Landscape Appraisal.

27.9.2023 Rev B

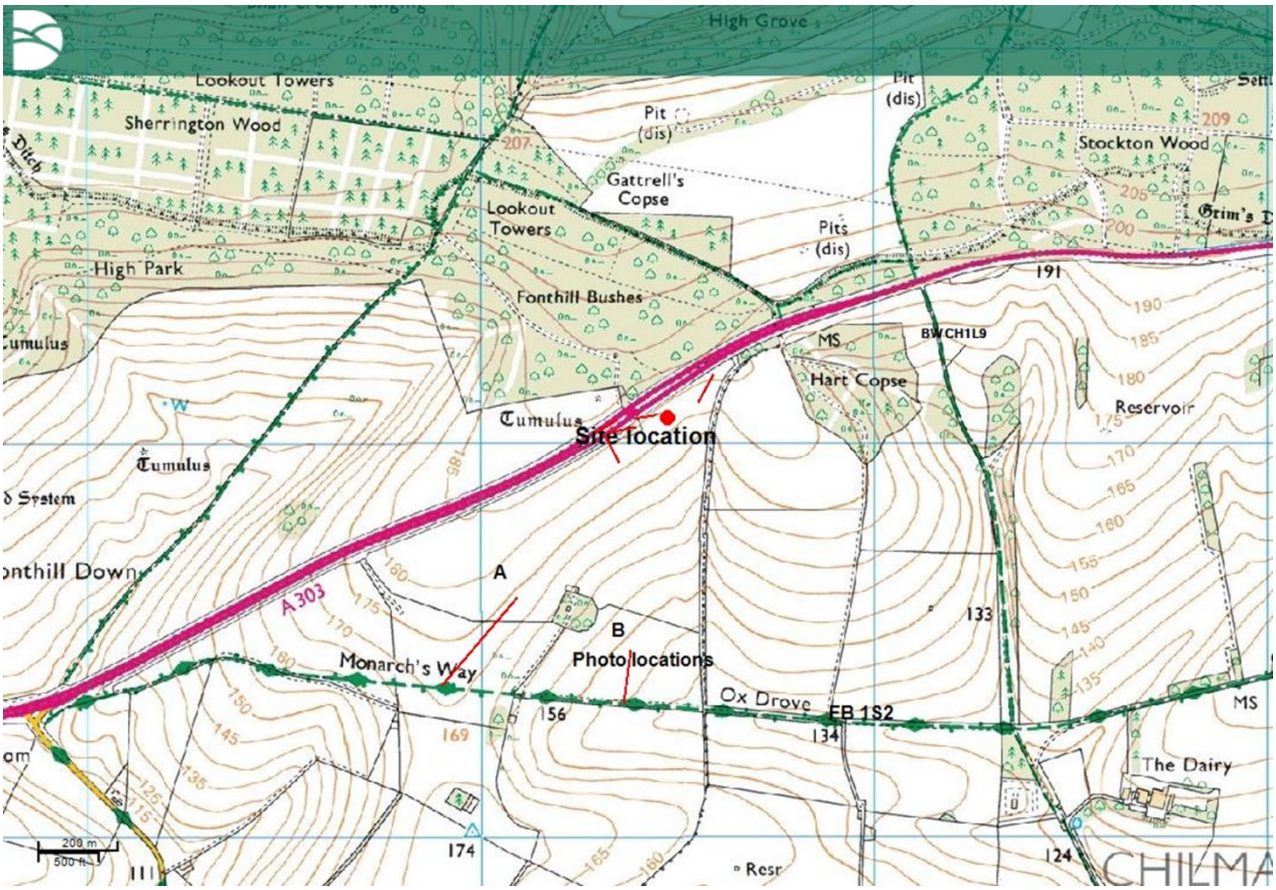
Construct Digestate Storage Lagoon for Fonthill Estate.
Land south of A303, Berwick Farm, Berwick St. Leonard, Wiltshire

1. **Introduction**.

This appraisal provides a description of the sites landscape character, its value and its susceptibility to the development in question and will include any opportunities for appropriate mitigation and/or enhancement.
The appraisal is based on the proposals shown on the Fowler Fortescue site plan dated June 2023 (FONTHILLBISHOP-0623-PROPOSED) and in the information provided in the South Circle Planning and Design 'Prior Approval statement' dated July 2023.

It is to accompany a planning application for the development and in particular because the development lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

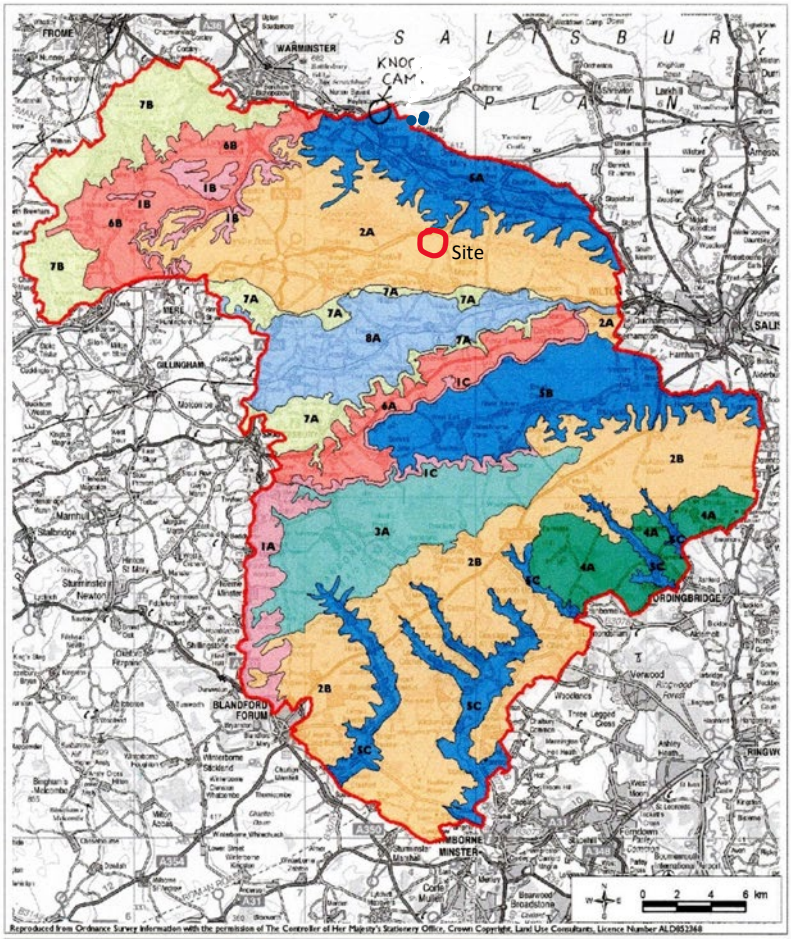
See Site Context and photo viewpoint locations. Plan 1. below.
NB: all the area shown is within the AONB.



Site context.

Land south of A303, Berwick Farm, Berwick St. Leonard, Wiltshire. The proposed lagoon will be sited on arable land on the northern edge of an existing field that abuts the A303 25m to the north and being approximately 2.6 km to the northeast of Fonthill Bishop. See photos below.

Site location within the AONB Landscape Character Assessment. Plan 2 below



The site lies within the Salisbury Plains & West Wiltshire Downs Lands National Character Area (Number 132; as defined by Natural England 2013). It is also within the West Wiltshire Downs Chalk Downland Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined in the Salisbury District Council document 'The Landscape of Salisbury' dated Feb 2008 and the West Wiltshire Downs LCA as defined in the Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment dated June 2003. All of the above state the importance of woods, copses and 'clumps' in contributing to landscape character in this open, large scale and intensively farmed downland landscape

2. **Key Landscape Characteristics of the site**[1]

a. An elevated area of open, intensively farmed arable land with wide expansive views south.

b. The site lies in the northeast corner of a large arable field which stretches and gradually slopes south and southwest.

c. Forms part of a wider downland, large scale and simple arable landscape.

d. A distinctive linear wooded backdrop provided by trees and vegetation along the south side of the adjacent A303 and north south down the eastern edge of the field.

e. The A303 is a major distracting and negative element in the landscape, creating a noisy untranquil perception.

f. The site is closely associated with the west to east running track that runs parallel to the A303 which ends at a turning area adjacent to a lay by and a gated road crossing point next to the site.

3. **Summary of overall character of the site**. *Based on scale, landform, pattern/complexity, settlement & human influences, skyline, visual relationships & views, intervisibility, perceptual/aesthetic criteria.*

The site forms part of a wider open intensively farmed arable landscape, characteristic of the chalk down uplands in this part of the AONB. The field within which the site sits, slopes to the south and is bounded by the distinctive edge formed by the A303 and its associated trees and vegetation. The eastern boundary is also formed by trees and shrubs running north to south down the field boundary. The A303 is a major negative and distracting feature, creating an un tranquil feel in the area.
To the immediate west of the site is a track and turning area linked to a gated crossover on the A303. Close to this is a layby on the A303 within 150 metres of the proposed site on south side of the road. This lay by has open views across the expansive arable landscape. The nearest field boundary to the south of site, is 700 metres away along Ox Drove along which runs Monarch Way, a designated long distance public footpath.
It is from this public right of way that there are some views of the site lying to the north and northeast as one travels along the path.

[1] A site or Landscape Character Areas' key characteristics are aspects of character which give an area its distinct sense of place. It can include key features of importance, which are elements of the landscape of particular prominence or those which catch the eye. If the key positive characteristics were to change or be lost there would be significant negative consequences for the character of the landscape. Equally if key negative characteristics were to be enhanced, this may result in positive consequences for the character and visual amenity of the landscape.

4. **Landscape Value**[2].

The site has some scenic value in its contribution to the wide, open and underdeveloped setting and context of the surrounding landscape. The wooded strips that form the site boundaries to the north, along the A303 and to the east along the field boundary hedgerow, also contribute to the setting of the site.

There is no direct recreational value and little biodiversity value apart from a four to five metre width of unploughed access track along the eastern headland. Being next to the A303 means it has little tranquillity value and there are no known historic or cultural associations that could contribute to the sites value.

5. **Visibility of the landscape/site**[3]. See also photo assessment below.

The site is open to public views primarily from the adjacent A303 lay by and potentially from glimpsed views as you pass along the A303 heading west. The layby is about 150 metres from the proposed site, so relatively close by as seen in the photographs below. However, the occupation or activity of most users of this layby is unlikely to be based on outdoor recreation and scenic experience, their focus more likely to be based on their travels and journey. This reduces the viewpoints sensitivity despite its AONB location.

There are more distant views north and northeast to the site from the Monarchs Way which is approximately 700 metres directly south of the site.

These views are also glimpsed but the occupation or activity of users of this long-distance footpath will be more focused on landscape scenery and recreational amenity.

Users generally will be viewing the scenery in the round and in a sequential way as they pass along this route rather than looking at one particular view. Despite this and due it its location in the AONB and on a designated long distance right of way, these viewpoints will be of high sensitivity.

There are no residential or other properties which have any significant views towards the site. There are also no views of the site from the right of way to the east of the site (BW CHIL9) as the intervening landform blocks views to the north and west. There are some, non-public viewpoints assessed for context and a wider understanding of the site and its potential effect on the landscape and views. These are VPs 1,4,5 and 6.

[2] This is based on Perceptual aspects such as scenic value, tranquillity, wildness, openness, views and remoteness; Cultural and historic associations; Amenity and recreational value; and Wildlife, geodiversity and biodiversity significance.

[3] The degree to which people are susceptible to and concerned about changes in views and visual amenity is a function of:

- The occupation or activity of people experiencing the view at particular locations
- The extent to which their attention or interest may therefore be focused on the views and the visual amenity they experience at particular locations.

The most sensitive receptors are: users of all outdoor recreational facilities including rights of way, whose interest may be focused on the landscape such as visitors to heritage assets, communities where the development results in changes in the landscape setting or values views enjoyed by that community and occupiers of residential properties with views affected by the development.

6. **Survey of photo viewpoints**. See location plan above for viewpoints: Plan 1. Photos taken 25.9.2023.

Viewpoint 1.



View looking directly east along the northern edge of the site from the end of the access track that runs parallel and south of the A303 by the access gate to the A303 crossing point.
This is not a public viewpoint and is therefore of minor sensitivity as it is also a sought-after view despite being in the AONB. The development site will be visible so the overall magnitude of change due to development in this view will be moderate and the overall significance of any landscape and visual impact therefore minor.

Viewpoint 2.



View looking east along the eastern end of the access track that runs parallel and to the south of the A303. It is taken from the lay by which is approximately 150 metres west of the development site. It is a sought-after view as one has to get out of your vehicle and look east. Those people's attention,

occupation and activity in most cases, will unlikely be based on outdoor recreation and scenic experience rather, their focus being on their travels and journey. So, despite being in the AONB this viewpoint has a low sensitivity but the magnitude of change in the view as a result of the development will be high. Overall, therefore the significance of any landscape and visual impact will be moderate to major.

Viewpoint 3.



For context: this is in the same location as 2 but looking south over the access track and shows the open expansive nature of the wider landscape setting. Monarchs Way runs, west to east within the hedged field boundary in the middle distance being the first field boundary located immediately south of the viewpoint some 700 metres away.

Viewpoint 4. For context. See VP2 comments. Just east of the layby on the highway verge



Viewpoint 5. See VP1 comments, this is in the same location as VP1 but shows metal gate to road crossing.



Viewpoint 6.



View looking southwest from the headland along the northern boundary of the site approximately halfway along its proposed footprint. This is not a public viewpoint and therefore is of minor sensitivity being a sought-after view despite being within the AONB. The development site will be visually prominent and will dominate this view, so the overall magnitude of change due to the development will be high. The overall significance of any landscape and visual impact will be moderate to major.

Viewpoint 7. (B on plan 1 above)



View looking north directly towards the proposed site which would 'sit in front' of the horizontal tree line in the middle of the view through the gap in the hedgerow. This photo is taken from Monarch's

Way about 700 metres from the site and is a highly sensitive viewpoint being on a designated long-distance footpath and due to its location in the AONB. This is despite it being a glimpsed view as users pass along the right of way, west or east. In the winter this view will be more obvious due to the lack of deciduous vegetation.
This viewpoints sensitivity is also heightened by the fact that users will have an interest landscape scenery and views will be important to outdoor recreational users. This is despite the fact the viewing experience will be 'in the round' and along their route rather than focused on one location or feature.
The magnitude of change in the view will be minor to moderate, primarily due to the distance from the site and the overall significance of any landscape and visual impact will be moderate to minor.

Viewpoint 8. (A on plan 1 above)



View looking northeast towards the site approximately 850 metres away from Monarchs Way on the highest point along this section of the route. The proposed development will be seen in this location just below the dark tree line in the very centre of the view in the arable field.
It is a sensitive viewpoint being on a designated long-distance footpath and within the AONB despite it being a glimpsed view as users pass along the route west or east.
This viewpoints sensitivity is also heightened by the fact that users will have an interest in landscape scenery and views will be important to outdoor recreational users. This is despite the fact the viewing experience, particularly at this high point, will be 'in the round' and out towards to wider expansive views south, rather than focused on one location or feature.
The magnitude of change in their view will be minor to moderate and the overall significance of any landscape and visual impact minor to moderate.

7. **Landscape susceptibility to the development in question**[4].

Based on the site visit to the wider area, the photo viewpoint assessment of all viewpoints including non-public ones for completeness, and considering the sites value, it is felt the site is of medium susceptibility (moderate-minor) to the development in question.

As seen in the assessment of potential impacts on the viewpoints, the development site is only readily seen from a few close by viewpoints and there is limited visibility of the site from the wider landscape to the south due to the distances from receptors.

This medium level of susceptibility is primarily due to its location near the A303 layby and to some extent due to the impact when viewed from Monarchs Way and in particular on the high ground of Monarchs Way as seen in photo viewpoint 8.

Despite the development including the earthworks being of a reasonable footprint, in terms of the scale of the wider landscape it is felt it would not create a significant adverse impact on landscape character and visual amenity in this part of the open download landscape.

In other words, its susceptibility is 'reduced' to medium as the development would not have a significant adverse impact on the scale, land use pattern and openness of the wider landscape character area.

It is however felt there are significant opportunities to mitigate any moderate-minor adverse impacts.

8. **Opportunities for mitigation and/or enhancement**[5]

As there are moderate to minor adverse impacts assessed from some sensitive viewpoints in particular this provides 'a hook' to justify a range of appropriate mitigation measures.

The viewpoints adjacent to the site; from the public layby and the non-public areas at the eastern end of their access track south of the layby, are close to the site. This relationship and potential adverse impact from this layby was a concern expressed by planning officers in their report dated 17th August 23.

The viewpoints on Monarchs Way are also where there would be some moderate-minor adverse landscape character and visual amenity impacts, despite being some distance from the site.

The following mitigation measures are therefore recommended:

1. Relocating the development site footprint, as shown on FONTHILLBISHOP-0623-PROPOSED plan, a minimum distance of 20-25 metres in the same orientation northeast, towards the existing field corner. This would significantly reduce any adverse impacts from the key viewpoints mentioned above. Between 20-50 metres is approximately the optimum distance for the development footprint to be relocated as any further northeast into the existing field corner and it would be

[4] Landscape susceptibility is a product of landscape value and sensitivity. It is defined as the extent to which the landscape/site can accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of any positive baseline situation and character.

It is based on judgments about the susceptibility of aspects most likely to be affected:

- Natural factors- e.g., extent and pattern of semi-natural habitat
- Cultural factors- e.g. land use, enclosure pattern
- Landscape condition- e.g. representation of typical character
- Aesthetic factors- e.g. scale, enclosure, pattern, form/line, movement
- Landscape value- see 4 above

[5] Opportunities and the scope to mitigate the potential adverse impacts will be outlined (the purpose of mitigation is to avoid, reduce and where possible remedy or offset any negative impacts).

more open to views from Monarchs Way. This is due to the fact the far northeast corner of the existing field is more open to views from elevated locations along the Way.

2. Plant up with native woodland tree and shrub species, the regraded earthworks around the northwest, north, northeast, southwest and southeast corners of the development area. This will form a natural extension of the planting along the existing north and east boundaries of the site which were identified as key site characteristics. It would form a natural backdrop to the site when viewed from the south in particular helping to 'sit' the development into its setting.
   It would also tie in with the wooded 'clumps' which are key characteristics of the landscape character area e.g., similar to the nearby Harts Coppice to the east of the site.
3. The areas of earthworks associated with the southern slopes not planted up, should be over sown with an appropriate chalk wildflower mix which will help to conserve and enhance this habitat.
4. All areas to be either planted up or over sown, will be sown immediately post completion of the works with a non-ryegrass reclamation mix such as produced by British Flora. In the short term this will help to integrate, 'green up' the development into its wider setting and help to stabilise the slopes.
   It is understood that during construction in this chalk landscape, there will inevitably be some moderate-major adverse impacts. However immediately post the engineering works the sewing of this non rye grass mix will within a reasonable time period, reduce the construction impacts to an acceptable level of significance.
   In the long term, once the planting has started to mature and the grass established, the site will be satisfactorily integrated into its wooded backdrop setting and seen in association in its field corner context.

All of the above mitigation proposals will help to conserve and enhance landscape character and help in maintaining the 'strong' strength of character as defined in the AONB Landscape Character Assessment (see P.97).

They are also in line with the Management Objectives for this Downland Character Area as stated in both the AONB and Salisbury District Assessments i.e., they will promote the management of arable farmland to create wildlife rich habitat and create new deciduous woodland which are key features in the area.

The Salisbury District Assessment states that this Downland Character Area is of high visual sensitivity principally because of the far ranging inter visibility and upland character of the area. The proposed woodland planting mitigation will help in this regard by assimilating the development into its landscape setting by tying it in with the existing wooded backdrop to the site.

There is an opportunity therefore to 'conserve and in particular enhance' the overall landscape setting of the area as part of this development. This will be in line with National Planning Policy Framework (2019)[6] and the AONB Management Plan objectives and policies[7].

[6] For example, NPPF Paragraph 172 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

[7] Cranborne Chase AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. Presents objectives & policies that partners can apply to help conserve & enhance this nationally important landscape. Objectives PT. B and LAN. B are particularly relevant.

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