

Knowsley, Ormskirk – Tree Planting Strategy and Visual Impacts Summary

This note has been prepared by Urban Green as a summary response to facilitate discussions with the relevant officers at Knowsley Council on landscaping and arboricultural matters associated with application ref. 22/00348/FUL. This note has been prepared, having regard to the application submission pack, to detail the impacts of the development.

The development proposals will require a degree of tree removal across the site to accommodate the new access road and three industrial units. The main impacted location is around the development of Building 3 which will consist of the partial removal of a woodland group located north of the site. This woodland is an early-mature lapsed coppice woodland dominated by sycamore. Except for the planting of several young pedunculate oak trees, evidence of recent previous management was minimal and looks to have lapsed approximately 20 years ago. This has limited the amount of natural regeneration and range of biodiversity and woodland flora.

The following sections detail the visual impacts of removing the above noted trees, the replacement strategy and the constraints posed from utilities easements.

Visual Impact

From discussions with the relevant officers, concern was raised as follows *‘the concern is the loss of the woodland and how this impacts the view and streetscape from the A580’*. Existing views towards the site from the A580 East Lancs Road are reserved to portions of the route in the immediate proximity of the site. Views from the junction of the East Lancs Road and Ormskirk Road and views from the East Lancs Road are limited views to the mature woodland within the site from the north and are seen through the existing screening of the mature trees along the north facing embankment of the A580. These trees along the A580 will be retained and will continue to provide screening. Further views to the site from the A580 are truncated due to the existing intervening mature vegetation and/or built form lining the A580.

Those parts of the woodland that are visible from the north (A580 East Lancs Road) and are lost as part of the development of Building 3 are considered to have a moderate localised impact in the short term through the loss of this landscape resource, this is anticipated to result in a minor visual effect for users of the A580 in the immediate proximity of the site. These impacts are anticipated to reduce over time as the proposed planting strategy matures around the unit.

To minimise impact further, the identified groups of existing trees either side of the woodland will be unaffected by the development and are to be retained and appropriately managed, providing further retained screening from the East Lancashire Road to the north and Ormskirk Road to the west. This will maintain an established screen that can be linked/adjoined to as part of the future planting which will strengthen this screened edge to the rest of the site.

Further architectural measures have also been included to reduce the perceived massing and any considered visual impact from the proposals, as detailed within the submitted Design and Access Statement (by Fletcher Rae). This includes the use of 3 complementary cladding shades running across the facades of each Unit. A darker band of cladding is proposed to the lower portion of the elevation to visually ground the Units. Above the office accommodation a lighter band is proposed, the final and highest band will be the lightest shade. This approach aims to reduce the perceived height of the units

The measures proposed clearly detailed within the prepared CGI as below which show how the proposals have gone a significant way in addressing perceived visual impact.



Figure 1: Proposed view from the A580 East Lancs Road (Prepared by Fletcher Rae)

The proposals also need to be considered against the established allocation context (East of Knowsley Industrial and Business Parks) in which both the proposals site and the northern area over the A580 will be brought forward for development at some point as part of a sustainable urban extension. The two areas coming forward to secure an identified need will inevitably change the immediate setting however it would be seen to effectively integrate with the adjacent urban development.

Landscape strategy

Policy CS21 encourages new development to incorporate existing tree retention, woodland and vegetation and other habitat features. Should tree loss be unavoidable, adequate replacement planting should take place taking account of species and size. The approach to the finalised development scheme has fully respected this emphasis and has followed the correct process in devising a landscape and ecological strategy.

Appropriate steps have been taken to survey existing habitats and woodland/trees to establish health and specimen value over an extensive period of time. The finalised landscape plan and overarching strategy has been prepared to replace as many trees as possible as well as ensuring the enrichment of site ecological value.

As set out, the main impacted location is around the development of Building 3 which will consist of the partial removal of a woodland group located north of the site. This woodland group is identified as early mature mixed broadleaved/lapsed coppice woodland predominantly consisting of Sycamore and sporadic natural colonisation of oak with some younger planted oak to the west. It is estimated that 95% of this woodland group will be required to be felled with the retained portions remaining between the proposed Building 3 and existing farm property. This will retain key separation and screening between the developments.

The proposed tree planting strategy seeks to mitigate loss with new tree planting throughout, utilising appropriate green spaces around the new development. This will consist of 204 individual new trees planted to the site boundaries and soft landscape areas alongside access roads and car parks. The strategy will provide a much richer diverse mix of native tree planting across the site from those lost and currently present.

A portion of this strategy incorporates a significant area of planting in the locality of the existing woodland to mitigate the loss through and relinking the retained tree group adjacent to unit 3,

with 47No individual trees and 4463m² dense understorey of native tree/shrub planting mix. This is intended to wrap Building 3 in dense screen planting and provide richer biodiversity understorey from that previously available in that location. These include Birch, Whitebeam, Beech, Field Maple, Sessile Oak individual specimens and understory planting consisting of Hawthorn, Birch, Blackthorn, Elder, Alder, Hazel and Guelder Rose.

As such, Urban Green are of the view that the proposed strategy is effective and addresses the loss of trees on site with a richly diverse landscape.

Easements

The inherent site constraints caused by existing utility easements also presented a further challenge to the final landscaping scheme given the restrictions in such areas not only of the development but also the type of planting permissible in these areas of the site. These are further detailed below.

Gas

Cadent Guidelines for Tree Planting Recommendations on Pipelines provides clear details as to what is and isn't permitted within gas easements. The guidance restricts the planting of Ash, Beech, Birch, Conifers, Elm, Horse Chestnut, Lime, maple, Oak, Sycamore, Apple, and Pear within 6m of the easements.

Further consideration is also required for personnel who need clear access above the pipeline and Cadent recommend that no shrubs or bushes are planted on the easement. However, they do accept there will be cases where landowners will wish or be required to plant shrub and bushes near the pipeline for screening purposes. In these cases, shallow rooted plants are acceptable such as Blackthorn, Broom, Cotoneaster, Elder, Hazel, Laurel, Privet, Quickthorne, Snowberry and most ornamental flowering shrubs.

As such, we have selected only Dwarf Stock Fruit Trees as these are accepted as being appropriate for planting 6m from the pipeline or distribution main. From this, we have selected Birch, Wild Cherry, Field Maple and Whitebeam to provide screening to Knowsley Lane. Root barriers are allowed but are only to be used with dwarf stock as proposed.

Water

Within the Water Easement Strip, the planting of trees is restricted, with the area only to be used for agricultural or gardening purposes (except for planting of trees) or as an open space and in particular no building erection or structure.

As a result of this, tree planting within the northern section of the site is restricted to only enhancing existing shrub planting and retention of the existing trees along the East Lancs Road which provides an effective and established screening.

Electricity

All proposed tree planting has been avoided within the Electricity Easement as per the restrictive condition as follows *'no building or other erection shall be constructed, and no trees shall be planted over the Electricity Easement Strip or in such a position that the foundations of the buildings or other erections will be within the Electricity Easement Strip'*.

The existing tree planting within these locations is to be retained. The areas of soft landscaping that lie outside of this easement have been used in full for tree planting. One significant unrestricted area has allowed us to form an effective screening element along Knowsley Road connecting to the existing trees on the boundary.

In both water and electricity easements where new tree and shrub planting isn't acceptable we have looked to maximise groundcover through wildflower meadows to work towards achieving a positive and more diverse impact on Biodiversity Net Gain.

Summary

In response to the Tree Officer's and Case Officer's comments and to further assist with the understanding of the easement constraints, tree mitigation opportunities and the visual considerations, we have provided this summary to explain our strategy to maximise the enhancement of both trees and biodiversity on site.

As part of the tree planting strategy careful consideration has had to be given to the easement constraints that exist throughout the site including water, gas, and electricity. Where possible and allowed, tree planting has been proposed in and around these easement zones. However, this has had to be in line with the accepted species and specimen size guidance provided by the utility groups. This has led to a select tree stock that is approved and that will require the incorporation of root barriers.

Considering the detail of this supplementary note, the proposed strategy best utilises the available space for landscaping ensuring tree loss is appropriately mitigated for through individual tree planting, understorey native tree planting and understorey shrub planting mix, seeking to provide both quantitatively and qualitatively adequate compensation in line with the policy requirements.

The visual impact of the proposals is considered moderate only at localised viewpoints with boundary planting being retained to effectively screen the development from key locations such as the East Lancashire Road. The proposed landscaping will develop over time and as detailed within figure 1, will effectively integrate into its surrounding context.