

Appendix 4: Statement on valued landscape

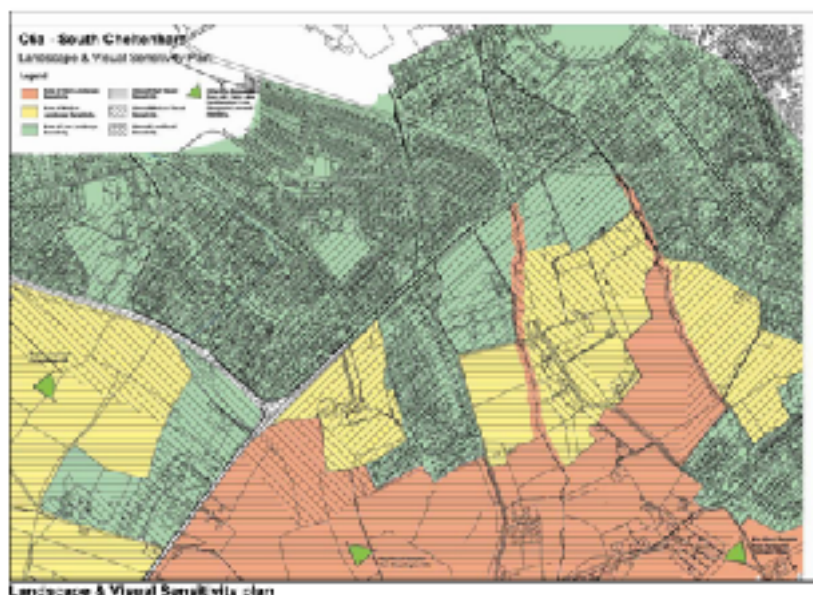
In 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 109 said that “the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by.. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils”¹. This paragraph, unchanged, is now paragraph 174 of the 2021 National Planning Policy Framework.

In the same year a Landscape & Visual Sensitivity Analysis was carried out as part of the creation of an evidence base for both the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (adopted in 2017) and the Cheltenham Plan (adopted 2020). It looked specifically at the Leckhampton & Warden Hill area, included a landscape sensitivity map and concluded in relation to the Leckhampton fields:

“Overall sensitivity rating; high - medium

Key considerations incorporated into the Landscape & Visual Sensitivity plans;

- Very prominent landform and field pattern to the south adjacent to the AONB which is vulnerable to change and is considered valuable landscape resource.
- Only a small area has limited intrinsic landscape value as previous character has already been lost.
- Primary key views from national trail/PROW’s within the AONB to the south of the area from Hartley Hill and Shurdington Hill”²



This study as well as her own site visits was key to JCS Inspector Elizabeth Ord excluding Leckhampton from the list of JCS strategic allocations: “built development should avoid areas of high landscape and visual sensitivity ...Overall, in my judgement, a limited amount of development could be supported towards the north of the site where public transport is more accessible, subject to the avoidance of land of high landscape and visual sensitivity.”³

In 2016 the status of Leckhampton’s fields as valued landscape under the NPPF was tested in the appeal on the Bovis/Miller application to build in Leckhampton. The Secretary of State concluded:

“Though not designated, the site is clearly a locally valued landscape which paragraph 109 of the Framework states should be protected” ⁴

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¹ National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012 paragraph 109

² Joint Core Strategy Landscape & Visual sensitivity and Urban design Report, October 2012

³ Inspector’s Interim Report – EXAM 232, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy - Inspector Ord, 31 May 2016

⁴ File Ref: APP/B1605/W/14/3001717, 11 January 2016 AND Secretary of State covering letter, Julian Pitt, APP/B1605/W/14/3001717, 5 May 2016

Policy MD4 of the Cheltenham Plan duly focussed planned development on the northern fields (coloured green on the map above) for lower landscape sensitivity. Following the Miller appeal, the Landscape Visual Review carried out for the Cheltenham Plan process noted that it had “deemed the area a valued landscape”⁵.

A succession of other inspector’s reports supported these conclusions. These are detailed in Appendix B, section B.1.3 of **Annex 4 the Landscape Character Assessment Update and evaluation of Landscape Value (September 2022)** commissioned by the Parish Council for this Neighbourhood Plan process.

This report by Lepus Consulting includes a detailed professional assessment of the continuing landscape value of the area, including both the 26 hectares of Local Green Space designated in the Cheltenham Plan 2020 but also undesignated parts of the wider landscape. It uses 2021 Landscape Institute published guidance to inform the assessment of landscape value for areas outside national landscape designations.

Importantly, it postdates the construction both of the new High School Leckhampton and most of the new Brizen Park development west of Farm Lane by Redrow, permitted by Tewkesbury Borough Council.

The report summarises its assessment of the area’s landscape value:

“The landscape of the study area strongly expresses numerous qualities across a range of indicators that are considered to contribute to its high landscape value, as assessed using the LI TGN21 guidelines. In summary these valued qualities comprise:

- **A strong landscape pattern** in many parts of the study area, created by the vegetated historic field boundaries;
- **A sense of visual unity** created by the consistent pattern of grasslands combined with vegetated field boundaries and watercourses;
- **A good sense of tranquillity** and providing opportunities for contact with nature;
- **A range of habitats for biodiversity**, including protected species, such as dormice and bats, as well as Priority Habitats, such as Traditional Orchards, and irreplaceable habitats, such as the Veteran oak tree;
- **Historic associations:** The landscape of the study area is likely to be considered to form the setting to designated heritage assets, including Moat Cottage and Field Cottage;
- **Links to market gardening and nursery businesses**, reflecting soil quality and fertility;
- **Part of the setting to the designated landscape of the Cotswolds National Landscape (NL).** The study area lies at the footslopes of the escarpment to the Cotswolds Hills, which allows opportunities for views towards and from the ridgeline and to appreciate this geomorphological feature, one of the identified Special Qualities of the Cotswolds NL.
- The study area has strong **visual connectivity** with the nationally important landscape and forms part of the transitional landscape between the designation and the suburban edge of Cheltenham;
- The study area is an excellent example of **multifunctional green infrastructure** providing a range of services and functions for biodiversity, natural water management, carbon storage and recreation;
- **Highly valued for informal recreation**, reflected in its designation as a Local Green Space (LGS) and providing opportunities to benefit local residents’ physical health and well-being.”

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⁵ Cheltenham Local Plan Allocated Sites Landscape and Visual Review, Ryder Landscape Consultants for Cheltenham Borough Council, December 2017

⁶ Landscape Character Assessment Update and evaluation of Landscape Value, Lepus Consulting for Leckhampton with Warden Hill Parish Council, September 2022, paragraph 6.6.1 pp59,60

The Lepus report concludes:

“This assessment has found the landscape of the study area is highly valuable under the majority of the indicators of landscape value set out in the LI LGN21 Guidelines. This conclusion is supported by numerous other previous assessments of the value and sensitivity of the landscape as well as in the comments from Planning Inspectors made during the preparation of the Local Plans for Cheltenham and the Joint Core Strategy”.⁷

This amounts to a substantial body of evidence that the Leckhampton fields, including the Local Green Space designated in the Cheltenham Plan but also undesignated areas, especially those identified as areas of medium to high visual sensitivity, are valued landscape under the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework and should be protected and enhanced.

September 2022

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⁷ *ibid*