

## **Worcestershire Parkway Strategic Growth Area**

### **Strategic Landscape and Visual Appraisal (SLVA)**

#### **Introduction**

As part of the evidence base for the proposed Worcestershire Parkway Strategic Growth Area (SGA), it is important to demonstrate that a 'landscape led' approach has been taken to help inform and guide the proposals and the changes to the landscape as a result of development. A landscape led approach is fundamental in delivering sustainable development as well as being at the heart of the Garden Towns and Villages approach.

Given the strategic nature of the proposals at Worcestershire Parkway, and the early stage in the process, it is considered that a Strategic Landscape and Visual Appraisal (SLVA) is an appropriate level of assessment – which would then help to inform more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA) further down the line when more detailed development proposals are being considered.

In a collaborative approach, one methodology has been agreed between landscape consultants engaged for the different land interests and used in the carrying out of the SLVA work. Whilst individual land parcels are considered by different consultants, a common approach to the appraisal work allows for the various 'chapters' of the SLVA (one for each land interest) to come together to help inform a sensitive change of land use in the concept plan work.

#### **Methodology**

Key documents informing this methodology are:

- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England 2014)
- An Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (Natural England 2019)
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (LI/IEMA 2013)

The purpose of this methodology, at this early stage in the process, is to provide an appropriate approach to landscape and visual appraisal that will inform and guide the development proposals – and to demonstrate, for the purposes of the EIP, that a landscape led approach has been undertaken.

The process:

- a) Identifies a baseline through both desktop and site assessment
- b) Considers landscape and visual sensitivities
- c) Explores from the findings of a) and b) how the development might be shaped, by the formulation of landscape-led design principles and identification of opportunities

- d) Identifies future assessment work to inform more detailed proposals, as it will form the basis of future LVIA work in support of planning applications

a) Baseline

A baseline is identified through:

Desktop Study:

- Landscape Character Assessment (at National, Regional and County level)
- Key landscape, ecology and heritage designations
- Mapping – with initial Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

Site Appraisal – using an agreed common field survey form to record:

- Landscape features and attributes
- Topography and hydrology
- Existing vegetation (trees and hedgerows)
- Landscape characteristics and their values
- Strategic visual context and key views – both from within the site looking out, and from outside looking towards the site
- Visual context and values

At a level of the County LCA, the assessment includes landscape receptors and character areas that are directly affected by the proposals and also adjacent receptors/character areas that may be indirectly affected. Local landscape character is considered down to the Land Cover Parcel level.

Visual receptors relate to geographic areas both within and outside the site, with broad receptor groups identified.

b) Sensitivity

Landscape sensitivity may be regarded as a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to accommodate a specific type of change – such as that arising from development – without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value.

It is assessed by combining the landscape and visual receptor values identified in a) above with the susceptibility of the landscape and visual baseline to a specific change – susceptibility being the degree to which a defined landscape and its associated visual qualities and attributes might respond to the proposed change without undue negative effects on landscape character and the visual resource. Indicators of susceptibility may include, for example: landform; land cover - patterns of vegetation cover, field pattern and scale; sense of place; settlement pattern; tranquillity; key views and inter-visibility; skylines; scenic quality; typical receptors.

[Note regarding the County Landscape Character Assessment: In 2008, Conservation and Landscape Officers at Worcestershire County Council undertook a review of the County's Landscape Character, Landscape Description Units (LDU), which aimed to embed a measure of landscape condition, sensitivity and resilience to change within each LDU, although the overall aim was to create a strategic evidence base. The over-arching risk to landscape character, as set out in the project background was summarised as: *a slide towards uniformity – that is, a dilution of landscape character and loss of local distinctiveness*. In broad terms, the drivers were categorised as development, land management change and forestry: drivers that through inappropriate or poor design, or that promote the attrition of distinctive landscape attributes, lead towards a loss of landscape character. Turning to the specific matter of residential development and its associated employment, infrastructure and access, the project acknowledged that: *without reference to specific development and its intended layout and design, there will be some questions over the degree of impact likely to result from such change*. The approach was therefore based on assessing the significance of each LDU by measuring its intrinsic features against the primary, secondary and tertiary characteristics identified in its parent Landscape Type. *Sensitivity* is then defined as the degree to which the *resilience* of the landscape is influenced by its current *condition*. Resilience is a measure of the endurance of landscape character, defined by the likelihood of change in relation to the degree to which landscape is able to tolerate that change. Condition is the degree to which the inherent landscape character is represented today on the ground. Sensitivity is calculated by summing resilience and condition scores on the assumption that, within a landscape of low resilience, areas in good condition (i.e. where the character is strongly represented) are more susceptible to change than those areas where the landscape has already been weakened or is poorly represented. Outputs from the project were focused on informing strategic planning decisions within Worcestershire County Council and, subsequently, an additional exercise to assess the contribution of each LDU towards the delivery of green infrastructure. The new Parkway settlement presents a scenario that was not strictly within the parameters of the study. That being: a substantial new settlement that will result in large-scale landscape change. It was, nonetheless, decided to share the results of the sensitivity assessment with the consultants preparing their individual contributions towards the SLVIA as a contribution towards the strategic baseline.]

### c) Landscape-led Design Principles

Combining the findings of the baseline studies and sensitivity assessment, a 'landscape led' approach explores how landscape character, values and sensitivities inform and help shape the design of the SGA – finding the balance between spaces and buildings, and identifying opportunities for leisure and energy generation.

Landscape-led design principles for the SGA:

- Support the landscape elements of the vision for the Worcestershire Parkway new settlement
- Address landscape features identified to be retained and protected

- Consider how the linkages of those features may influence the design of the scheme, with the production of a Green-Blue Infrastructure Strategy
- Respect the identified landscape character and follow landscape guidelines in published landscape character assessments - considering how local characteristics may be embedded into the strategic design
- Identify opportunities to incorporate multi-functional spaces - integrating the ecological function of development with its social life, so they support each other
- Are informed by identified key views and view corridors – and how these may shape the scheme
- Identify a landscape strategy for landscape mitigation

### **SLVA findings for the main land interests**

Sub-Appendix A) – Land to north-western part of the site (Spetchley)

[See documents provided by NPA](#)

Sub-Appendix B) – Land to south of B4084 and west of Woodbury Lane (Merton)

[See document provided by Define](#)

Sub-Appendix C) – Land to the immediate south of Worcestershire Parkway Station (Bellway)

[See document provided by IDPL](#)

Sub-Appendix D) – Land to the eastern and southern parts of the site (Summix)

[See document provided by HDA](#)

Sub-Appendix E) – Land to the north-east of the B4084 (St Philips)

[See document provided by EPA](#)

Sub-Appendix F) – Land to the south (Terra Strategic)

[See document provided by FPCR](#)

### **Strategic Views from Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

In addition to the views considered in the separate SLVA documents for the various land interests, strategic long-distance views from elevated viewpoints within AONB towards the SGA site as a whole have been considered - specifically, views from the Malvern Hills and Bredon Hill.

The nearest peaks of the Malvern Hills AONB, at North Hill and Worcestershire Beacon, are located to the south-west some 12.5km away from the nearest part of the site. Bredon Hill, an outlier of the Cotswolds AONB, is approximately 11km to the south-east.

Whilst the proposed development of the SGA will be visible in those long-distance views, it will form part of the wider panorama within which individual settlements can be identified. Landscape strategies outlined at this stage include for new planting to the western and southern site boundaries of the SGA and along the prominent ridge line of the B4084 between Stoulton and the new town centre. Furthermore, development cells will be subdivided with new planting as part of the Green Infrastructure network and, as this planting matures, the SGA will become increasingly 'softened' such that the new settlement will be viewed within a strongly vegetated setting.

## **Summary**

The Strategic Landscape and Visual Appraisal work has identified across the site as a whole the principal landscape features of value that are distinctive and characteristic of the area and the key views and view corridors that can be appreciated from within and towards the site. The findings of the SLVA work have provided the primary influence in the placemaking of the scheme – the landscape led approach fully embedding Green and Blue Infrastructure into the design principles, respecting and building upon the character and identity of the local landscape and its green infrastructure.

Landscape led design principles and opportunities, informed by the SLVA work, that are central to the vision and to be incorporated into development proposals include:

1. **Existing landscape features:** distinctive and characteristic landscape features across the site should be retained and enhanced, and should have a primary influence on the placemaking of the scheme. Maintain existing watercourses and their associated floodplain, riparian woodland and significant stream-side vegetation; retain and enhance existing woodlands, traditional orchards and substantial elements of the existing hedgerow network - and develop the potential for integrating these features within the development, including within proposed residential areas and town centre. Consideration to be given to the protection and re-use of soil across the site.
2. **Identification of landscape and visual design drivers:** Given the likely scale and massing of the proposed town centre, employment areas and cells of residential development, the focus for built development should take into account the existing site topography and vegetation to minimise visual impacts – and also embed identified key views and view corridors leading to landmark features into the masterplan. This should include views towards/from Bredon Hill, the Malvern Hills and Crookbarrow Hill. The setting to key landmarks and existing settlements, as well as notable walking routes, should be maintained. The contribution landscape features and vistas make to the outlook of the proposed development, as well as views towards the site in the wider landscape, should be considered alongside the disposition of land uses, principal routes and civic spaces so as to recognise their contribution and make best use of such features in the wider landscape setting.
3. **Green Infrastructure Network:** the creation of a strong multifunctional network of publicly accessible landscape and green infrastructure across the site, which identifies and integrates with existing landscape features, provides opportunities for biodiversity enhancement (including the establishment of species rich grassland in

areas of open space and recreation), and promotes equal access to green spaces. This network will also provide for pedestrian and cycling linkages between key assets and destinations – for example, open spaces, orchards, parkland, existing rights of way, town centre and railway station - in order to encourage active movement and assist with providing associated health and wellbeing benefits.

4. **Sustainable Drainage Strategy:** develop a strategy for surface water management through sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) at an early stage, such that it may be fully integrated within the landscape and green infrastructure network. Consideration should be given to opportunities to provide amenity and biodiversity benefits, alongside the management of surface water quality and quantity, through the design and implementation of SuDS features. The SuDS strategy should consider aquatic typologies already present within the area and identified within local landscape character assessments.
5. **New planting and climate change resilience:** Where the existing landscape structure is limited, the placemaking will provide the opportunity to establish a new and compatible green infrastructure that will integrate the new settlement with the wider landscape. Proposals for planting of woodlands, trees and hedgerows, should seek to form part of the landscape framework across the site and should be appropriate to the local landscape character. Published Landscape Guidelines for the various identified Landscape Types across the site, with reference to the County Landscape Character assessment in particular, should be taken into account in providing new planting – as well as respecting those parts of the site where landscape have historic significance. New planting, to supplement the existing framework of vegetation, would provide combined benefits of greater carbon sequestration, air quality, visual containment, biodiversity, shelter and shade over time. Scheme design should have regard to environmental best practice in management, maintenance, bio-security, provenance and supply chain – and include opportunities for food production by the community ('grow your own' vegetables and orchards).
6. **Landscape management:** Landscape proposals should be designed and developed with consideration for landscape management in the short, medium and long term. This will assist in the successful establishment of the green infrastructure network and its on-going maintenance and monitoring.

The SLVA work will form the basis of future, more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments in support of planning applications. At that future stage, further and more detailed assessment work will be required including landscape and visual assessment, tree and vegetation surveys – to identify key specific features and develop protection, retention and enhancement strategies in connection with specific development proposals. At that stage, the *impacts* of specific developments in the landscape would be considered.