

Land Northwest of Radstone Fields
Brackley

Arboricultural Impact Assessment

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Executive Summary

- i) **Introduction.** Aspect Arboriculture are commissioned by Mintondale Developments Ltd to undertake an Arboricultural Survey and produce a subsequent Arboricultural Impact Assessment in respect of the proposed introduction of residential led development at Land North of Radstone Fields, Brackley.
- ii) **Proposals.** The proposals comprise an application seeking consent to introduce residential development comprising up to 450 dwellings, including formal sports provision, public open space and a cemetery together with associated infrastructure including foul and storm water drainage and full details of access arrangements from Halse Road comprising 4 new access points, (2 primary and 2 secondary); two access points from Radstone Fields.
- iii) **Surveys.** The Site was surveyed by Aspect Arboriculture in October 2020 following the guidance contained within BS5837:2012.
- iv) **Statutory Designations.** Background checks reveal that the Site is not located within a Conservation Area, nor are any of the trees afforded protection within a Tree Preservation Order.
- v) **Arboricultural Impact.** The arboricultural impact of the proposed development majors on the removal of sections of agricultural field boundary hedgerows and shelter belt plantings. It will be necessary to remove seven trees worthy of individual distinction, due to proposed highways works. All tree removals are mitigable within an appropriate scheme of soft landscaping. A preliminary tree protection drawing is provided to demonstrate the deliverability of safeguarding measures for retained trees and to highlight which trees are recommended for removal.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background & Proposals

1.1.1 Aspect Arboriculture are instructed by Mintondale Developments Ltd. to establish and report on the arboricultural impact of the introduction proposed residential development at Land North of Radstone Fields, Brackley.

1.1.2 The proposals comprise an application seeking consent to introduce residential development comprising up to 450 dwellings, including formal sports provision, public open space and a cemetery together with associated infrastructure including foul and storm water drainage and full details of access arrangements from Halse Road comprising 4 new access points, (2 primary and 2 secondary); two access points from Radstone Fields.

1.2 Site Overview

1.2.1 The application site is formed of two distinct elements, both entirely within the administrative control of South Northamptonshire Council (SNC):

1.2.2 The southern area is proposed to receive residential led development, and comprises the entirety of two adjoining agricultural fields, and part of the adjacent field, directly to the north. To the southeast, the application area abuts the adjacent, recently constructed Radstone Fields development. To the west the boundary is defined by, and the fields currently accessed from, Halse Road, beyond which lies further agricultural land. To the north and east, continuing agricultural land bounds the area.

1.2.3 The northern portion of the application area is proposed to provide sports pitches and associated parking, and is formed of the southern corner section of an arable field which is separated from the majority of the application area by an intermediate field. The northern element is accessed from The Worlidge; a bridleway and established agricultural track, which also defines the area's southern boundary. To the south, west and north, the adjacent land is also under arable usage, whilst to the east lies a solar farm with underlying pasture.

1.3 Existing Tree Stock

1.3.1 The tree cover within influence of the Site can be described as three distinct cohorts: Firstly, the existing fields are surrounded by maintained agricultural field boundary hedgerows; the second cohort is formed of dense shelter belt buffer planting, located on the northwestern and western extents of the southern two fields; thirdly, occasional more established broadleaved trees are set within the boundary hedgerows – primarily defining the eastern boundary, adjacent to Halse Road, and also lining The Worlidge. As is typical for both site elements' current agricultural usage, the existing tree cover is primarily limited to the boundaries and offsite, where it is incidental to the current land use.

- 1.3.2 The site's principal tree cover relates to five mature broadleaves; four English Oak and one Ash, all sited adjacent to The Worlidge, where they have established within the existing field boundary hedgerows. In all cases, the mature trees form the dominant components of the boundary tree groups and, although exhibiting a usual amount of storm damage and deadwood for their maturity, provide a significant contribution to the site's amenity. All are considered capable of providing a long term contribution and associated benefit to the site. On this basis, regardless of their defects, all five fulfil the criteria for consideration as category A components of the tree stock within the guidance of BS5837:2012. Being sited as they are, none will be affected by the proposed residential development, and the proposed sports pitches have been sited to avoid the RPAs of the key trees.
- 1.3.3 A number of features within influence of the site warrant category B, these comprise established broadleaf trees (sixteen Ash, and two English Oak) both within the hedgerows, and lining Halse Road. Although established components of the tree stock, none demonstrate the special quality required to enable their higher categorisation. Those lining Halse Road in particular are afforded category B by virtue of their visual contribution to views from the public highway rather than their arboricultural quality, which is limited through their reduced physiological and structural condition.
- 1.3.4 Correspondingly, the existing shelter belt planting defining the boundaries of the southernmost fields is considered to warrant category B. This category is afforded by virtue of its collective visual contribution to the site and immediate surroundings; rather than the arboricultural quality of the individual components. Due to its planting density and lack of management, the individual components contained therein have developed etiolated structures due to mutual suppression, and none are considered to be of individual significance, and are by definition replaceable.
- 1.3.5 A number of established groups of deciduous trees define the site's northeastern boundary, line the western side of Halse Road and also the southeastern side of The Worlidge. Comprising a variety of ages between Semi-Mature and Mature the components are considered more arboriculturally significant than those within the shelter belt planting, albeit again lacking the special quality required to enable their higher classification.
- 1.3.6 Within the scope of the tree survey, two early mature Ash warrant category U only within BS5837 guidance. Both are located adjacent to the northern sports pitch area:
- 1.3.7 T11 has suffered a major structural failure of a co dominant stem at c.5.5m, its remaining crown was particularly sparse and contained a very high degree of deadwood. Its resultant physiological condition is such that it is anticipated to be in a state of terminal decline regardless of any proposed development.
- 1.3.8 Similarly, T14 was exhibiting a significant failure at c.2m; its current canopy is formed solely of a single secondary limb. Subsequently, its future outlook is considered to be particularly limited.

- 1.3.9 All remaining tree cover within influence of the application area is considered to be of low arboricultural quality only. The low quality elements comprise the boundary hedgerows, low quality Ash, Hawthorn and Crack Willow contained therein, and internally sited establishing buffer planting and scrub encroachment.

2 Statutory Designations

2.1 Conservation Area

2.1.1 Background checks reveal that the Site is not located within a Conservation Area (SNC, September 2020). Accordingly, the amenity value of the trees is not elevated to preserving or enhancing any unique or distinctive interest linked to the setting.

2.2 Tree Preservation Orders

2.2.1 It is also understood that no trees within influence of the application area are afforded protection within a Tree Preservation Order (SNC, September 2020). The nearest Tree Preservation Order (ref: 08/2012) is located offsite to the south, and affords protection to a belt of primarily deciduous trees to the east of Halse Road.

3 Policy Review

3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework

3.1.1 The NPPF (2019) provides planning policy guidance at a National level. With respect to arboriculture, it considers that 'decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland' (para 170b), and; 'development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists' (para. 175c).

3.1.2 For clarity, no trees are considered to be veteran, nor are any areas of designated ancient woodland within influence of the application area, against which the tests of para 175c can be applied.

3.2 South Northamptonshire Local Plan

3.2.1 At a local level, South Northamptonshire Council has a statutory obligation to ensure adequate provision is made for the preservation of trees through Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990). Policies from the South Northamptonshire Part 2 Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted July 2020) and those contained within the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Local Plan (Part 1) (adopted December 2014), are understood to comprise the Council's current primary development control policies; of which, Policy NE4 *Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows* and Policy BN3 *Woodland Enhancement and Creation* are the tests considered relevant to trees in the context of development (reproduced below).

3.2.2 POLICY NE4 – Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

1. *'Proposals for development should seek to integrate existing trees, woodland and hedgerows.*
2. *Development that results in the loss of ancient woodland or aged and veteran trees or other protected trees will rarely be acceptable. Proposals that would result in the loss or deterioration of these specimens will be refused unless the need for, and benefit of the development in that location clearly and demonstrably outweighs the loss.*
3. *Proposals for felling or pruning will not be permitted to a tree in a conservation area or to a tree subject to a tree preservation order except where the proposal is justified in the interests of good arboricultural practice or other clear environmental benefits.*
4. *Where the loss of existing trees, woodland or hedgerows is unavoidable, suitable replacement planting will be required within the development site, or secured via*

planning obligation to be provided at another location with direct links to the development site.

5. *Planting schemes should, where possible, use native or similar species and varieties, and maximise the benefits to the local landscape and wildlife.'*

3.2.3 POLICY BN3 – Woodland Enhancement and Creation

'Measures to enhance and manage existing woodlands and create new woodlands in west Northamptonshire will be supported. Opportunities will be sought to create new woodland to buffer, extend and relink areas of ancient woodland which have become fragmented. The protection of aged or veteran trees outside ancient woodlands will also be supported. Development that would lead to further fragmentation or result in a loss of ancient woodland, aged and veteran trees will not be permitted unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.'

4 Arboricultural Impact

4.1 Net Tree Removals¹

- 4.1.1 Trees are recommended for removal where: a) it is necessary and unavoidable to Site development within proximity to existing trees, such that they cannot be confidently retained in the long-term as living features, and/or b), where the amenity value of the tree will be significantly reduced as a result of the proposals, particularly if already of a low retention priority.
- 4.1.2 Arboricultural input has been provided from an early stage of design of the layout; as a result, the proposed layout provides significant buffers between the residential development and both the southeastern and northeastern boundary trees and hedgerows, and the internal hedgerow and shelter belt. The spatial separation between the tree cover and residential properties is further reinforced by the use of single sided roads and outward facing properties.
- 4.1.3 Similarly, the arrangement of the sports pitches has been designed to avoid the Root Protection Areas associated with the important trees adjacent to The Worlidge. It has also been confirmed that the proposed car parking provision at the southernmost extent of the field can be designed to avoid the RPA of category B Ash T12.
- 4.1.4 Consequentially, the unavoidable removals are limited to sections of hedgerows and shelter belt planting to provide vehicular access and interconnectivity between the fields within the residential development; and tree cover which must be removed to implement the highways improvement works to Halse Road. The necessary removals are detailed within Table 1 below.

Table 1: Net Tree Removals by BS5837 Category

Category B	Category C
T1, T2, T5, T6, T7, T9, T10 Ash	G6+ (2no. sections)
G1+	H1+
G5+ (3no. sections)	H3+
	H6+ (1no. section)
	H8+ (1no. section)
	H11+ (5no. sections)
	H14+ (2no. sections)
	H15 Hawthorn (2no. sections)

+ Denotes mixed species assemblage of three or more species – refer to Appendix B

Δ Denotes partial clearance of tree group or hedge

- 4.1.5 Although a number of Ash adjacent to Halse Road, and the buffer planting to be removed warrants category B within the guidance of BS5837, none are of the trees are

¹All tree works should be timed to avoid the main nesting season for birds between 1st March and 31st August. If scheduled within this period it is recommended that an ecologist is present to advise on any necessary protective measures, and on hand to confirm that tree works are not likely to cause disturbance to nesting birds.

of individual arboricultural significance, and all could be mitigated for within an appropriate planting scheme

4.2 Vulnerable Trees

4.2.1 As a result of arboricultural input, the proposals do not necessitate the introduction of development features within the RPAs of any retained trees. It has also been confirmed that during detailed design the parking provision associated with the sports pitches can be relocated to outside the RPA of category B Ash T12.

4.3 Protective Barriers and Ground Protection

4.3.1 It will be important to protect the retained trees' above-ground structures and underlying RPAs from damage during construction works. To achieve this, tree protection barriers should be erected prior to the commencement of any development works.

4.3.2 For the direct protection of retained trees, barriers should consist of the default barrier specification provided in BS5837:2012. Elsewhere within the proposed development, where hedgerows are to be protected, a reduced specification barrier which omits diagonal bracing to the rear is considered appropriate. This specification is to comprise heras panels on rubber feet, secured every second panel with a driven 100x100mm timber post or scaffold pole.

4.3.3 The locations for protective fencing are illustrated within the Tree Protection Plan (Appendix C) with a bold blue line signifying the default barrier, and a light blue dashed line illustrating the secondary hedgerow specification (refer to figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Tree Protection Barriers



4.4 Pruning Works²

- 4.4.1 It is recommended that throughout the entire Site, dead branches should be entirely removed from the canopies of retained trees. Although this work is not required to facilitate construction, it will help mitigate the risk of future tree related hazards emerging.
- 4.4.2 Pruning works should be undertaken in accordance with section 7.3 (for removal of deadwood) of BS3998:2010. Pruning works should be carried out by a competent tree contractor, to ensure that cuts are performed correctly and positioned so as to avoid future structural defects or physiological issues, facilitate growth and maintain aesthetic value.

4.5 Mitigation Replanting

- 4.5.1 The removal of seven category B Ash and shelter belt planting generates a requirement for replacement mitigation planting. In accordance, the proposals will be accompanied by a scheme of soft landscaping. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (submitted separately) outlines the approach to the provision of tree planting and soft landscaping. It is anticipated that detailed planting proposals can be secured by condition.
- 4.5.2 The planting proposals will seek to enhance the site boundaries with additional tree, hedge and shrub planting, where required.
- 4.5.3 Within the residential development, the landscape buffers have the capacity to receive a meaningful extent of planting of large canopied species. Throughout the development, smaller incidental areas of open space can receive a selection of ornamental species appropriate for the more constrained setting.
- 4.5.4 In addition, the removed hedgerow adjacent to Halse Road will be replaced with new native hedgerow, and tree planting. Ultimately, this provides the opportunity to replace the poor condition Ash with higher quality components of more varied species selection. This element of the scheme can also mitigate for the unavoidable removal of the shelter belt G1, with a high quality landscaped frontage.
- 4.5.5 Gaps within the existing hedgerows adjacent to The Worlidge will be infilled, and a new hedgerow will provide a defined northern boundary to the sport pitches, which will also be improved with additional tree planting the northern and western boundaries.
- 4.5.6 The current land use limits the presence of tree cover to the boundaries of the arable fields. Subsequently the proposals provide the opportunity to improve both the

² All tree works should be timed to avoid the main nesting season for birds between 1st March and 31st August. If scheduled within this period it is recommended that an ecologist is present to advise on any necessary protective measures, and on hand to confirm that tree works are not likely to cause disturbance to nesting birds.

quality and distribution of tree cover within the application area, whilst mitigating for the loss of the individually low quality tree cover from the Halse Road frontage.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1.1 In accordance with SNC's adopted development control policies, the development proposals have been informed by an arboricultural survey of the existing tree stock, following guidance within BS5837:2012.
- 5.1.2 To minimise necessary tree removals, the residential element of the scheme has been designed to provide buffers to the boundary hedgerows and trees, and the sports pitches are sited to avoid the RPAs of all significant trees. Although the highways proposals necessitate the removal of seven Ash, and shelter belt planting G1 considered to warrant category B within BS5837:2012, this is unavoidable in order to deliver the improved highways and access provision required within the scheme.
- 5.1.3 The proposals will be accompanied by a scheme of landscaping, and provide the opportunity to secure betterment to the tree stock. The soft landscape proposals will mitigate for the unavoidable removals and can reinforce and complement the retained tree stock, whilst also providing betterment in terms of amenity and seasonal interest.
- 5.1.4 Subject to ongoing arboricultural input during detailed design of the proposals, including levels, drainage and services, and the implementation of safeguards for protecting retained trees during construction, the proposed development can be introduced whilst ensuring the confident protection of retained trees.
- 5.1.5 Whilst SNC's adopted Policy NE4 requires that proposals seek to integrate existing trees and hedgerows, it does not preclude the unavoidable removal of trees to implement development. The tree removals detailed are unavoidable to provide vehicular access to and interconnectivity between development parcels. Subsequently, the introduction of the proposed development does not conflict with SNC's adopted Policies NE4, BN3. Given the absence of harm to any veteran trees or Ancient Woodland, the scheme also accords with NPPF paragraph 175c.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1.1 Pursuant to the Council's preference to ensure confident tree retention during development, a detailed Arboricultural Method Statement should be prepared, which expands on Appendix C. This could be secured by Condition.
- 6.1.2 The Arboricultural Method Statement should address matters including: specification for tree protection barriers, including revisions to barrier locations; a schedule of tree works; any works within RPAs; details of services, drainage and levels; phasing of work; a scheme for auditing tree protection and subsequent reporting to the LPA should feature explicitly throughout.
- 6.1.3 Detailed Tree Protection Drawings should be prepared to 1:500 scale to support the AMS, with detail given of proposed levels and service routes.

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