edge remains unaffected and ensuring the new viewing platform is constructed over the existing structure
- retaining the large bund, selectively thinning pioneer trees to create a more open habitat and future mosaic development
- including knee high rail fence around the south and west of the developed area to restrict visitors to the developed area only
- ensuring vulnerable boundaries to the site are secured with metal grid fencing to prevent trespass and habitat damage
- Fence security to prevent entry into the crematorium area from walkway down the east side of the lake

3.v Ecological Mitigation Elaborated

Detailed instructions regarding protection of the site, including the body of water would be included in tender documentation to ensure existing ecology beyond the immediate development area was safeguarded during the construction process

With a similar regard to ecological protection, the proposed jetties adjacent to the water have been positioned in the location of previous structures with the aim of protecting water margins.

New planting proposals are equally sensitive, with ornamental planting restricted to the car parks and memorial garden, the latter referencing the natural surroundings of its surroundings. The species of new trees have been selected with equal sensitivity to the environment.

The proposals have been developed alongside close liaison with ecological consultants and continuing discussions with The Wildlife Trust. The latter will ultimately provide a long-term Landscape and Ecology Management Plan for the undeveloped areas of the site.

It has been noted that the valuable ecology of this site has to a great extent developed over the 4 years since the Outdoor Centre finally closed, information which evidences huge potential for successful landscape mitigation and compensation measures within the site

A new open mosaic habitat will be created to the north of the building. It is estimated that this will develop into a habitat similar to the existing gravel car parks over a period of four years. Visitor access will not be permitted in this area.

Natural burials in the area of existing open mosaic habitat to the south of the car park will be managed to ensure minimal disturbance until the newly developed northern habit has established. To facilitate this, natural burials would commence in the eastern section of the existing mosaic habit which is more shaded, with less established plant mosaic.

When natural burials do take place, the existing gravel surface would be scraped away and reinstated once the burial had been completed, thus ensuring the habitat would be recreated as a permanent and protected area

The western section of existing open mosaic habitat would only be used for burials in the longer term by which time both the early burial areas and the new northern habitat will have established into compensatory open mosaic habitats.

Minimal disruption by working with existing breaks in vegetation to facilitate the northern access and east of the lake walkway

4 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

4.i Introduction

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in February 2019, contains the Government's planning policies and provides a framework to 'contribute to the achievement of sustainable growth'.

Within the context of the NPPF sustainable development is summarised as:

'...meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. (Section 2.7)

A comprehensive response to national policies relevant to this project will be detailed within the submitted Planning Statement, with those directly relating to Landscape addressed here:

- 2 Achieving sustainable development
- 12 Achieving well-designed places
- 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

These are addressed in more detail on the following pages

In addition the ECDC Pre-Application response stated:

Whilst the application would be considered against the range of policies as outlined above, there are four policies of pertinence to the proposal:

COM 3 relates to the retention of community

COM 4 relates to new community facilities

COM 8 relates to Car parking

EMP4 relates to Re-use and replacement of existing building in the countryside

These are addressed within Section 5 'Local Plan' pages 19-31

4.ii Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development

Section 2.7 explains that

'the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'

Section 2.8 explains the three overarching objectives to help achieve sustainable development:

- economic helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy
- social supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities
- environmental contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment

Section 10 refers to *a presumption in favour of sustainable development*

Response

It is important to note that the objectives are not criteria against which every decision can or should be judged. Planning policies and decisions are designed to guide development towards sustainable solutions whilst taking into account the specific character and needs of individual proposal sites.

This proposal sits comfortably within the overarching aims of Policy 2, being one that has been designed at the outset to protect the environment and habitats across the site, and to specify sustainable products and permeable surfaces throughout.

There is a commitment to ensure that the wider site beyond the immediate development area will not only be protected but enhanced by appropriate future, long-term management to be specified by the region's Wildlife Trust. In addition mitigation and compensation proposals have been made specifically relating to open mosaic habitat areas. These commitments ensure that the project would certainly contribute and enhance our natural environment.

4.iii Section 12 - Achieving Well-Designed Places

Section 12.124 requires the creation of high quality buildings and places with good, sustainable design

Section 12.127 requires planning policies and decisions to ensure that developments:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting
- establish or maintain a strong sense of place,
- optimise the potential of the site
- create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being

Response

Plans, schedules and reports submitted as part of this planning application evidence a proposed development of the highest standard in every way – quality, sustainability, aesthetic, longevity – across both architecture and landscape design.

Through appropriate maintenance which will be detailed in associated management plans the development will maintain these high standard long into the future. Given that the crematorium is designed to function for decades ahead there is protection in terms of longevity.

As reiterated throughout this LVIA, protecting the existing ecology and ensuring its future enhancement has played a major part in the design development process. As part of this, due respect has been paid not only to the character and sense of place that currently exists, but also ensuring that the future vision is an integral part of the development proposal.

We see the potential of the site as being not only within the cemetery areas but also in the wider landscape where ecological potential is critically important.

Unlike the current situation this site will be secure and safe, not only for visitors and staff but also for the ecology of the site. The vandalism and anti-social behaviour experienced on the site over several years will desist.

4.iv Section 14 - Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

This section is concerned with the transition to a low carbon future, to ensure that full account should be taken of flood risk and coastal change.

Response

Requirements under this section will be addressed within the submitted T2 Groundwater Assessment and Drainage Strategy Report

4.v Section 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Section 15 focuses on how planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment.

The following summary points highlight the general principles behind the policy:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits
- minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity
- preventing new development from contributing to unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability.

There is a requirement to:

- Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks
- promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats,
- opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged

Responses

Habitat protection on this ecologically significant site has been a key element in developing the proposal, and the design for the new facilities has, to a great extent, been confined to the previously developed areas, leaving the remaining, majority of the site unaffected and protected.

Ecology consultants have worked closely on the project throughout and recently The Wildlife Trust has become involved in finalising concepts and developing a vision for the wider site's management and protection in the future. The Trust will produce a Landscape and Ecology Maintenance Plan for the undeveloped areas of the site.

For more detailed information please refer to Sections 3.iv and 3.v of this LVIA together with the Ecological Impact Assessment included in this planning submission

5. Local Plan

The Pre-Application response letter dated 12th November 2020 confirmed that all planning applications are assessed against the statutory development plan for the District, which comprises:

- East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015;
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan 2012.

A comprehensive response to Planning Policies relevant to this project will be detailed within the submitted Planning Statement, with those directly relating to Landscape addressed here:

East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015:

Policy GROWTH 5	Presumption in favour of sustainable development
Policy ENV1	Landscape and settlement character
Policy ENV2	Design
Policy ENV 7	Biodiversity and geology
Policy ENV8	Flood risk

Supplementary Planning Documents:

- Design Guide
- Contaminated Land -Guidance on submitted Planning Application on land that may be contaminated
- Flood and Water
- Natural Environment

5.i Policy GROWTH 5 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

This policy details how the District Council is committed to finding solutions to ensure that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Response

This crematorium proposal, presents first class design through both building and landscape detailing that would provide the community with a first class project that has sustainability at its heart, including an electric cremator, recycled cladding to the building, permeable roads and pathways and a landscape that will enrich and enhance the biodiversity of the site. In addition, generation of energy through solar panels is being incorporated into the building design.

5.ii Policy ENV1 - Landscape and settlement character

Proposals for development should be informed by, be sympathetic to, and respect the capacity of the distinctive character areas defined in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines.

Development proposals should demonstrate that their location, scale, form, design, materials, colour, edge treatment and structural landscaping will create positive, complementary relationships with existing development and will protect, conserve, and where possible enhance:

- The pattern of distinctive historic and traditional landscape features, such as watercourses, characteristic vegetation, individual and woodland trees, field patterns, hedgerows and walls, and their function as ecological corridors for wildlife dispersal.*
- The settlement edge, space between settlements, and their wider landscape setting. Visually sensitive natural and man-made skylines, hillsides and geological features.*
- Key views into and out of settlements; this includes quintessential views of Ely Cathedral and the setting of the City as a historic 'isle' settlement close to the fen edge and the valley of the River Great Ouse.*
- The unspoilt nature and tranquillity of the area.*
- Public amenity and access*
- Nocturnal character of rural areas free from light pollution.*

Suitable compensatory provision must be made in the event of significant harm where necessary.

Response overleaf

Response

Throughout the entirety of this proposal, design elements have incorporated a sensitive response to the existing, unique character of the site and a clear and respectful understanding of its man-made origins that have been transformed into a landscape that today incorporates areas of important ecological value and diversity.

The submitted plans, drawings and specifications evidence a level of detail that more than satisfies the relevant elements of Policy ENV 1

5.iii Policy ENV 2 - Design

All development will be designed to a high quality, enhancing and complementing local distinctiveness and public amenity by relating well to existing features and introducing appropriate new designs.

Design which fails to have regard to local context including architectural traditions and does not take advantage of opportunities to preserve, enhance or enrich the character, appearance and quality of an area will not be acceptable and planning applications will be refused.

Response

The architect and landscape architect designs evidence a site specific approach to the project. Architecture incorporates fine and sustainable building design while the landscaping not only introduces new, carefully thought out elements such as the car park and memorial garden but also ensures through design and documentation a long term plan for the wider areas that will maintain and enhance the overall distinctiveness and ecology of the site.

All relevant areas of specific consideration detailed within the policy have been successfully addressed within the design

5.iv Policy ENV 7 - Biodiversity and geology

All development proposals will be required to:

- protect the biodiversity and geological value of land and buildings and minimise harm to or loss of environmental features, such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, wetland and ponds.*
- Provide appropriate mitigation measures, reinstatement or replacement of features and/or compensatory work that will enhance or recreate habitats on or off site where harm to environmental features and habitat is unavoidable;*
- Maximise opportunities for creation, restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats as an integral part of development proposals.*

Development proposals where the main aim is to conserve biodiversity will be permitted; and opportunities to incorporate biodiversity into new development will be supported.

All applications for development that may affect biodiversity and geology interests must be accompanied by sufficient information to be determined by the Local Planning Authority, including an ecological report, to allow potential impacts and possible mitigation measures to be assessed fully.

Where there is reason to suspect the presence of protected species, trees and woodland, applications must be accompanied by a survey carried out by a qualified individual assessing their presence and, if present, the proposal must be sensitive to, and make provision for, their needs, in accordance with the relevant protecting legislation.

Where appropriate, there will be a requirement for the effective management of designated sites and other features, controlled through the imposition of conditions or Section 106 agreements.

Proposals which have an adverse impact on a site of national importance will not normally be permitted unless the benefits of development at the site significantly outweigh the impacts. Proposals which would cause harm to County Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodland, aged and veteran trees, Local Nature Reserves, Protected Roadside Verges, any other irreplaceable habitats, and green corridors or important species²⁷ will not be permitted unless the need for, and benefits of development in that location outweigh the potential harm to nature conservation interests.

Response

The submitted plans, schedules, Biodiversity documentation and the mitigation and compensation information included in this LVIA all evidence the care and attention that has been applied to protecting and enhancing the ecology and biodiversity of this site. This attention will extend through the construction period into use, with long term management plans being prepared by The Wildlife Trust.

5.v Policy ENV8 - Flood risk

Please refer to the T2 Groundwater Assessment, Drainage Strategy Report in the planning submission documents

5.ii Supplementary Planning Documents – Design Guide

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are prepared by the Council to support the Local Plan, inform the delivery of infrastructure and to aid applicants in preparing successful development proposals. Following public consultation and adoption by the Council, SPDs become a material consideration in determining planning applications.

The Supplementary Planning Documents relevant to this scheme and referred to in the Pre-Application response letter are:

5.ii.a Design Guide

The Design Guide SPD sets out principles and requirements to ensure new development delivers good design

Much of the guide refers to domestic development but the principles of sustainable architecture of high quality design has been an intrinsic element within the design process

With regard to landscape we note the introduction to the Landscape Design section:

Landscape influences the quality of our working, travelling, domestic and recreational lives. It reflects the richness of our ecological and historical heritage

It is generally accepted that countryside should

- Be diverse*
- Reflect local character*
- Create or contribute to a sense of place*
- Be consciously thought about, and managed*
- Acknowledge our affinity with nature*
- Fulfil the need for recreation and visual enjoyment*
- Create local identity*
- Inspire creative thought*
- Give pleasure to residents and tourists alike.*

Cont.

The countryside is primarily influenced by visual characteristics. It differs little in principle from our perception of high quality buildings and townscape. However, landscape cannot look after itself. There is a need to use design-based landscape guidelines, and to think long-term for the next generation and beyond.

Before undertaking landscape schemes it is important to follow the action points below:

- Professional landscape design advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity;*
- Gain a full understanding of the area using documents, photographs and aerial surveys/photographs;*
- Carry out an appraisal of the landscape;*
- Understand the landscape variation that exists between the north and south of East Cambridgeshire.*

Response

The creative input and sensitivity applied to the proposal has been of a high standard, collaborative and forward-thinking. Experts in the field of ecology have worked closely on the project and their recommendations have been embraced. The scheme will use planting to create a transition from the formal car park and building areas into the more naturalistic memorial garden planting and finally onto the wider existing landscape that will be managed to ensure ecological gain and stability long into the future.

The designers have become intimate with the site both in terms of desk study and site visits, and the respect and commitment to the existing ecology and potential gains for the future are evident in the landscape proposals.

Sustainable materials will be applied throughout the project and permeable surfaces are specified throughout external areas.

5.ii.b Guidance on submitted Planning Application on land that may be contaminated

The SPD provides guidance on submitting planning applications for the development of land that may be contaminated:

<https://www.eastcambbs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/contam%20Consultation%20Statement.pdf>

Response

The result of land contamination investigations are detailed in the submitted document:

Phase I and Phase II Geoenvironmental and Geotechnical Report

5.ii.c Flood and Water

The SPD provides guidance for developers and applicants on managing flood risk and the water environment in and around new developments. The contents of the SPD expand upon the flood risk and water management policies contained within the adopted and emerging Local Plans.

Response: Please refer to our *T2 Groundwater Assessment and Drainage Strategy Report* within the planning application documents

5.ii.d Natural Environment

This SPD sets out the Council's approach to the natural environment and provides advice on policy requirements relating to issues such as: 'net gain' in biodiversity through development proposals, protection of existing nature sites, protection and provision of trees, and supporting the Council's position in relation to the recently adopted Local Nature Partnership vision to 'double land for nature' by 2050 across Cambridgeshire.

Response: Please refer to *Ecological Impact Assessment* within the planning application documents.

5.ii.e Note regarding Appendix 2

This Appendix lists designated wildlife/historical sites within the District and references the following entry :

7034 Mepal gravel pits TL4283 Mepal

The entry refers to the County Wildlife Status, designated because of the rare pondweed discovered in the body of water

Refer to the Ecological Impact Assessment included in the submission documents for more information.

6.i Landscape Character

The proposed development falls within the southern area of the Fens National Character Area (NCA) NCA Profile: 46. The Fens (NE424), with the following general descriptions included in the introduction:

.....a distinctive, historic and human-influenced wetland landscape lying to the west of the Wash estuary, which formerly constituted the largest wetland area in England. The area is notable for its large-scale, flat, open landscape with extensive vistas to level horizons. The level, open topography shapes the impression of huge skies which convey a strong sense of place, tranquillity and inspiration.....

..... The level horizons and the huge scale of the landscape create a strong sense of isolation and tranquillity, and a distinctive sense of place. There are, typically, large open panoramas and enormous skies, whose changing weather patterns have a strong influence on the observer

6.ii The Local Character - Key characteristics relevant to the proposal site

Expansive, flat, open, low-lying wetland landscape influenced by the Wash estuary, and offering extensive vistas to level horizons and huge skies throughout, provides a sense of rural remoteness and tranquillity.

Overall, woodland cover is sparse, notably a few small woodland blocks, occasional avenues alongside roads, isolated field trees and shelterbelts of poplar, willow and occasionally leylandii hedges around farmsteads, and numerous orchards around Wisbech. Various alders, notably grey alder, are also used in shelterbelts and roadside avenues

The predominant land use is arable – wheat, root crops, bulbs, vegetables and market gardening made possible by actively draining reclaimed land areas. Associated horticultural glasshouses are a significant feature. Beef cattle graze narrow enclosures along the banks of rivers and dykes and on parts of the salt marsh and sea banks

6.ii Exceptions

Whilst the surrounding area reflects the arable land use and other references quoted above, the proposal site overall does not specifically reflect many of the national or local characteristics. This is due to its previous commercial aggregate extraction and the formation of a man-made lake that results in the site being exceptional in its specific character and indeed genus loci.

7. BASELINE – LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

7.i Landscape Baseline - Assessment

Baseline studies for assessing landscape effects include a mixture of desk study and field work to identify and record the character of the landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to it.

Elements contributing to the landscape in the recorded study area include:

- physical influences geology, soils, landform, drainage and water bodies, etc;
- land cover, including different types of vegetation and patterns and types of tree cover;
- the influence of human activity, such as quarrying and recreation;
- the character of buildings, the pattern and type of fields and enclosure;
- the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape - scale, complexity, openness, tranquillity, wildness.

Evidence of change in the landscape was considered, including the condition of the different landscape types and/or areas, and their constituent parts and evidence of current pressures causing change in the landscape.

The landscape baseline report aims to:

- identify and describe individual elements and aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape, particularly those that are key characteristics contributing to its distinctive character
- indicate the condition of the landscape, including the condition of landscape elements or features
- project forward drivers and trends in change and how they may affect the landscape over time, in the absence of the proposal
- evaluate the landscape and, where appropriate, its components, aesthetic and perceptual aspects, particularly the key characteristics
- describe, map and illustrate the character of the landscape in both:
 - the wider study area
 - the site and its immediate surroundings.

7.ii Landscape Baseline - Findings

7.ii.a Historic influences

Today's landscape within the red line boundary is one that has developed entirely through man-made intervention. Gravel and sand extraction took place from 1920s to 1950s, gradually creating the landscape that is evident today. By the 1960s the pit had transformed to a lake and some early recreational use was recorded in the form of model boat sailing.

Due to the quarrying history, it is likely that the peat soils geologically recorded on site were removed as part of the excavation process and disposed of off site. Consequently the soils found on site today are likely to comprise made ground, variable, composed of reject sand and gravel and not to be considered representative of the mapped soil type.

One of the most dramatic demonstrations of man's intervention is seen in the large bunds that are formed of reject excavation material, mainly sand. Some ground cover vegetation and trees, mainly birch, have established here and the bunds are home to a large population of rabbits.

In terms of recent history it is the derelict buildings of the former Mepal Outdoor Centre that are most dominant in terms of evidencing that period of activity



Large bund, mainly sand excavation



The old gravel pit now a lake



Derelict buildings from the outdoor centre

7.ii.b Characteristics of the Site

The two bodies of water on either side of the A142 are designated as County Wildlife Site No 7034 in the East Cambridgeshire District County Wildlife Site Register (Anon, 2010) based on the pondweeds present in the water bodies.

The site has undergone notable changes since the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal was undertaken in December 2019 due to unsocial behaviour and arson. Consequently, there is a recommendation from ecologists that a balanced approach to developing the site will be needed to manage the existing and potential deterioration of habitats.

A natural pioneering development of habitat specific vegetation supporting a variety of entomological species is evident in gravel surfaces that formed the previous car parking areas – this is referred to as open mosaic habitat, and relies on free draining surfaces and an open bright aspect, with no shade from tree canopies.

The water edge is of interest from botanical, entomological and general wildlife contexts and, along with the lake and sandy shores contributes greatly to the specific character of the site. Reeds dominate in some areas and along with teasle to the south east will need managing to control spread into surrounding, different habitats.

Other areas comprise scrub and scattered trees, many in poor or unstable condition as well as occasional mature and veteran trees and hedgerows that lay outside the development zone.

The site supports a variety of bird life and an area of specific interest is in the south and south east of the site where there are food sources for winter foraging. A range of water fowl are also seen, with swans recorded during a site visit in November 2020. Evidence of otter presence has been recorded.

Buildings on the site remaining from the activity centre and a period of caravan use are now derelict. Some have been vandalised and set on fire and are now considered to be unsafe. Vandalism and anti-social behaviour is regularly evidenced and in November 2020 it was clear that the site is being used for fly-tipping.

7.ii.c Surrounding Areas

Commercial aggregate extraction continues on sites to the north east of the site.

A large anaerobic digestion plant has been built immediately to the north adjacent to the roundabout at the junction with A142 and Block Fen Drove, with an associated reservoir to the west

Road tracks surround the site to the north, west and south. The byway to the west and the North are part of the proposal site.

Otherwise, the site sits within fenland, surrounded by a landscape of level, arable fields divided by hedgerows.

The settlement of Chatteris lies approximately 3.5km to the north west, with Mepal village 3km to the south east, with the connecting A142 traversing the full length of the east boundary

7.ii.d Public Access

The site has been formally closed to the public since February 2017 when the Outdoor Centre closed, and no legal public access has been allowed since then. However, it is a very easily accessed site that would be expensive to secure around the entire perimeter. It is clear that there is regular trespass, anti-social behaviour and vandalism, as well as a recent entry by the traveller community.

Fishermen are active on the lake, gaining entry at various points but mainly by accessing via the track roads to the north, south and west of the site.

7.ii.e Landscape value

The relative value attached to the landscape was considered at the baseline stage to inform the judgments about the effects likely to occur:

- to areas of landscape as a whole;
- to individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions;
- at the community, local, national or international levels.

Other considerations:

- intrinsic aesthetic characteristics, scenic quality or sense of place, including providing landscape setting to other places
- cultural associations e.g. arts, guides to the area, recreation use, important experiences of the landscape;
- the presence and scale of detractors in the landscape and the degree to which they are susceptible to improvement or upgrading
- conservation interests – e.g. wildlife features, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest;
- importance of elements or components of the landscape in terms of:
 - the landscape character of the area
 - contribution to the landscape setting of other areas

The site- specific analyses carried out for the purposes of this LVIA were taken into account in assessing the landscape's value, recognising:

- historic narrative and experiences, emotional and physical;
- informal fishing opportunities;
- mixed and varied habitats of differing types and importance;
- a body of water that provides habitat and food sources for birds and aquatic mammals;
- a partner to a second body of water across the A142, extending the habitat corridor;
- a landscape of beauty, reflecting seasonal change and imbuing a *genus loci* – sense of place.

Factors undervaluing the landscape:

- derelict buildings;
- arson, vandalism and anti-social behaviour;
- trespass anxiety e.g. travelling community;
- lack of landscape management will ultimately result in safety issues (unstable trees, collapsing water edge structures);
- lack of management will result in invasive species such as bramble dominating areas and excluding valuable species.

7.ii.f Assessment of Cumulative effects

Given the number of now derelict and semi-derelict buildings on the site and the height of the existing tepee structures which vastly exceed that of the proposed crematorium, it is not considered that the new building has either the scale or impact to be of concern within the context of cumulative effect.

Similarly, the degree of consideration with regard to the site's landscape ecology, protection of areas beyond the development zone and the intention to ensure appropriate long-term management of all areas, means the scale of impact on the existing landscape and ecology would be minimal and only extend as far as the immediate development zone. Mitigation and compensation measures will aim for a longer term ecological benefit.

8. LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

8.i Assessment Criteria

Baseline information is combined with an intimate understanding of the proposal to enable identification of landscape effects.

Landscape receptors are components or aspects of the landscape likely to be affected by the development, such as:

- overall character or key characteristics;
- individual elements or features;
- specific aesthetic or perceptual aspects;
- those with views of the development;
- those likely to be affected by the construction or future use of the development.

The degree of the likely landscape effects of the proposed development are determined by:

- relating the sensitivity of the receptors to the changes arising from the development proposals;
- the degree and nature of the changes in the landscape arising from the proposals.

In assessing the interaction between receptors and the effects, the following stages were considered:

- Construction;
- Operation.

With potential effects being:

- direct and indirect;
- secondary, cumulative, short, medium and long- term;
- permanent and temporary;
- adverse and beneficial.

Considerations are informed by the criteria shown on tables included on the following pages

8.ii Assessment tables

Note:

- effects may be adverse or beneficial.
- In some instances, the effect may be offset by other considerations, for example, through mitigation or landscape proposals, and the resulting effect may be neither beneficial nor adverse.

8.iii Table 1 – Sensitivity

The following table details indicative criteria for assessing landscape sensitivity

High Sensitivity	A highly valued landscape (e.g. of national or international importance), whose character or key characteristics are very susceptible to change; Aspects of the landscape character are highly valued as ‘key characteristics’, identified as susceptible to change in national or local character assessments The landscape character is highly valued as intact and in good condition and particularly vulnerable to disturbance; A highly valued landscape with no or limited potential for substitution or replacement.
Moderate Sensitivity	A landscape of local importance or value, whose character or key characteristics are susceptible to change Other characteristics of the landscape character also noted in national or local character assessments and susceptible to change The landscape character is valued for moderate condition and not particularly vulnerable to disturbance A moderately valued landscape with some potential for substitution or replacement
Lesser Sensitivity	No or little evidence of value or importance attached to the landscape area, its features or characteristics Few features, characteristics or qualities susceptible to disturbance or particularly susceptible to improvement or upgrading Good potential for substitution or replacement

Assessed as MODERATE SENSITIVITY :

It is clear that the site has become more valuable in terms of habitat value in the four years since the Outdoor Centre closed, facilitated by reduced activity on site over that period. The open mosaic habitat areas have developed within that four-year time frame, as evidenced by the aerial views in Appendix 1, pages 47-52. There will be a combination of retention, mitigation and compensation of these habitats by allowing areas to remain undisturbed for several years while new areas become established. In addition, when burials and internments take place in these areas they will be staged over several decades and the aggregated mix re-laid over the plots to establish new habitats for the future. It is noted that approximately 20 natural burials are anticipated each year, with a proposed 294 No. Plots to be made available under the detailed staged process.

Areas of specific ecological value to the south of the development area will remain untouched and a long-term Landscape and Ecological Management Plan will be in place, prepared by The Wildlife Trust. There will be little disruption to areas at the north and east of the lake where access and pathways will be informal and routed through already sparse sections of vegetation.

8.iv Table 2 – Magnitude of Change

The following table details indicative criteria for assessing Magnitude of Change

The scale of magnitude of the changes is related to:

- considerations of the size or scale of the change;
- the geographical extent of the area influenced;
- and the duration and reversibility of the change.

The scale of magnitude of the changes is graded, as follows:

Great Change	Major size or scale of change, affecting the landscape type or character of the area within which the proposal lies or extending over the wider area; Likely to be longer term or permanently, with low prospect of reversibility
Medium Change	Intermediate size or scale of change, affecting part of the landscape type or character of the area within which the proposal lies, or larger scale of change at the level of the site or immediate context Likely to continue into the medium term, with good prospect of reversibility
Small Change	A minor proportion of the extent of the character type or area is affected or smaller scale of change over a larger extent; the changes occur at the level of the site or immediate context Likely to be short term and reversible
Negligible / No charge	No apparent change to landscape characteristics

Assessed as MEDIUM/GREAT MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE:

The development area has been designed to hug closely to the existing developed area. There will result in a reduced building mass with a slight increase in parking areas. The new crematorium building is modern and elegant and is some 9 metres lower than the top of the current marquee structures. Given that the remainder of the site will remain untouched except for beneficial long-term maintenance, there is controlled and manageable magnitude of change on the overall site characteristics.

In terms of reversibility we predict the ecological benefit of only four years in terms of newly developing habitats within the abandoned site. A similar process would repeat should this development no longer be required, thus allowing for reversibility with equal ecological benefit.

These elements persuade a MEDIUM CHANGE category.

The very nature of a burial and internment site is one of longevity and ECDC requires the site to remain active beyond this century. This single factor would therefore influence a GREAT CHANGE aspect to the assessment for this consideration alone.

Access to and passage through the northern and eastern areas will simply regularise current activities such as fishing and walking that already take place on an informal and unauthorised basis.

8.v Table 3 – Assessing Effect

The degree of effect, whether adverse or beneficial, is assessed by:

- relating the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of change;
- considering the indicative criteria shown on the table below.

Major	Highly sensitive landscape completely degraded or greatly changed, with little or no scope for mitigation; Great improvement, sufficient to upgrade overall landscape character.
Moderate	Medium change to moderately sensitive landscape or its character: Lesser change to higher sensitivity landscape or greater change to less sensitive landscape.
Minor	Small or limited adverse change to the existing landscape or its character; Greater change to less sensitive landscape; Considerable scope for mitigation; Small improvement to the existing landscape.
Negligible	No perceptible change to the existing landscape or its character; The change is difficult to discern.

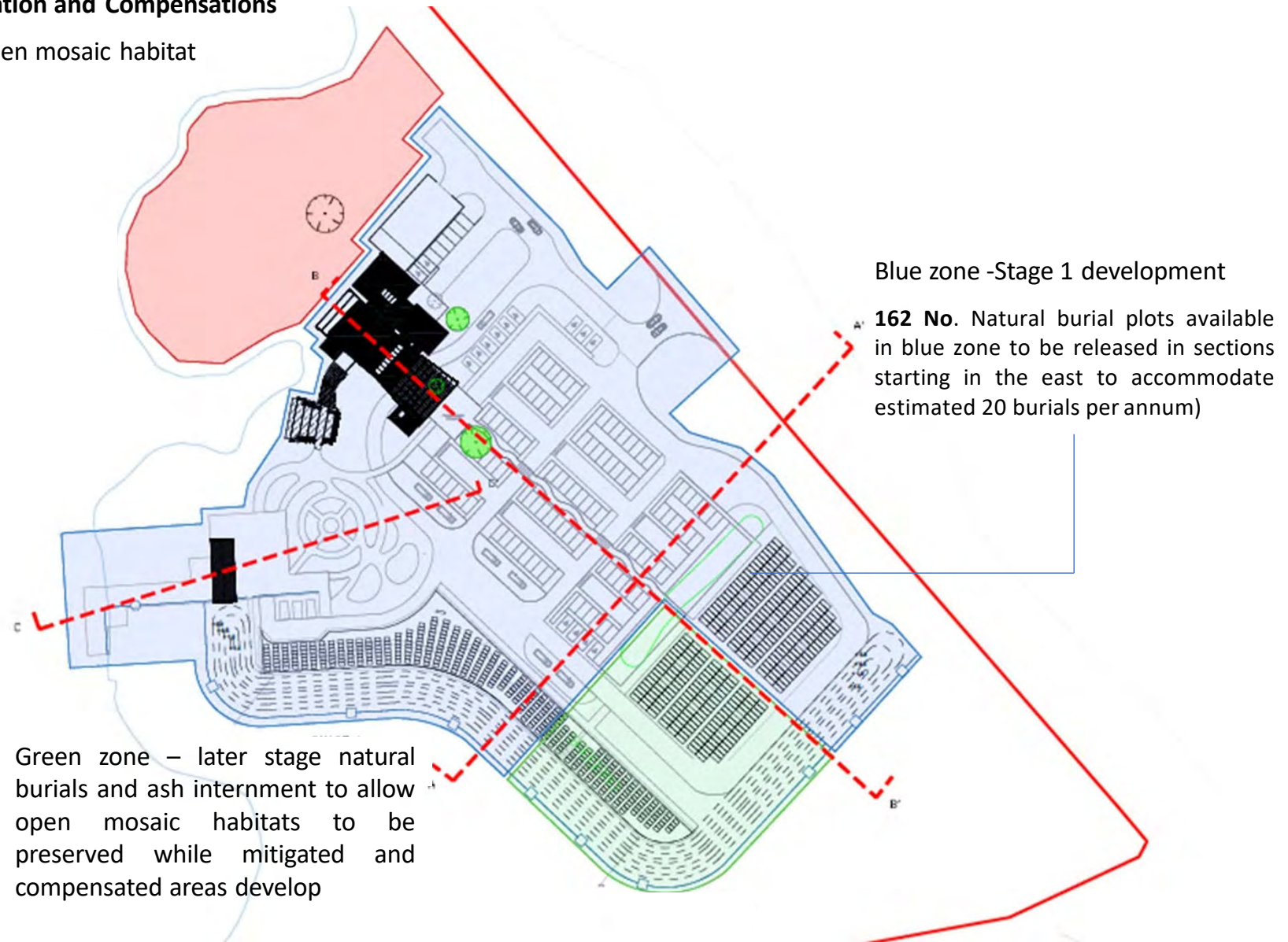
Assessed as MODERATE/MINOR LANDSCAPE EFFECT

In reviewing Sensitivity and Magnitude of Change the overview is toward a MODERATE/MINOR effect on this landscape supported by:

- the vulnerable condition of the site as it currently stands in terms of trespass, vandalism and habitat damage;
- the commitment to working with ecological consultants and The Wildlife Trust to ensure future management of the entire site;
- the opportunities already identified with The Wildlife Trust for mitigation and compensation, especially in the open mosaic habitats;
- opportunities for significant new planting in the car parks that will enhance the landscape appearance on arrival;
- commitment to respecting the overall character of the site and protecting its valuable habitats from trespass in the future;
- maintaining the water edge in an unadulterated state;
- introducing a building that is discreet, elegant and much lower than existing structures;
- specifying permeable and sustainable materials into the project;
- providing specific protection to identified habitats – ‘beach area’, the winter bird foraging area, open mosaic habitats, aquatic plants.

Fig. 7 – Habitat Mitigation and Compensations

Red -Proposed new open mosaic habitat



Note: The Northern lake shore does not require habitat mitigation and/or compensation since the proposal only aims to facilitate access to this area, where informal and unauthorised activities are already taking place.

9. BASELINE - VISUAL IMPACT

Visual impacts relate to changes arising from the modification of the composition of views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes, and the overall effects in respect of visual amenity.

This section examines the site in the context of visual amenity.

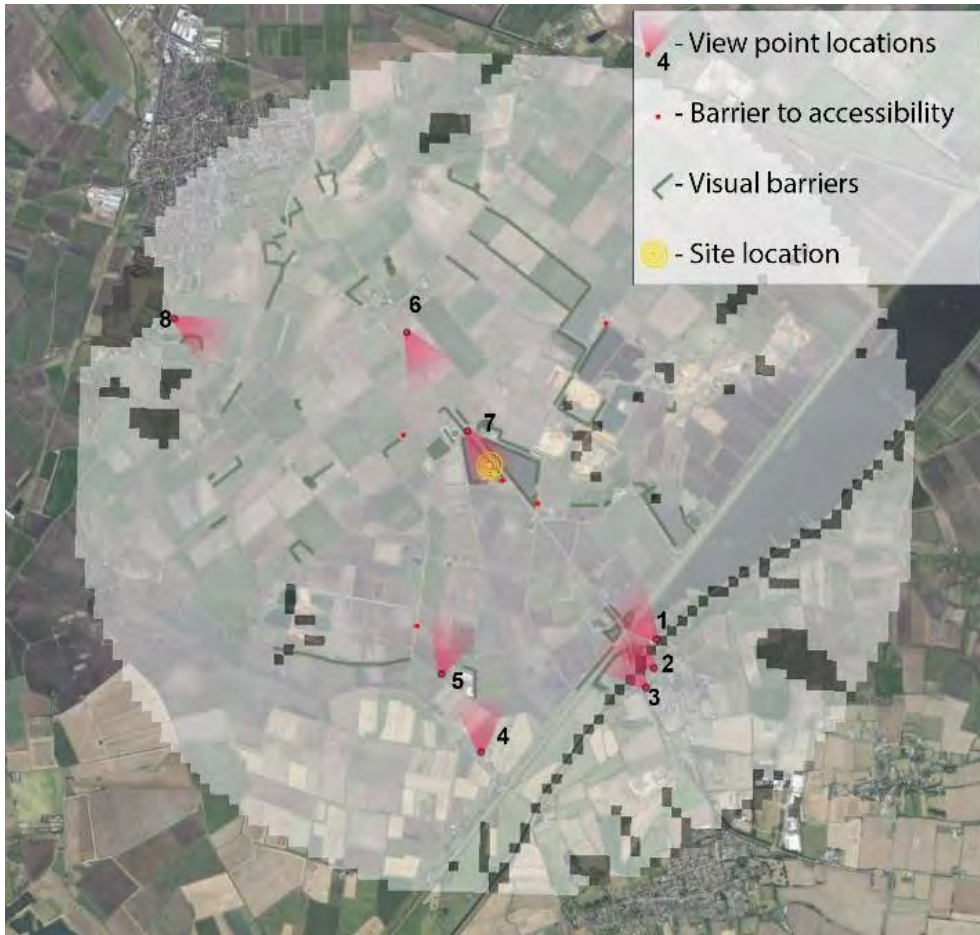
9.i – QGIS data

The circle in the QGIS graphic below is drawn at a 4.2km radius and illustrates in light shading where, from contour levels it might be assumed the crematorium could be seen.

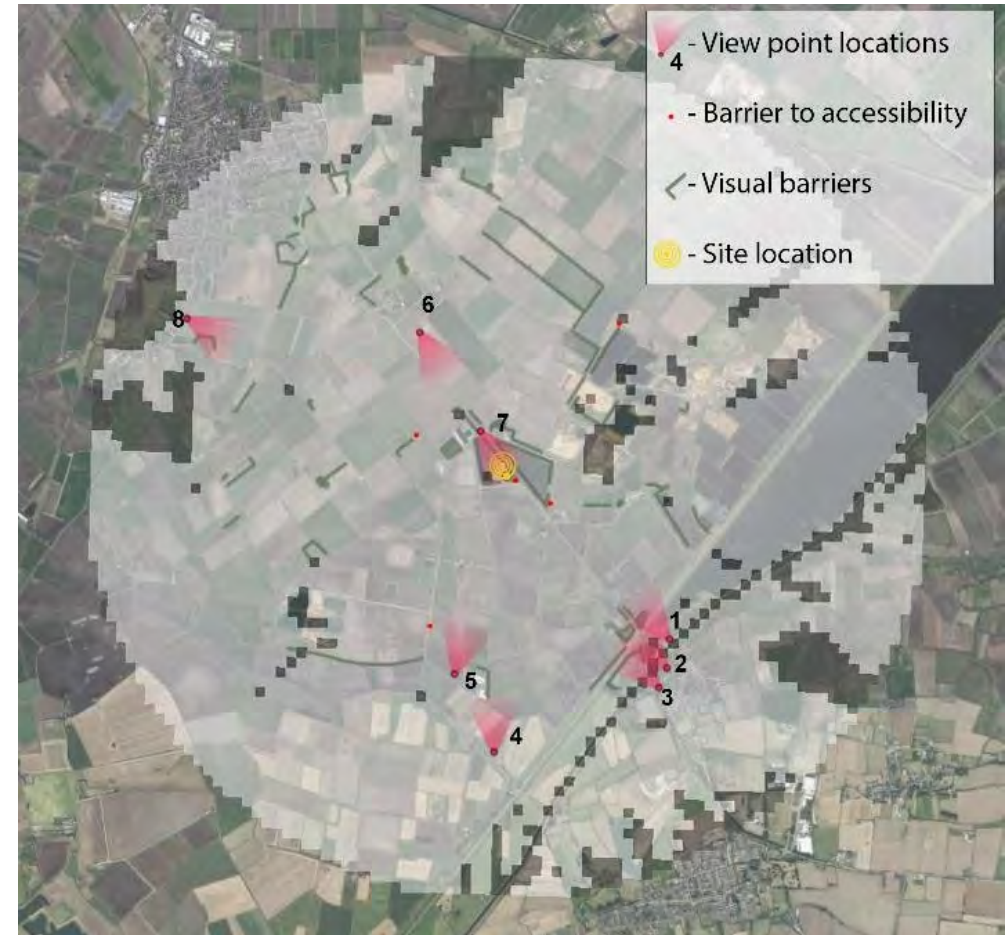
However, the existence of mature hedgerows, tree lines and small groups of trees screen the development from view from the settlements nearby as well as from the vast majority of directions. As represented in the images below, the site is completely blocked from views from the two most significant settlements nearby, Chatteris to the North West and Mepal to the South East. Further photographic evidence of this is provided on pages 44-45.



9.ii QGIS – Comparisons tepee height against new building height



1 – Geographical location of photographs (page 44 & 45) superimposed on viewshed showing where (based on topography only) the existing buildings on site can be seen from the surrounding landscape



2 – Geographical location of photographs (page 44 & 45) superimposed on viewshed showing where (based on topography only) the proposed buildings on site can be seen from the surrounding landscape

9.iii Immediate area

The site itself is bounded to the east by Ireton's Way (A142), to the south and west by agricultural fields and to the north by the Pretoria Energy's anaerobic digestion plant.

Road tracks surround the site to the north, west and south, the west one being within the application boundary.

The site sits within fenland, surrounded by a landscape of level, arable fields divided by hedgerows.

The settlement of Chatteris lies approximately 3.5km to the north west, with Mepal village 3km to the south east, with the connecting A142 traversing the full length of the east boundary.



9.iv Elevation

The composite image below demonstrates that the proposed crematorium building is less than half the height of the existing tepee tent, and is also sitting 200mm lower within the terrain.

Photographs on the following pages shows that the existing tepee is indeed visible in the landscape from the South (photograph no. 4), however, due to the difference in height between the existing and the proposed structures, it is demonstrated that the proposed building will not be visible from the surrounding landscape.



- Maximum height of existing building (18.17m)
- Ground level of existing building
- Maximum height of Proposed building (8.513m)
- Ground level of Proposed building (0.2m lower than existing building)

9.v Photomontage – Entrance – comparison views

The image across shows the existing entrance viewed from A142 which will be retained under the new development.



This second image below is a CGI of the same entrance with a view into the proposed development again from A142.



9.vi General photographs

The methodology applied in assessing the visual impact of the proposed development on the Zone of Influence (c.4km radius – see QIS data page 39 & 40) was to travel extensively around the locality to assess from 8 different locations that could potentially be affected by views of the development. These were identified from the GIS imagery as potentially having clear views across to the site.

The views below demonstrate that the proposed Crematorium and chimney, which are lower than the existing teepee tent on site, cannot be seen from any viewpoint except no.4 where on a clear day a distant view of the chimney might be evident



1 – View from Bridge Road in Mepal*



2 – View from field West of St. Mary's Church in Mepal*



3 – View from Brangehill Lane in Mepal*



4 – View from Long North Fen Drove*

* -Refer to page 46 for geographical location of these viewpoints



5 – View from Long North Fen Drove*



6 – View from Langwood Hill Drove*



7 – View from Ireton's Way*



8 – View from London Road South of Chatteris*

* -Refer to page 40 for geographical location of these viewpoints

The proposed crematorium facilities would provide an important community resource for the District.

The highest point of the proposed building is at the roofline at 8.51 metres high, with the chimney stack 7m high. The building would stand on ground approximately 200mm lower than that on which the existing tepee structure is built, with the height of this being 18.17m at the pinnacle.

The total floor area of the proposed building is **526.86m²**, with the multi-function building at the lake being **86.92m²**. This compares with an overall total of **825.75m²** floor space being the cumulative sum of all buildings currently on site.

It is evident that the cumulative effect and visual impact of existing structures on site is far greater than that of the proposed buildings.

Boundary planting would be retained and enhanced, and sensitive planting designed for the new car parks and memorial garden. As planting matures, screening of all facilities would increase both with regard to views into and within the cemetery. Access to and pedestrian passage through the northern and eastern shores of the water would cause little disruption or damage to rough tree and shrub planting already along the banks.

Areas outside the development zone would be properly managed according to Landscape and Ecology Management Plan to be provided by The Wildlife Trust, enhancing the ecological value of the entire site long into the future. This includes the Northern lake shore.

Mitigation and compensation proposals would ensure that any valuable habitats, specifically the open mosaic habitats, would be recreated, retained and regenerated. Other areas identified as ecologically valuable are outside the development area and will be managed in accordance with The Wildlife Trust specifications.

Referring to imagery in the previous section 'Baseline – Visual Impact' and appreciating that Visual Receptors in the context of the proposed development would comprise drivers on A142, fishermen and cemetery visitors it is clear there would be minimal visual impact, and less than is currently experienced with existing buildings.

Uniquely the provision of cemetery, burial and ash internment facilities provides long term security which, in a site as unique and important as this, is an unarguable benefit that alternative uses would be unlikely to provide. In addition, if the site is to remain unused and in its current state it will deteriorate, be vulnerable to increasing vandalism and trespass and ultimately there could be serious threat to both the site's ecology and potentially to human safety.

In conclusion, this report considers that the creation of a cemetery with the outlined facilities would be an appropriate community use for this site, with added benefits of enhancing, improving and securing the site's ecology. In recognising any potential disadvantages the development might present there has, through a thoughtful and collaborative process, developed a combined approach of retention, mitigation and enhancement of the sites' existing landscape and ecology. Thoughtful building and landscape design present an overall a positive outcome with long-term security for the future of the site.

1999

Gravel car parks clear of vegetation

Lawn to south west of toilet block



2003

Gravel car parks clear of vegetation

Lawn to south west of toilet block



2008

Gravel car parks clear of vegetation

Lawn to south west of toilet block



2016

Gravel car parks clear of vegetation

Lawn to south west of toilet block

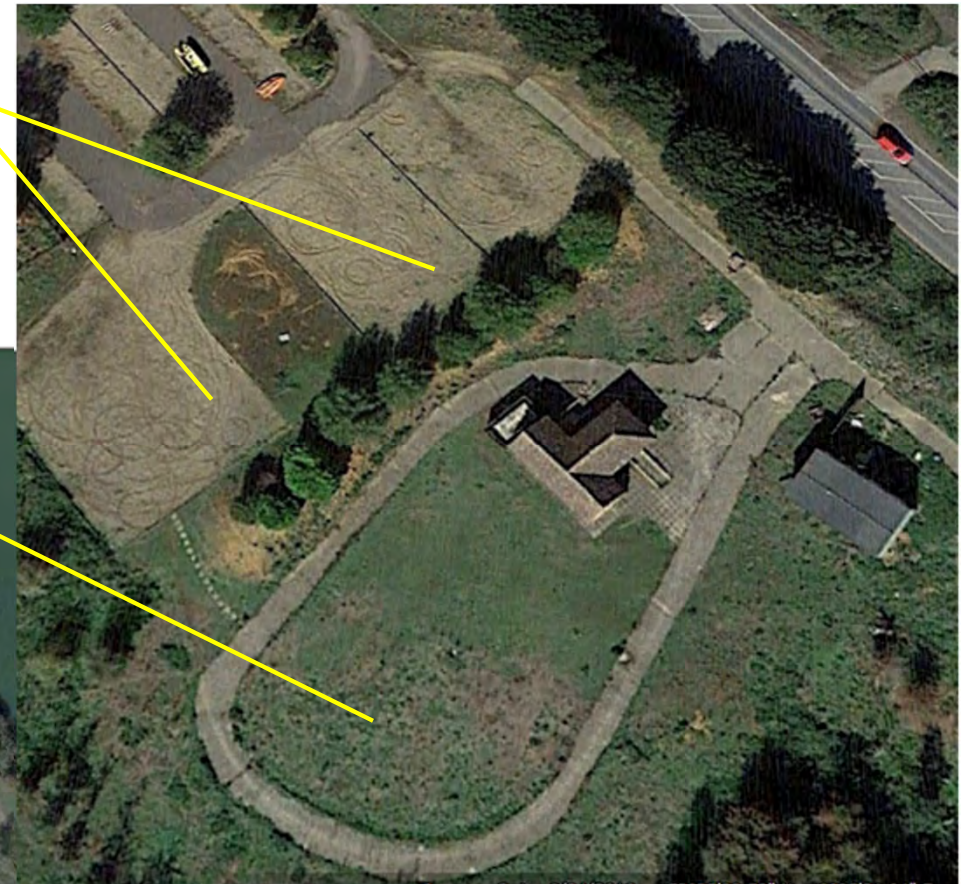
Summer 2016 shows caravans on the area



2018

Gravel car parks showing light scattering of vegetation
(also evidence of illegal driving stunts e.g.
'doughnutteering')

Lawn to south west of toilet block starting to show
patchy vegetation



2020

Gravel car parks showing light scattering of vegetation

Lawn to south west of toilet block no longer exists - starting to show patchy vegetation

