

Site Name: North Dorchester
Date: 23rd April 2013

Key characteristics:

- The area of the site to be developed falls almost entirely (with the exception of a small area at the junction of the B3143 and the B3150) within the Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland Landscape Character Area (WDDC LCA 2009).
- The site is formed by medium-large straight-sided fields which slope gently (c.75m - 53m AOD) both to the south and towards the dry coombe running NE-SW at the centre of the site.
- These fields are bounded by straight hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow and parkland trees to the south east of the area. In local views looking north, the fields of the site form an undeveloped skyline.
- The characteristic skyline of Dorchester is visible approximately 0.5km to the south over the water meadows, from the approach to and within the site.
- The majority of the site is very open in character, with the exception of the dry coombe to its centre; typical of the chalk valley and downland character area.
- Several copses, parkland and hedgerow trees within or in close proximity to the site are important landscape features.
- The road network within and approaching the site is rural in character, with little in the way of highway engineering features.
- There are open views of the site from the south, notably from the water meadows and from the wider elevated landscape.

The site as a whole significantly contributes to the overall character of the area. With no clear distinction between the site and the wider landscape, the area as a whole is perceived as a consistent character area, with a unifying pattern of land uses, clustered small development, small copses and a gently undulating landform.

Landscape Value

The site has a high amenity value, providing the closest access from the town centre to open countryside, facilitated by a number of public footpaths passing through and adjacent to the site. The site also plays an important role in the landscape setting of the town, being visible as open countryside from within the town (notably from South Street, Friary Hill, Northernhay walks and the Millstream) and as the backdrop to the town in a number of wider views.

The site lies outside the Dorset AONB, though a number of visual receptors are within the AONB designation and are considered in this assessment.

Sensitivities / vulnerabilities

- Development could negatively impact upon the open and undeveloped character of the Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland character area, particularly through the loss of unity of field pattern and land uses over a wide area, and the interruption of the undeveloped skyline from local and middle-distance views.
- Without clear definition of the site, impacts upon landscape character could be widely apparent.

- Development could negatively impact upon the role the site plays in the rural countryside setting of the town, restricting the strong visual connection between the landscape to the north of Dorchester and the characteristic skyline of the town.
- Development could form a new and dominant feature in local and wider views from the south, and locally could undermine the rural character of the landscape and road network with highways signage, visibility splays etc.

Analysis

Due to the potential wide nature of sensitivities/vulnerabilities outlined above, it is felt that mitigation would be limited in reducing the potential impacts of development. The loss of several key characteristics of the character area would be significant, and as a result of the poor natural definition of the site, would be widely apparent. A comprehensive landscape scheme as indicated could reduce these impacts to a degree, but the principle of large scale development in this open area would be fundamentally at odds with the local landscape character.

Restricting the spread of development into the more enclosed fields to the centre of the site and away from the open skyline would go some way to limiting the wider impacts upon landscape character, and would offer opportunities for sensitive mitigation. However, this would significantly limit the developable area; creating a “village” more akin to Charminster. Additionally, the impacts on the character of the road network, and impacts on views from the south could still be significant with a smaller scale of development.

Visual Baseline

Views of the site are available from the immediately adjacent public right of way network passing through and adjacent to the site. Similarly, two rural lanes pass through and border the site and afford direct views into the fields. In the medium distance, views of extensive areas of the site are available from the south, both within and on the approach to the floodplain separating the site from Dorchester. In these views, the site often forms the skyline; its rising topography restricting views beyond the site boundary.

From further afield, visibility is dictated by the elevation of the viewer. From the A35 to the west of Dorchester, and from Maiden Castle, only the northern edge of the site is visible beyond the town. From more elevated land towards and on the South Dorset Ridgeway, the site is more isolated, and particularly from the elevated Osmington Ridge appear to become increasingly detached from the built form of the town.

The appearance of the site in local, middle distance, and wider views is consistently rural, and in keeping with the agricultural character of the area.

Key views & Analysis

Viewpoint no. (ref Viewpoint Locations Plan)	Description of view	Anticipated change in view	
1	View from the B3150 south of the site, looking north.	<p>The view takes in the two areas of site to the north of the road. The field to the centre of the view is that used for the county show, and is excluded from the site boundary. The areas covered by the site appear as large agricultural fields bordered by hedgerows on gently undulating land, typical of this area and consistent with the other features in the view.</p> <p>Sensitivity: Moderate to high. Although roads have a lower sensitivity, this stretch also provides a link between two PRow and is frequently used by pedestrians and cyclists. On the approach to Dorchester, cars also slow down along this stretch before reaching a set of traffic lights.</p>	<p>Development would lie either side of the showground field, reaching to the skyline.</p> <p>Although the existing vegetation would provide some screening during times of leaf, development would form a new and dominant feature in an otherwise rural agricultural landscape. Development would break up the unified pattern in the landscape appearing as two isolated areas of built form.</p>
2	View from the public footpath north of the B3150, looking north east.	<p>The eastern extents of the site are visible as a large arable field. Some agricultural development is visible on the skyline with a backdrop of trees. Trees surrounding highway infrastructure and the Kingston Maurward Estate beyond form a strong boundary to the east. The remaining boundaries are formed by clipped hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees, with a small copse visible to the centre of the site.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath.</p>	<p>Development would form a dominant feature in the middle-ground of the view, stretching over a large area of undeveloped landscape. The gently sloping site could not be effectively screened from this vantage point, and development would form a prominent new feature in the view.</p>
3	View from the public footpath west of the site,	<p>An area of parkland trees forms the dominant feature in the view, with the two fields of the site on the skyline. A further field within the site</p>	<p>The parkland area is excluded from the site boundary, and would remain in the foreground of the view. Development in the two visible fields would be visible</p>

	looking east.	<p>also extends to the left of the image beyond the hedge on the skyline.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath leading towards the site.</p>	<p>beyond this, and it is likely that some development would be visible behind the hedge forming the skyline to the left of the view due to the close proximity of the site to this edge.</p> <p>Due to the shallow angle of view, mitigation is likely to be effective for the central fields from this approach to the site in softening the appearance of development. However, the open and undeveloped character would be substantially lost, and any visible development would appear incongruous in this isolated location; the urban edge of Dorchester lying some 0.5km to the south of this point.</p>
4	View from the "Blue Bridge" on the public footpath south of the site, looking north east.	<p>The site covers the two open fields to and beyond the skyline at the centre left of the view. The open a gently undulating nature of the area is apparent. Substantial vegetation is present to the centre of the view surrounding an isolated dwelling and a farmstead.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath.</p>	<p>Development would be present over the high ground, forming the backdrop to the view. Extending to the skyline, development would undermine the extensive open character of the agricultural landscape.</p> <p>Due to the angle of view, a comprehensive mitigation scheme could be effective in softening the appearance of development, however over a large area such an extent of planting would be at odds with the open agricultural character. Any visible development would appear incongruous in this isolated location; the urban edge of Dorchester visible over the water meadows behind the viewer.</p>
5	View from the Millstream to the north of Dorchester, looking north.	<p>The view takes in occasional scrubby vegetation in the foreground, but the dominant feature is the open countryside extending from the floodplain in the foreground to the lower slopes of the downland on the skyline. Badgers Copse forms a prominent landscape feature.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath and amenity area for Dorchester.</p>	<p>The site lies beyond the middle-distance floodplain field, and would reach to the skyline in the centre of the view, extending to the west beyond the parkland trees.</p> <p>Given the degree to which mature trees on the site break the skyline, it is likely that development would substantially intrude into the open skyline, and block views to Badger Copse.</p>

			Due to the vertical height of the site when viewed from this location, it is unlikely that development could be successfully mitigated. Any extensive and dense planting would undermine the open character of the area.
6	View from the unnamed (east-west) road within the site, looking west.	<p>The view takes in the central portions of the site, and the dominant features are the gentle undulations of open pasture and arable fields, with occasional small copses.</p> <p>The urban edge of Dorchester is approximately 0.75km distant from this point, and very little development bar small farmsteads and isolated dwellings is apparent in the landscape at this point.</p> <p>Sensitivity: Moderate-high. A rural lane with public right of way links.</p>	<p>Development would lie in the foreground and middle distance fields, extending for two fields beyond the hedgeline lying very close to the skyline. Bridging this hedgerow, it is likely that development would intrude into the skyline across much of this view where foreground development allows views through to the wider landscape. This would result in a fundamental change in the character of the area.</p> <p>The insubstantial boundaries of the site are clearly apparent, and the degree to which extensive planting would undermine the open character of the area is evident.</p> <p>Views of the site are available from prolonged sections of this road. The rural character of the lane is evident in the view, and highways infrastructure required for new housing developments would degrade this.</p>
7	View from the unnamed road to the east of the site, looking north west.	<p>The view takes in one of the large arable fields towards the eastern edge of the site. Again, the expansive open character of the agricultural landscape is apparent, with clipped hedgerow boundaries and occasional copses forming isolated landscape features. Dorchester lies approximately 0.75km to the south west.</p> <p>Sensitivity: Moderate-high. A rural lane with public right of way links.</p>	<p>Development would become a dominant feature in the view, obscuring views to the open countryside from this point and along much of the lane running to the east.</p> <p>Extensive mitigation planting would be at odds with the open nature of the view.</p>
8	View from the public footpath to	This view lies within the dry coombe lying at the centre of the site. The field to the left of the	Development at the site would dominate this view, and the open and rural character of the area would be

	the north of the site, looking south.	<p>view has a more enclosed feel than much of the site, however analysis of wider views from the west show an extensive visibility of the west facing slope.</p> <p>Remnant scrub and hedgerow trees are important local landscape features. Dorchester is visible on the skyline over 1km from this location.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath.</p>	<p>fundamentally changed. Development on the more elevated areas of the coombe to the left and right of the image would form a new built skyline.</p>
9	View from the public footpath to the south of the site, looking north.	<p>This view takes in the characteristic open landscape, with occasional agricultural features, open skylines, and occasional woodland copses.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath.</p>	<p>The site lies on the fields forming the skyline of the view, and would form a dominant and incongruous new feature. Mitigation could be effective in screening the lower portions of the site, but extensive areas of planting would be at odds with the wider open character.</p>
10	View from Access Land on Poundbury Hillfort, looking north east.	<p>This wide panoramic view takes in the lower slopes of the chalk downland to the north of Dorchester. There is a strong pattern of open arable fields and occasional agricultural uses, with dense vegetation associated with agricultural units and parkland close to the valley floor.</p> <p>The small settlement of Charminster is off the image to the left, and the urban edge of Dorchester is visible to the right of the view.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. Access Land on a significant local landmark.</p>	<p>A wide area of development would be visible stretching along the middle distance of the view. Notably, the west-facing slope of the dry coombe (viewpoint 8) is clearly visible, as are the large arable fields to the east of the site.</p> <p>Some mitigation may be possible with a comprehensive landscaping plan, however extensive areas of dense planting and the elevation of the site are not characteristic of this area.</p> <p>The isolation of the site from Dorchester would be apparent.</p>
11	View from Roman Road to the west of the site, looking	<p>The view takes in the well treed landscape of the Frome Valley, with the wooded skyline of Puddletown Forest forming the backdrop to the</p>	<p>The site lies in the middle-distance to the centre of the view. Development at the eastern and western extents of the site would be visible, in the large arable fields</p>

	east.	<p>view. The urban edge of Dorchester is not visible; Charminster forming the only substantial settlement feature some distance from the site.</p> <p>Sensitivity: Moderate - low. A glimpsed view from a rural lane within the AONB.</p>	<p>which slope in this direction.</p> <p>It is likely that mitigation would be effective in minimising visibility of the western area of the site due to the angle of view and high presence of dense tree planting in the middle-distance. The eastern extents are likely to be harder to mitigate due to the sloping topography. If any development were to be visible, the consistently undeveloped character of the lower slopes of the downland would be adversely affected due in part to the clear isolation of the site from any significant development.</p>
12	View from the public footpath east of Tilly Whim Lane, looking east.	<p>The rolling landscape of the Dorchester Downs and the new development of Poundbury form dominant features in the view. Puddletown Forest is also visible forming the distant skyline.</p> <p>The site lies in the open area of landscape between these features, with Badger Copse visible in the middle-distance.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public footpath within the AONB.</p>	<p>A small area of development at the site would be visible in the open landscape to the left of the lower slopes of Poundbury.</p> <p>It is likely that mitigation would be effective in minimising visibility of the due to the small area of the site visible, however if any development were to be visible, the consistently undeveloped character of the lower slopes of the downland would be adversely affected.</p>
13	View from Maiden Castle, looking north east.	<p>The view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set below the extensive downland landscape to the north and north east.</p> <p>The site lies beyond the current built form of Dorchester, and the large arable fields towards the eastern edge of the site are clearly visible.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. Access Land on a significant local landmark, within the AONB.</p>	<p>Built form in the fields of the site, particularly those to the east, would extend the built form of Dorchester into the fields beyond.</p> <p>This would form a small but noticeable change in the view, resulting in an incremental creep of the built form of Dorchester into the open countryside beyond.</p> <p>Extensive mitigation planting would be inappropriate in this view; the character of the site is distinctly different from the valley landscape below which has substantially</p>

			more tree cover.
14	View from the public bridleway to the north west of Stafford Farm, looking north west.	<p>The view takes in the well treed landscape of Stinsford and the Kingston Maurward Estate to the right, and Frome Hill and development in Dorchester to the left.</p> <p>The site lies to the centre of the view, in this view appearing as a transition landscape between the open chalk downland and the more densely vegetated valley floor.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A public bridleway.</p>	<p>Development on the elevated and open areas of the site (north eastern and western extents) would be visible in the open landscape between the trees of Stinsford and the Kingston Maurward Estate, and the slopes of Frome Hill.</p> <p>It is likely that mitigation would be effective in minimising visibility of the western area of the site due to the angle of view and high presence of dense tree planting in the middle-distance. The eastern extents are likely to be harder to mitigate due to the sloping topography. If any development were to be visible, the consistently undeveloped character of the lower slopes of the downland would be adversely affected due in part to the clear isolation of the site from any significant development.</p>
15	View from the South Dorset Ridgeway (National Trail) to the north west of the Osmington Horse, looking north.	<p>The view takes in the sweep of Dorchester over the upland landscape of the South Dorset Downs (WDDC LCA 2006). The town lies below the slopes of the chalk downland and is visible in the left portion of the view.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A National Trail footpath within the AONB.</p>	<p>Though over a long distance, the extent of development proposed and the width of the site in the view would make it a new visible feature from this elevation vantage point.</p> <p>The low-lying nature of the eastern area of Dorchester results in the main form of Dorchester being visible substantially to the west of the site area. This effect accentuates the isolation of the site.</p> <p>Even with mitigation to set the development into the landscape, a new and isolated development feature viewed from this elevated location would appear at odds with the local landscape character.</p>
16	View from the Came Down Golf Club car park,	<p>The view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set between the more elevated landscape of the Dorchester and South Dorset Downs in the foreground, and the chalk downland to the</p>	<p>Development at the site would form a new visible feature, extending the urban form of Dorchester into the open landscape beyond the town. Although this would be read in context with the existing development at the</p>

	looking north.	<p>north.</p> <p>The site lies to the centre right of the view, extending above the existing urban form of Dorchester.</p> <p>Sensitivity Moderate. A non-public area, representative of the visual amenity from Came View Golf Course. Within the AONB.</p>	<p>town, a new development feature viewed from this elevated location would appear at odds with the local landscape character.</p> <p>Any extensive mitigation planting would also appear incongruous in this consistently open landscape.</p>
17	View from the road to Bincombe Barn, looking north.	<p>The extensive view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set low in the landscape below the extensive downland to the north. The elevated sections of the site lie above the current form of Dorchester in the view, which is partially screened by undulating topography on the South Dorset Ridgeway, but would be read in close proximity to the existing development.</p> <p>Sensitivity Moderate-High. A rural lane with public footpath links within the AONB.</p>	<p>Development at the site would form a small but visible change to the view, extending the urban form of Dorchester into the open landscape beyond the town. Although this would be read in context with the existing development at the town, a new development feature viewed from this elevated location would appear at odds with the local landscape character.</p>
18	View from the South Dorset Ridgeway (National Trail) to the east of Gould's Hill, looking north east.	<p>The extensive view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set low in the landscape below the extensive downland to the north. The elevated sections of the site lie above the current form of Dorchester in the view, which is partially screened by undulating topography on the South Dorset Ridgeway, but would be read in close proximity to the existing development.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A National Trail footpath within the AONB.</p>	<p>Development at the site would form a small but visible change to the view, extending the urban form of Dorchester into the open landscape beyond the town. Although this would be read in context with the existing development at the town, a new development feature viewed from this elevated location would appear at odds with the local landscape character.</p>
19	View from the South Dorset Ridgeway	<p>The extensive view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set low in the landscape below the extensive downland to the north. The elevated</p>	<p>Development at the site would not be discernible from the existing development in Dorchester with the naked eye, but with a zoom or binoculars, a small depth of</p>

	(National Trail) to the south of Eweleaze Barn, looking north east.	<p>sections of the site lie above the current form of Dorchester in the view, which is partially screened by undulating topography on the South Dorset Ridgeway, but would be read alongside the existing development.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. A National Trail footpath within the AONB.</p>	extension may be visible above the current extents of Dorchester. A negligible change to the view.
20	View from the base of the Hardy Monument, looking north east.	<p>The extensive view takes in the sweep of Dorchester set low in the landscape below the extensive downland to the north. The elevated sections of the site lie above the current form of Dorchester in the view, but would be read alongside the existing development.</p> <p>Sensitivity: High. Access Land on a significant local landmark, within the AONB.</p>	Development at the site would not be discernible from the existing development in Dorchester with the naked eye, but with a zoom or binoculars, a small depth of extension may be visible above the current extents of Dorchester. A negligible change to the view.

Mitigation and opportunities for enhancement

- Avoiding development on the highest and more open areas of the landscape would help to reduce the degree to which the skyline would be dominated by development, and would reduce the adverse landscape impacts, however this action would significantly limit the developable area.
- A comprehensive landscape scheme and appropriate tree planting should form the basis of a mitigation and enhancement scheme, and should be developed “up front”, prior to any planning application. It would not be possible, or appropriate, to completely screen development at the site, however the intention should be to create a character of built form set amongst a tree canopy as present at Charminster, Charlton Down, and Dorchester itself.
- It would be necessary to form defined extents of the site through the internal design and new planting to limit the wider impact upon landscape character. A naturalistic form of landscaping avoiding "shelterbelt" planting would be most appropriate.
- Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the arable fields with a planned network of green spaces and linkages would also be encouraged.

Conclusion

There is a high potential for significant and adverse impacts upon the local landscape character from this development. Within the area currently proposed, development would appear to be fundamentally at odds with the rural landscape character of the Cerne and Piddle Valleys and Chalk Downland character area. The open expanses of the medium-large fields could not sensitively accommodate development, demonstrated by the open views towards the site from a number of local, middle distance, and wider visual receptors. Mitigation planting of discrete site areas could be effective in some localised views, however extensive areas of planting would appear incongruous in the elevated and open areas of the site. Localised impacts upon the character of the site and rural lanes would also be significant.

A number of highly sensitive visual receptors would experience views of the site; from public rights of way and national trails both within and outside the AONB designation. Development of this scale could not be completely screened without adversely affecting the landscape character, and consequently, would form a dominant new development feature in a number of these local to middle distance views.

The role the site plays in forming the setting of the town would also be adversely affected, with development interrupting views into open countryside from within and on the northern edge of the town.

In wider views to the south and south west, development would form a modest extension to Dorchester; visible currently as undeveloped fields, but viewed in context with existing development. In views further to the east or west, and on the elevated Osmington Ridge to the south, the site becomes increasingly detached from the urban form of Dorchester, and the site's isolation becomes more apparent.

Overall, it is felt that without substantially reducing the area of built form in this area, the landscape and visual impacts of development could not be mitigated, and there would be significant residual impacts on the character of the landscape.