

Landscape

Officer name: Mark Goodwin CMLI (Senior Landscape Officer)
Date: 17.04.2025

Application No: **PL/2025/03307**
Proposal: Erection of B8 use Unit and associated works
Site Address: **Land west of Oakleigh Acres, Draycot Cerne, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 5LH.**
Case Officer: Mykola Druziakin

Recommendation:

☐	No objection
☐	No objection subject to condition/s
☐	Holding objection
☒	Object (for reasons set out below)

Matters Considered:

Landscape and visual related matters.

Background:

This is a full planning application for development of a proposed new B8 facility in connection with relocation of an existing road haulage business currently operating from an established base within the Bowerhill Industrial Estate, Melksham.

A Pre-Application Planning enquiry was submitted for this potential development at this identified site, Wiltshire planning application reference number ENQ/2024/00857.

Pre-application Planning advice was provided by the LPA dated 29 July 2024. Within that pre-application planning advice, it was advised that due to the open and rural greenfield nature of the application site, in combination with the presence of trees, hedges and public rights of way in the locality that a 'Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' alongside an 'arboricultural survey' and 'arboricultural impact assessment' should be prepared to accompany any subsequent planning application.

While the application is supported by an 'Arboricultural Survey' (AS), 'Arboricultural Impact Assessment' (AIA) and 'Tree Protection Plan' (TPP), the application is not supported by either a full 'Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)' or a simpler / more proportionate 'Landscape and Visual Appraisal' (LVA) as the LPA requested within their pre-application response. Despite the absence of an LVIA/LVA within the planning submission, I offer the following comments in relation to landscape and visual matters arising from the proposed development at this location.

Relevant Planning Policy: (Landscape and visual matters)

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Dec 2024 & Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- Section 12: Achieving well-designed and beautiful places.
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Development Plan (Local Policy)

Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015

- Core policy 51: Landscape.
- Core Policy 57: Ensuring high quality design and place shaping.
- Core Policy 52: Green Infrastructure.

North Wiltshire District Local Plan 2011 (Saved Policies)

- Core Policy NE12: Woodland.
- Core Policy NE14: Trees, Site Features and the control of new development.

Neighbourhood Plan/s

The site lies just within the northeastern boundary limits of the parish of Kington Langley, for which no neighbourhood plan currently exists.

The site adjoins the parish boundary of Sutton Benger (incorporating Draycot Cerne) along its southern and eastern edges. The Parish of Sutton Benger does have a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan, the 'Sutton Benger and Draycot Cerne Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020 – 2035' (Made March 2025).

Comments / observations:

Character and appearance

The site comprises the western part of an existing larger arable field fronting and accessed directly from the B4122. This larger field area provides an existing greening separation between the recently constructed St Modwen B8 storage and distribution warehouses to the west and Chippenham truck stop/Pit stop to the east. To the north and opposite the site, lies the Wiltshire Council owned Stanton St. Quinton Household Recycling Centre, with the M4 motorway beyond.

The site lies within the 'Limestone Lowland' character type. The Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (2005) identifies the site as falling within the '16A: Malmesbury-Corsham Limestone Lowlands' Landscape Character Area.

This local area of countryside has been substantially impacted by recent approval / construction of the St. Modwen Development and is exposed to noise emanating from the M4 motorway and other urbanising uses and associated noise and traffic from the household recycling centre and the Chippenham truck/Pit stop. This is not a quiet tranquil area of unspoilt countryside. Despite this, the countryside to the south of the site retains many rural agricultural qualities that should be conserved and enhanced to sustain characteristic agricultural landscape settings to Draycot Cerne (highly characteristic small limestone village settlement) and the setting and approach to the surviving historic Draycot Parkland further to the east.

It is not abundantly clear from the planning information submitted why the proposed development is planned to be set so far back from the B1422 road. This necessitates the construction of a longer than required access road.

This neighbourhood development plan references the recent approvals of unallocated employment uses extending along the B4122 associated with the A350 Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA), and seeks to protect against harmful influences of traffic and noise generation from further unallocated employment land use approvals expanding outwards from Junction 17 of the M4 motorway into and impacting upon the neighbourhood plan area and reducing the rural separating countryside important to maintain the separate identity and landscape settings of Sutton Benger and Draycot Cerne settlements.

Important views and visual effects

The NP identifies a number of locally important views within **POLICY SB3: IMPORTANT VIEWS AND VISTAS**. These views are illustrated within accompanying figure 14. The policy requires that development proposals should respond positively to the identified views and demonstrate consideration of matters relating to design, height, and massing, either individually or cumulatively and concludes that development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on an identified Important View will not be supported.

I have looked at these identified important views contained within Policy SB3 and consider that those views with most potential for observing the proposed development as a perceptible change effect within their fields of view could include;

- PM 4 - View looking in four directions from SBEN32 (elevated vantage point from Draycot Parkland, looking south, west and east).
- PM 13 View from Public Right of Way SBEN14 (looking southwest & west)
- PM 15 View from Public Right of Way SBEN15 (looking northeast)

In relation to these valued local views, the proposed development would not generate unacceptable visual change effects over and above the existing visual baseline situation for any of these identified important views. This is largely due to the screening function already provided by intervening woodland and treelines to the south of Chippenham Pit Stop and Wessex Auction Rooms, including the existing woodland adjoining the southeast corner of the site in combination with the much lower height and lesser massing of the proposed buildings viewed against the existing backdrop of the very large B8 distribution sheds within the adjacent St Modwen Development, i.e. there unlikely to be any additional cumulative urbanising skyline effects generated over and above those already present.

There are likely to be locations from the rural Rights of Way network to the south of the site, on the opposite side of the shallow valley, where intervening topography or vegetation will not screen available views of new development. These would likely be experienced from specific points along footpath SBEN3, footpath SBEN14, and from higher land to the north of Lipgate Farm from byway KLAN34. Receptors from these public vantage points are likely to view the development across the shallow valley landform as a lower-level expansion of the St Modwen development site extending slightly further east, although the large B8 sheds within the St. Modwen site would remain visually dominant within these views.

An appropriate way to minimise and mitigate these visual effects would be to extend the existing woodland adjoining the southeastern corner of the site, with new linear native woodland planting belt along the southern edge of the site, extending west to the St Modwen site.

Design and appearance

I note the planned colour treatment to the lorry service building, which attempts to copy the graded horizontal colour scheme of the adjacent St. Modwen very large (up to 18m high) storage and distribution warehousing units. The interpretation of this is slightly misguided in my opinion as it seeks to include the full colour gradation in a proposed new building which is just 7m high, and which would not break the horizon or rise above background landscaping. In this regard it would be better to remove the lighter colours proposed otherwise the lighter higher colours used will contrast sharply against St Modwen sheds and woodland unhelpfully drawing the eye and silhouetting the new lorry service building. The use of the higher-level lighter colour tones within the St. Modwen development was an attempt to reduce bulk and massing effects of much larger development and reduce the harshness of new skyline impacts. This development does not generate the same level of impact in this regard, so the colours used should be the darker lower height tones within this development. I would be happy to further liaise with the applicant's agent or designer on this matter if the LPA considers this appropriate.

The office building is a simple single storey brick and tile utilitarian building which would have less visual presence than the larger service building. It is not particularly supportive of the local inherent built character of the area but there is local material use variability in the context of the site.

The lorry parking areas would be largely screened from the road by the proposed new buildings, but these parking areas would be distinctly visible alongside the new buildings and security fencing viewed from the adjacent public footpath (KLAN29) which extends along the western edge of the site. Lorry parking areas could be better screened from wider countryside receptors located further south and southeast, and development better assimilated into the receiving landscape context if a strip of new woodland could be planted along the southern edge of the site.

Landscaping proposals

While I welcome the inclusion of internal site landscaping, including new tree planting along the edge of the new access road, the currently proposed landscaping treatment fronting the public road B4122 is severely lacking. The new development should deliver additional landscaping measures fronting the B4122. This should comprise planting a new native hedgerow including some hedgerow trees along the back edge of any required highway sightlines (including making allowance for future growth (hedge width), and any potential new pedestrian footways that the highways authority may request). This is viewed to be necessary to support placemaking fronting the public road and to help maintain the inherent rural character of this road, enhance green infrastructure connections and to provide appropriate amenity and landscape screening filtering functions towards the new development and security fences. The objective should be to provide a consistent continuum of the frontage landscape treatment already delivered for the adjoining St. Modwen development to the west and the proposed (approved but not implemented) frontage landscaping treatment fronting the B4122 connected with the expansion of the Chippenham Pit Stop facility further east. i.e. planting a new native hedgerow incorporating hedgerow trees behind any new frontage footways and visibility splays with security fencing located within the site behind this.

Boundary treatments

I note the intention is to enclose the whole land in the applicant's control with 2.4m high steel palisade security fencing (rail track type fencing). This seems unnecessary. This application does not propose to change the blue line land from existing agricultural use. The proposed lorry service and parking yard is already being enclosed along all its edges by this same 2.4m high steel palisade fencing. This type of fence is not considered to be an appropriate boundary treatment to enclose or physically separate agricultural land.

The subdivision of the larger host field to separate this application site and blue line land from the remaining farmland to the east should be separated by a new simple agricultural fence line (separating the agricultural land each side) and the planting of a new native hedge to support and enhance the inherent rural characteristic field enclosure of the area. The planting of a new native hedge line will also strengthen north/south green infrastructure connections along the eastern side of the site.

Arboricultural matters

While I defer to this council's tree officer for definitive arboricultural advice and planning requirement acceptability, I highlight that the Arboricultural Impact Assessment includes an annotation to referenced trees that are seemingly not related to this site. i.e. T18 & T34, which I assume should be referenced as G01 & G02.

I note slight encroachment into RPA's of G01 & G02. In my opinion the site is large enough to enable the reconfiguration of lorry parking layouts so as not to impact on identified tree Root Protection Areas.

Surface water drainage strategy

It is understood that the surface water drainage strategy for the site is proposed as wrapped underground attenuation crates with perimeter swales and filter drains. It is a shame that this approach is being proposed here as multifunctional SuDS solution would be preferable way forward to help deliver the 4 design pillars of SuDS, in particular additional amenity and biodiversity benefits.

It is not clear what the applicant's proposal is for disposal of the large volumes of resulting subsoil and topsoil arising from the construction of this scheme. It is assumed that resulting waste soils will not be

disposed within the (red line) application site or stored on a temporary or permanent basis on the adjoining (blue line) land in the applicant's control/ownership to the north of the site. I would suggest the LPA should seek further clarity on this matter to ensure resulting waste soils connected with this proposed development will be disposed off-site.

Conclusion:

While this site is not an identified site allocation within the Development Plan, and is being speculatively proposed on greenfield, previously undeveloped farmland, I offer no opinion in relation to whether the location of the proposed application site and form of employment land use proposed is acceptable in principle in planning policy terms at this location.

I confirm that the site is not located within any local or national landscape designation/s and the location is strongly influenced by existing adjoining urbanising employment uses and associated noise and traffic including from the nearby M4 motorway and Stanton St. Quinton Household Recycling Centre.

While no LVIA/LVA is submitted with the application, the potential for this development to give rise to any particularly adverse wider landscape and visual effects is unlikely assessed against the existing landscape and visual baseline situation, either on the development's own merits, or cumulatively in combination with adjoining development.

With sensitive design and appropriate landscaping measures and mitigation in place, the proposal would be unlikely to result in any significant adverse landscape or visual effects, other than the obvious change to the existing land use of the site itself. This is largely due to the backdrop of the St Modwen development and other neighbouring urbanising influences extending along this section of the B4122, in combination with the comparative low height of development being proposed by this application and screening functions provided by intervening trees, vegetation and local topography, the adverse effects of which could be reduced further with more sensitive design consideration and mitigating landscaping measures.

As outlined earlier within this response...

The proposed design in relation to use of colour within the main lorry service building needs to be revised to avoid unnecessary and unintended contrasting visual effects.

The currently proposed landscaping treatment fronting the B4122 is not considered sufficient to support appropriate place shaping quality or character. A continuum of frontage landscaping as implemented as part of the St. Modwen Development (west) and as secured within the Chippenham Pit Stop expansion proposals (east of the site) is required.

The enclosure and separation of blue line agricultural land from adjoining agricultural land and adjoining the access track to the east is not appropriate with 2.4m high steel palisade security fencing, this should be replaced with typical agricultural timber post and wire netting, stock proof fencing.

Further consideration should also be given to additionally screening the site and better integrating lorry parking areas viewed from the south, by extending the screening function of existing woodland with a new connecting belt of native woodland planting along the southern edge of the site.

The requirements and resulting effects of any external lighting and floodlighting proposals along the road access and external yard areas should be further provided and considered.

Recommendation

A landscape objection is viewed to be necessary until such time as the identified matters of landscape/visual/design concern are sufficiently and appropriately addressed by revised planning submissions.

End.