

Stowdes Estate Landscape Visual Appraisal

Landscape Appraisal - Character



View from SE corner of estate road
No possible views of proposed buildings.

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View from inside estate – near pond
No possible views of proposed buildings.

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View from Kenton's Lane – Youngs Cottage

No view of proposed buildings (even before gappy hedge has been repaired).

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Landscape Appraisal - Character



View north towards Hamilton Estate looking north-west of the site
No view possible from the Hamilton Estate.

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Landscape Appraisal - Character



View east towards tall beech hedge (3-4m) on eastern boundary
No view possible from the eastern boundary.

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Landscape Appraisal - Proposal

The Development Proposal

4.6: The proposal involves the construction of a principal dwelling along with ancillary buildings required to support the long-term operation and management of the Estate Management Building.

The Estate Management Building is a one storey building with a basement. The external materials will be a light-coloured natural stone and brick. Due to the proximity of a large Oak tree and its root spread, the Estate Management Building is proposed to be located approximately 12.75m west, towards the Main House. The building stands 4.14m tall and is set within a naturalistic landscape setting.

The proposals sit within a Proposed Landscape Masterplan, which includes extensive parkland tree planting, boundary screening and chalk grassland.

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Likely Landscape and Visual Effects

5.1.1: The proposed development includes the Estate Management Building and is accompanied by a comprehensive Landscape Masterplan.

5.1.2: The visual appraisal draws upon a series of representative viewpoints selected from the surrounding areas of the Site. To support this assessment, a topographical analysis was undertaken using Ordnance Survey (OS) base mapping to establish an approximate Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). This analysis indicates the relative potential visibility of the Site from surrounding locations, without accounting for the screening effects of vegetation or built structures. Consequently, it serves to highlight areas where notable visual effects could arise, thereby guiding the focus of field investigations.

The desk study highlighted a number of public locations with potential views of the Site, but fieldwork confirmed that local topography and vegetation largely screened these, resulting in minimal or no visibility of the Site.

Fieldwork was undertaken while trees were in full leaf. Although this is not the optimal season for assessing visibility, it was determined that the reduction of foliage during winter months would have minimal influence on the overall level of visibility.

The Registered Parks and Gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe, located to the northwest of Stowdes, are privately owned and therefore not accessible for direct assessment. To address this limitation, the likely visibility of the northwestern portion of the Registered Parks and Gardens was evaluated from within the Site itself. From these vantage points, it was determined that the combination of local topography and existing vegetation would preclude significant intervisibility, with only occasional glimpsed views possible through dense vegetation along the southeast-facing slope immediately adjoining the Site.

5.2 Landscape Analysis and Evaluation

There is very limited visual connection between the Site and the surrounding landscape character area. Construction activities are expected to result in some temporary adverse noise effects within areas closest to the Site. However, at greater distances, these effects would diminish significantly due to the minimal visual and acoustic connectivity.

The proposed development would not result in any landscape impacts on the Registered Parks and Gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe.

5.3: Visual Analysis and Evaluation

- The Site is generally well screened by topography and existing buildings.
- The Site is not visible from the public footpaths or highway, due to intervening vegetation and landform.
- Nearby private dwellings, including Hamilton House and Hamilton Farm, have no views of the Site.
- The Site is not visible from Registered Parks and Gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe due to natural and vegetative screening.

5.4: Lighting

The sensitivity of light levels and night-time visibility is addressed by information provided in other documentation.

5.5: Landscape Consideration of the Valued Landscape Topic Paper 2019

The Valued Landscapes Topic Paper identifies eleven Valued Landscapes across the Borough, including the Chiltern Chalk Valued Landscape, within which the application site is situated. Following the completion of this study, Paragraph 174(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is applicable to the site. This paragraph advises that development should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological importance, and soils, in a manner proportionate to their statutory designation or recognised quality within the development plan.

The Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (WDLCA, 2004) provides valuable insight into landscape sensitivity through its evaluation of the re-creatability of key landscape elements. Notably, it highlights a range of nationally important features that contribute to the area's distinct character. These include areas of ancient woodland, remnants of chalk grassland, the historic parklands and gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe, the striking local landform, and the perceptual qualities of remoteness and tranquillity. The WDLCA also recognises the intervisibility between the landscape and the River Thames—identified

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as a Valued Landscape—and, of particular significance, its relationship with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The principal strategies set out within the Proposed Landscape Masterplan will deliver a comprehensive range of enhancements to the parkland setting. In summary, these include maintaining the overall open character of the parkland, conserving and reinforcing the historic planting structure, and enhancing the heritage value and visual quality of the wider landscape context.

The proposed planting palette comprises predominantly native and traditional parkland species, including holm oak, lime, and beech, chosen for their compatibility with the existing landscape character and historic context. The placement of new planting has been carefully considered to support and enhance internal parkland views and towards the wider borrowed landscape beyond.

The establishment of this part of the Registered Park as a dower house reflects the historic evolution of large estates, where secondary residences were introduced to complement the principal parkland. Such dwellings were typically discreetly sited, away from main approaches and key views, with surrounding grounds forming smaller, self-contained parklands, in this instance, Park Place. This historic precedent has informed the design ethos of the proposed scheme.

There is no direct intervisibility between the Stowdes Estate and the western portion of the Registered Park, with the exception of limited glimpsed views along the northern approach drive.

The principal management objective for the Stowdes Estate is the long-term protection, restoration, and enhancement of the associated parkland landscape. This approach will ensure the continued enrichment of the site's biodiversity, reinforce its landscape character and scenic quality, and contribute positively to the overall value and integrity of both the Registered Park and the wider Valued Landscape.

Areas along the south-facing lower slopes will be managed as chalk meadowland, significantly enhancing local biodiversity.

The visual appraisal confirms there are no views into the mid or upper parts of the Estate, including the proposed development area, due to screening by landform and

vegetation.

On the plateau, the WDLCA (2004) highlights the importance of the flat landform, openness, and long views, which have been key considerations in the scheme's design.

The existing landscape exhibits a parkland character, comprising open grassland framed by a broad belt of deciduous trees. Many of the mature parkland trees, some originating from the Victorian period, are retained and complemented by more recent planting. The proposed extensive additional tree planting in a naturalistic arrangement will modestly reduce openness, but their placement, in this less sensitive area of the site, will minimise the impact of the development. The proposed buildings are grouped in the northern part of the parkland, preserving the historic openness of the lower section.

All of these characteristics are recognised in the most recent Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019). However, an additional consideration is the intervisibility between this landscape and the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, which contributes to the area's wider visual and contextual relationship. Another often overlooked but important aspect is the influence of the underlying chalk geology and calcareous soils, which strongly shape the landscape's character and ecological potential.

There is no direct intervisibility between the Stowdes Estate and the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape, ensuring that views from each remain visually independent.

IN SUMMARY:

The development will slightly reduce openness in the mid-section of the parkland, but this area is visually contained within the park and already has a more enclosed character.

The development will not affect the Registered Parks and Gardens of Park Place and Temple Combe. The addition of a new 'dower house' follows the historic pattern of incremental change within historic parks, reflecting a natural and historically consistent evolution.

The proposed Landscape Masterplan will safeguard and enhance the Valued Landscapes, aligning with the requirements of NPPF Paragraph 174(a).

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(Topography - 1km)

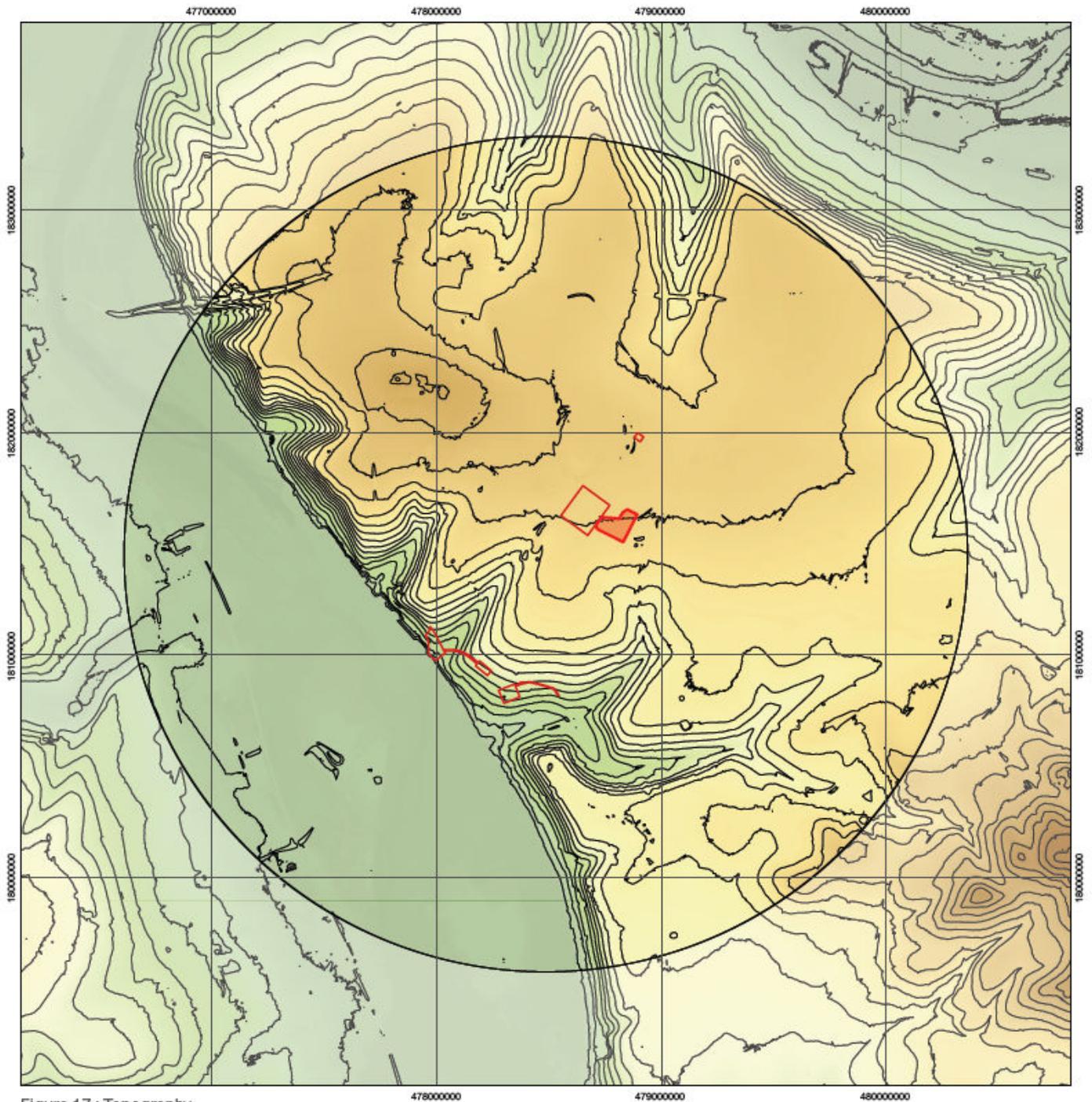


Figure 17 : Topography

Drawing notes

 Application Site Boundary	 Contour	 220m	 134.28m	 68.98m	 22.04m
 1km Buffer		 183.26m	 89.38m	 40.4m	 <20m

Image data sources

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Conclusion

6.1: The landscape visual appraisal has been made in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.

6.2: This application comprises the following:

- The Estate Management Building

Baseline Conditions

6.3: The local area around has an undulating landform, flattening out into a broader plateau to the north east. The site is flanked by local topography and hedged and well wooded margins. This countryside is within the Wokingham Valued Landscape areas.

6.4: There are no public footpaths from which the Site is visible.

6.5: There are no public views into the Site. Vegetation and 3-4m high hedges completely screen the Site from Kenton Lane.

6.6: The Site is extremely well screened by local topography and vegetation.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that the development does protect and enhance the Valued Landscape in accordance with NPPF 174 (a) and the Wokingham Borough Council Landscape Value Topic Paper 2019.

The proposed buildings will be well integrated within the grounds of Stowdes Estate and the proposed Landscape masterplan giving rise to a significant improvement in the quality of the historic parkland, increasing the bio-diversity value of the setting, and protecting the distinctive features and character of the landscape setting.

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