

MEMORANDUM

From:	Stuart Ryder External Landscape Consultant		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	250959
Address:	Former Prince Bros Service Station, Old Bath Road, Reading, RG10 9QJ.		
Proposal:	Full application for demolition of two existing buildings and a garage and the change of use from service station to a fuel oil storage and distribution facility including the recladding of the existing building, installation of 8 no. fuel oil storage tanks, refurbishment of hardstanding, car parking and associated works.		
Type of Development:	Minor General industrial/storage/warehouse (1-999 sqm)		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☒ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
- ☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

Dear Marcus

Thank you for asking us to review and comment upon the submitted proposals. I have set them below under various headings.

Documents Reviewed – Existing and Proposed Site Layout Plans, series of sections and elevations and the Landscape Appraisal produced by DEP that has no reference or stated date but presumed to be April 2025 looking at the some of the dates given on the figures it contains. The Tree Survey (dated Jan 2025) has been noted as has its recommendation that a full Arboricultural Impact Assessment be produced on completion of the finalised proposals.

Landscape Appraisal status – This is marked as Draft on the front cover. Is this the final version that will be issued to support the Application?

The Proposals – To demolish an existing industrial building and replace it with a series of 8 No. oil storage tanks surrounded by a modified service yard with staff car parking and parking for oil delivery tankers.

Landscape Baseline – The description of the existing landscape characteristic of the Site and surrounding area appears accurate and at a reasonable level of detail. Five landscape receptors have been identified for consideration of landscape effects, including the Site itself.

Landscape Character Assessments – The pertinent landscape character areas and character types have largely been identified for the Site and relevant landscape attributes listed from these sources of empirical data. The one set of character information that appears not to have been consulted is the Wokingham BC's Valued Landscapes Assessment – September 2024 (VLA). The Site is set within the River Loddon Valued Landscape boundary (see map on page 191 of the VLA). How the proposed changes to the Site conserve and enhance the River Loddon Valued Landscape needs to be discussed and demonstrated by the proposals with the inclusion of the River Loddon Valued Landscape as a sixth landscape receptor in the Landscape Appraisal so the effects of the proposals can be explained.

Visual Baseline – 10 No visual receptors have been identified through the process of modelling a bare earth and screened Zone of Theoretical visibility for the proposals. The tanks were modelled at 3.05m and 3.65m to produce the ZTV Figure which accords with their indicated height on the proposed sections drawing. It would be useful to have a summary of what screening elements were also included in the model and what height they were given. The proposed lighting columns that are 8m in height also need to be taken into consideration with regards to visual effects for close range receptors. If I had been approached to agree the representative viewpoints in advance of the Landscape Appraisal as recommended as good practice in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments – Third Edition (GLVIA3) I would have concurred with the 10No. viewpoints but would have requested an additional visual receptors from Old Bath Road looking into the Site to be included as a primary location where visual change may be experienced from.

Landscape Proposals – There are minimal landscape proposals indicated on the drawings other than a strip of landscape planting in a margin to the south end of the Site that is estimated to be approximately 2m wide. Security fencing is indicated as Palidan style fencing and a gabion retaining wall is shown to the east boundary between the Site and access track to the car park. None of these features are designed in sufficient detail to judge their effectiveness or overall appearance. It is recommended that additional information is requested of the Applicant to allow an adequate understanding of the proposed soft landscape and boundary treatments.

Overall Landscape Effects – The placing of the proposed tanks within an area of industrial / commercial land use does not cause unacceptable adverse landscape change at the Site and in the surrounding area. However, what the Applicant has not yet demonstrated is how the proposals will conserve and ideally enhance the interface with the neighbouring areas. The treatment of the Site's southern and eastern boundaries will be key to ensuring that any character change in the adjacent parts of the Charvil Country Park are minimised and the oil tanks and tanker parking

are effectively screened from sight as quickly as reasonably possible. The screen has to work effectively throughout the year and not appear artificial in its own right. The ability to provide sufficient winter screening with a planting bed of 2m width is doubtful. Nor is there any boundary planting to the east side of the Site to provide a buffer between the tanker parking bays and the adjacent land to the east. Along this boundary a drawing note indicates a gabion retaining wall is required but no details are provided. Such gabion walls will require clearance of boundary vegetation and there is no planting indicated to replace any felled trees and scrub. With a Full Application such as this details of retained heights, number and size of gabions, fill material and any replacement planting would be expected to allow an informed understanding of the proposals to be reached. If you are minded to grant consent there are no enforceable drawings to address the landscape planting and boundary treatments around the Site.

Visual Effects – The sense of visual change brought about by the proposal's tanks is limited to just two of the identified ten visual receptors – VP1 and VP3 - from Loddon Nature Reserve and Charvil Meadows respectively. The assessed levels of visual change are Slight prior to mitigation and Negligible post mitigation establishment. I would add two other visual receptor groups who will likely experience visual change and they are road users on Old Bath Road looking through the existing entrance into the Site and users of the car park to the east of the Site. I am unsure whether the car park is public or private but if the gabion retaining wall removes vegetation down the eastern side of the Site then views in from that direction are likely to become more evident. Overall, I do not consider the visual effects are at such an adverse level to give rise to a reason for refusal on visual impact grounds alone but further information as to vegetation loss and the eastern gabion retaining wall is recommended. Also suggested with regards to the eastern boundary is the continuation of a planted buffer along that site edge that could be achieved by rotating the line of tanker parking clockwise to create space for a landscape buffer.

Compliance with MDD landscape planning policies – are discussed in the bulleted list below:

- **Policy CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping:** *'Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside, protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features.'* I do not consider there to be sufficient information to confirm that the proposals can integrate into the adjacent countryside to the east and south of the Site.

- **Policy TB21 – Landscape Character:** *'Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.'* The submitted Landscape Appraisal by DEP has considered existing landscape character information but did not include reference to the Site being within the River Loddon Valued Landscape area (VLA). The fact that the Site is within the VLA does not preclude the development but rather points to the requirement that it should conserve and ideally enhance the Site's relationship with and contribution to the adjacent landscape.

• **Policy TB23 – Biodiversity and Development:** *‘Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing features.’* Albeit there is a low base to start from on this industrial / commercial site the 2m wide landscape strip to the south is the only feature with biodiversity value and more could be achieved on Site, potentially along the eastern boundary for example. Its position next to the Loddon Nature Reserve and near to the Old River part of the River Loddon corridor should be recognised and influence the character of the Site’s interface with it.

I trust these comments assist with the review of this application and should you wish to discuss them in more detail please do not hesitate to contact me.

To assist you and the Applicant I have compiled the following list of information that I consider as necessary to fully understand the landscape and visual effects of the proposals, including the effect of the tanker parking to the eastern boundary:

- Landscape Design Proposals – Plans @ 1:200 with associated planting schedule;
- Landscape Appraisal in its final form with no Draft stamp;
- The final Landscape Appraisal to consider the landscape effect on the River Loddon Valued Landscape;
- The final Landscape Appraisal to consider the view to the oil tanks from Old Bath Road;
- Gabion boundary details in terms of height of retaining wall, cross section, elevation and fill material;
- Vegetation clearance drawing for the gabion boundary to the east and as required for other parts of the Site.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

I have not put any specific recommendations for Conditions in this part of the memo yet as they will depend on any additional information submitted by the Applicant to better explain the landscape treatment.

If the scheme is to progress however I would expect standard conditions to confirm:

- Tree protection of vegetation that borders the Site;
- Soft landscape proposals;
- Management and maintenance procedures for 5-years post planting to ensure their successful establishment.

I would also anticipate a more specific condition addressing the eastern boundary to provide sufficient information to allow a thorough understanding of its appearance to be achieved. The reason for such a Condition is to allow control of how the Site and in particularly the tanker parking on the east side of the facility relates to the Nature Reserve and car park to the east.

Date:	3/6/25	Signed:	Stuart Ryder
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