Cinderford Northern Quarter
Landscape & Visual Appraisal
PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT
March 2011
Cinderford Northern Quarter
Pre Submission Draft AAP– LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

March 2011

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For and on behalf of
Environmental Resources Management

Approved by: Geraint Bowden

Signed:
Position: Partner
Date: 10th March 2011

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1 CINDERFORD AAP PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT – LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents a review of the landscape character baseline for the site of the Cinderford Northern Quarter Area Action Plan (AAP) and the surrounding area and considers the AAP proposals within this context. The report addresses consultation responses from Natural England (letter dated 4th December 2009) and also comments raised by local groups such as Friends of the Forest regarding the landscape character of the area in relation to a potential designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

1.2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND DATA REVIEWED.

The baseline landscape study took account of landscape character data at National level and that developed for the County of Gloucestershire. Within the County, a landscape character assessment was produced for the Forest of Dean in 2002. This formed the basis for the preparation of a landscape strategy for the district in 2004. The final report, covering the remaining landscapes in Gloucestershire was published in January 2006. The above documents informed the preparation of this report and are referenced in full below:

- Natural England – Countryside Character: Forest of Dean and Lower Wye, National Character Area No 105;
- The Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, January 2006;
- Forest of Dean District Landscape Character Assessment, February 2002;
- Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy, June 2004;

1.3 BASELINE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

1.3.1 National Landscape Character

The AAP site is located north west of the settlement of Cinderford within National Landscape Character Area no. 105, Forest of Dean and Lower Wye. The key characteristics of this landscape are presented below in italics as taken from the national character assessment data:

- A well-wooded plateau of ridges and valleys, contained by outer rim of more open landscape on limestone and sandstone ridges.
- Small-scale varied industry and industrial artefacts intermixed with settlements and large broadleaved and coniferous woodlands.
- A strong sense of identity through being remote and self-contained.
• Ever-present evidence of history, with artefacts and elements from many historic periods still visible.
• Scattered and sprawling settlements and small holdings retaining the feel of clearances from the forest.
• Mixed building materials and sporadic development give amorphous and disorganised feel to settlements.

The undulating plateau has a sense of isolation, remoteness and containment owing to its enclosure by two large rivers (the Rivers Wye and Severn). The extensive woodland cover contributes to the sense of remoteness.

The most elevated parts of this landscape are located in the north. These steep sided hills and wooded ridges are located in the areas of Mitcheldean, Ruardean Woodside, Drybrook and Cinderford.

The sense of containment in this national character area contrasts with the occasional extensive views out towards other landscapes including the Welsh borders to the west, the Severn Valley to the east and to the flat plains of Herefordshire to the north.

1.3.2 County Landscape Character

The Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment (2006) covers parts of the County of Gloucestershire not covered in the landscape character data produced prior to this date for the Forest of Dean District and separately for the Cotswolds AONB both of which lie within the County. Therefore whilst of interest in a broader context, as a result of data relating to the neighbouring Severn Valley, this document is not directly relevant to the AAP site area and has therefore not been considered in great detail herein.

1.3.3 District Landscape Character

Forest of Dean Landscape Character Assessment 2002

According to the District Landscape Character Assessment the AAP site lies within Landscape Character Type 5, Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin within the Forest of Dean District. The key characteristics of this landscape character type are listed below (as taken from the source document):

• Distinctive syncline structure occupied by extensive areas of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland;
• Dense vegetation cover;
• Type, age and management regime of different woodlands varies;
• Linear ponds and lakes along streams bordered by verdant lawns and riparian habitats;
• Long history of mining, industrial activity and forest management; and
• Almost continuous belt of development encircling the central forest.
Within this landscape character type, the following landscape character areas are located:

- 5a Forest Core (contains the AAP site);
- 5b Lydbrook and Ruardean woodside;
- 5c Cinderford and Ruspidge (contains a part of the AAP site and forms the south eastern boundary to the site);
- 5d Soudley Brook;
- 5e Littledean Ridges and Valleys;
- 5f Ellwood; and
- 5g Bream and Yorkley.

In addition, the Landscape Character Type 10, Ridges and Valleys is located adjacent to the north eastern boundary of the site. The key characteristics of this landscape character type are listed below (as taken from the source document):

- Distinctive rounded ridge profiles rising above the neighbouring vale landscapes and bordering the wooded syncline;
- The ridges are orientated north south which is emphasised by the orientation of hedgerow patterns and small woodland copses clinging to steeper slopes;
- Mosaic of mixed farmland and woodland cloaks the ridges;
- Extensive coniferous plantations are evident on the ridges;
- Distinctive ‘squatter’ settlements on the upper ridge slopes close to existing woodland and the line of the Crease Limestone;
- Extensive views over the surrounding lowlands are possible from exposed ridge top locations;
- A number of redundant quarries are located throughout the landscape;
- Numerous transportation routes follow valleys created by streams and brooks as they weave through the ridges;
- Range of species rich grassland habitats, heath and bog, old orchards and ancient semi natural woodlands.

Within this landscape character type, the following landscape character areas are located:

- 10a Allaston Ridge;
- 10b Littledean Ridge;
- 10c Edge Hill (located on the north eastern boundary of the AAP site); and
- 10d Breakheart Hill.

*Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy, June 2004*

The Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy identifies housing as the main force for change on the present day landscape of the District. The County Structure Plan referenced at the time of preparation of this landscape strategy identifies
priority areas for housing which include sites within the vicinity of Cinderford. Given the industrial age character associated with the stone residential and civic buildings, this area (including landscape character areas 5b, 5c and 5d) would be sensitive to inappropriately designed development.

The strategy refers to the key characteristics of each landscape character type, referenced above, and identifies these as being worthy of conservation. In the case of landscape character type no 5. Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin, the landscape sensitivity to change is outlined in the strategy as follows:

‘Despite dense woodland cover, the central forest core is highly sensitive, particularly where change would result in the loss of woodland and compromise the peace and tranquillity for which the central forest core is well known and valued. Areas of former mining or industrial activity are perhaps less sensitive provided that change is sympathetic to features of industrial heritage value or nature conservation interest. The forest fringe settlements are of limited visual sensitivity. However, change in these areas should recognise the unique character of each settlement, and the importance of areas of woodland and open space between settlements. Significant opportunities for restoration of derelict or damaged landscapes exist in these areas.’

The local forces for change within this landscape character type that are of relevance to the AAP and masterplan are outlined below in table 1.1 as taken from the landscape strategy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Forces for Change</th>
<th>Potential Landscape Implications</th>
<th>Outline landscape Strategies</th>
<th>Potential Indicators for Monitoring Landscape Change</th>
<th>Opportunities for Community Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New employment and housing land with associated infrastructure on the fringes of Cinderford.</td>
<td>Potential visual impact of large scale industrial buildings on the fringes of existing settlement and the forest core. Loss of existing landscape features such as pasture, trees and hedges.</td>
<td>Promote high quality residential development that respects local townscape and landscape character and reflects local vernacular building styles, layouts and materials. Conserve existing landscape features (trees, hedges) as intrinsic part of new development. Encourage a positive approach to new development and seek opportunities to create exciting new character in areas of degraded or declining landscape. Conserve the distinctive dispersed and industrial character of forest fringe settlements. Conserve the existing open spaces between settlements to avoid further coalescence.</td>
<td>Areas of new peripheral development determined against baseline aerial photographic record.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental expansion and infilling of existing forest fringe settlements.</td>
<td>Erosion of distinctive dispersed settlement layout and ‘industrial age’ character.</td>
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<td>Development of abandoned mineral working sites and colliery tips.</td>
<td>Loss of features of industrial heritage such as pit buildings. Loss of regenerating scrub woodland which may be of nature conservation value. Loss of open grassland and heathland habitats of nature conservation value.</td>
<td>Promote appropriate, sensitive development which will add value to the local economic and social well being of the district, which can: i) Conserve, enhance and restore features of industrial heritage and; ii) Conserve features of nature conservation and landscape interest.</td>
<td>Number of existing heritage sites retained.</td>
<td>Provide information on the location of abandoned mineral sites and colliery tips and better access to heritage features such as the miners memorial.</td>
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<td>Increased tourism and recreation in the central forest.</td>
<td>Erosion of perceptions of tranquility and remoteness away from main visitor sites. Proliferation of signage and furniture. Increased pressure on sensitive habitats. Increased erosion of forest tracks.</td>
<td>Seek to conserve and enhance perceptions of remoteness and tranquility throughout the central forest. Conserve and restore features of the forests industrial heritage. Conserve and enhance areas of high nature conservation value.</td>
<td>Number of new recreational sites built.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4 Cinderford Northern Quarter Area Action Plan - Landscape Character Appraisal

1.4.1 The Area Action Plan and Masterplan Setting

The Area Action Plan and Masterplan proposals will extend built development from the north western edge of the settlement of Cinderford. The proposals will introduce built development into a site which currently features largely open space fringed with forestry and featuring piecemeal industrial development, some of which is in use and some of which lie abandoned and in a state of decline. The implications of the changes that would be introduced by the AAP are presented in the context of National, County and Forest of Dean (district) Landscape Character below.

1.4.2 National and County Landscape Character

The valley location and the scale of the Northern Quarter AAP and masterplan is such that the change brought about by it will really be of relevance only to the landscape character of the Forest of Dean District. The zone of visual influence of the proposal is very localised. The change proposed amounts to a relatively small scale urban expansion. The implications of this are much less that would be the case were the masterplan to be sited in an undeveloped landscape and unattached to any existing established development. Thus, the development will be less visually prominent or immediately ‘noticeable’ by the viewer.

Overall, in landscape terms, the masterplan and AAP have no significant implications for County and National landscape character.

1.4.3 District Level Landscape Character Assessment

Introduction

As identified through the baseline review, the AAP will be located in the eastern edge of landscape character type no. 5 – Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin. Many of the key characteristics outlined for this landscape character type apply in the context of the Northern Quarter AAP site. The landscape setting of the site is small scale and intimate. It is both visually and physically enclosed by the densely wooded hills and ridgelines that surround the site. These wider features in themselves represent a larger scale afforested hill landscape which contrast to the smaller scale open areas within the AAP site. The Forest of Dean District landscape character assessment recognises importance of such open areas in providing relief from the continuous forestry that characterises and dominates the landscape character type. The landscape assessment also recognises the remnant buildings and structures from former mining activities as features of landscape character.
Opportunities

Whilst much of the AAP development areas identified feature open area, these features within the wooded setting are primarily artificial earthworks mounds remaining from former mining activities. Current industrial land uses such as Coleford brick and Tile Company and adjacent spoil heaps are visually prominent detractors in this immediate landscape owing to their location, near the most elevated part of the site. The Northern United colliery site lies derelict and the open areas of water are of variable quality in terms of amenity, one in particular awaiting restoration following industrial use. Whilst recognising the landscape value placed on such unforest areas, the AAP masterplan presents an opportunity to enhance this area overall. The opportunities are outlined as follows:

- Most of the masterplan building footprint, (residential areas) lies to the east of the lake and is therefore located in a manner that links it as a continuation of the more urban context of Steam Mills and Northern Cinderford;

- The development areas will displace an already man made landscape of grassed spoil heaps dating back to the industrial past of the site;

- The proposed light industrial and employment uses located at the Northern United site presents an opportunity to enhance this landscape of industrial buildings with some potential for restoration of this area;

- The inclusive development approach to the site, integrating existing industrial uses with new, presents an opportunity for improving the landscape around the site of the existing brickworks facility;

- The mixed development activities associated with the masterplan such as education, hotel and activity centre offer an opportunity to enhance the landscape of the lake with the integrated restoration of the clay quarry areas in this part of the site, whilst remaining sensitive to the current recreational value and setting of the Steam Mills Lake;

- The AAP site currently functions as an amenity area, supporting activities such as fishing and walking (including The Wysis Way national walking route crossing the northern part of the site). The AAP will present the opportunity to provide more effective and integrated access to these aspects of the site from the existing urban areas.

Constraints

In terms of district landscape character, the loss of open spaces to development is the main constraint to the AAP, as this will potentially displace a landscape resource that is rare in the area as cited in the district landscape character assessment.
The AAP also has the potential to extend the developed area associated with the settlement of Cinderford in a manner which would be seen as encroachment into open space and a further expansion of the existing built up area beyond and west of the Forest Vale Industrial Park.

The loss of woodland associated with the masterplan is a direct physical change of an adverse kind. Nonetheless, the scale of the woodland losses has been carefully considered and kept to a minimum, hence a potentially small area of plantation at the southern edge of the Hawkwell Enclosure area will be affected. Such change, if sensitively managed is likely to be indistinguishable from the routine rotating timber harvesting that occurs in this area.

1.4.4 AAP and masterplan—visual change

The expansion to the existing settlement of Cinderford arising from the masterplan proposal has also been considered with regards to the visual change that could occur when seen from the surrounding area.

Due to the level of enclosure (forest cover) and the topography of the area, the likely theoretical zone of visual change is very limited and mainly affects an area to the south and east of the site. This is graphically demonstrated in Figure 1 at the end of this report.

The proposed development plots associated with the masterplan will be located in a localised valley (geologically a downfold or syncline dating back to the Hercynian Orogeny 280 million years ago). Being located on a lower localised valley setting, the development is less likely to break the forested skyline when seen from the surrounding local landscape. The management of earthworks, especially the existing made up ground which forms two prominent high points east of the lake within the site will have to be carefully considered to minimise the potential visual prominence of the development as seen from the local area.

Visual changes will be barely perceptible, if at all visible, from the settlement of Drybrook, located to the north. The Hawkwell Enclosure Plantation will visually screen most of the masterplan proposal from this location.
Further south the settlement of Ruspidge is located on a ridgeline orientated broadly north to south. Edges of the settlement command panoramic views of the wider landscape setting, capturing the Wye Valley in the far distance and on clear days, the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons mountains to the north east. Whilst the masterplan proposal will be visible in part from this area, it will be seen to be associated with the built up area of Cinderford and Steam Mills and will be a small visual change as perceived from this location.
Visual change arising from the masterplan will be most pronounced for residents at the edges of the settlement of Steam Mills. The proposal will be seen in visual association with the Forest Vale Industrial Park. This industrial area is likely to remain as the most visually prominent element in the view owing to the scale and colour of the buildings and the presence of the stacks. The AAP proposes a mix of housing, educational and employment related uses which will yield a building type and scale that will be more appropriate to this setting.
1.4.5 *Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy*

*Introduction*

Having considered the District Landscape Character Assessment it is important to understand the interaction of the proposed AAP and masterplan with the Forest of Dean Landscape Strategy. In particular the strategy identifies the *Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin* associated with the AAP as being highly sensitive to change, particularly to changes resulting in woodland losses. However, the strategy also acknowledges the sensitivity to change varies across this landscape type and in particular notes the forest fringe settlements as having a limited sensitivity to change.

The Northern Quarter AAP and masterplan site lies on the eastern edge of this landscape type and is physically and visually associated with the settlements of Steam Mills and Cinderford. The site is considered to be a part of the forest fringe settlement referred to in the Strategy. The AAP and masterplan proposal are in accordance with the recommendations of the strategy in terms of managing change in this particular landscape type. Built development is not necessarily seen as undesirable change provided that it respects the built vernacular of the settlements in the area and that it is sympathetic to the industrial heritage interest.

The strategy goes further to say that the opportunity to restore derelict landscapes exists in this landscape type.
Forces for change and landscape strategy for Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin

The forces for change and landscape strategies for managing change are discussed below together with an evaluation of the AAP and masterplan against the strategy objectives.

Table 1.2  Landscape Forces for Change and Cinderford Masterplan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New employment and housing land with associated infrastructure on the fringes of Cinderford</th>
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<td>Conserve existing landscape features (trees, hedges) as intrinsic part of new development.</td>
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<td>Encourage a positive approach to new development and seek opportunities to create exciting new character in areas of degraded or declining landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation against the Cinderford Masterplan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masterplan site located in valley setting and will not be visually prominent or is unlikely to break the forest skyline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetation losses will be limited. The scale of the losses will be insignificant in the context of the overall scale of the forested hill backdrop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House building styles to be adopted to reflect local character and of high quality as set out in the design code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steam Mills Lake becomes the centrepiece of the masterplan and contributes to enhanced amenity open space for future residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The masterplan presents an opportunity to restore degraded areas within the landscape of the site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3  Landscape Forces for Change and Cinderford Masterplan

<table>
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<th>Incremental expansion and infilling of existing forest fringe settlements.</th>
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<td>Erosion of distinctive dispersed settlement layout and ‘industrial age’ character.</td>
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<td>Conserve the distinctive dispersed and industrial character of forest fringe settlements.</td>
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<td>Conserve the existing open spaces between settlements to avoid further coalescence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation against the Cinderford Masterplan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The masterplan does represent an incremental expansion of the forest fringe settlements. This does not necessarily conflict with the landscape strategy for the area provided that the building style reflects the local vernacular.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Table 1.4  Landscape Forces for Change and Cinderford Masterplan

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<td>Promote appropriate, sensitive development which will add value to the local economic and social well being of the district, which can:</td>
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i) Conserve, enhance and restore features of industrial heritage and;  
ii) Conserve features of nature conservation and landscape interest.

Where appropriate seek opportunities for innovative development that creates new landscape character in areas of degraded or declining character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation against the Cinderford Masterplan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The masterplan features employment led development at the Northern United Colliery. The proposed development would provide better integration of this area with the currently operating Coleford Brick and Tile Company. Future development of this area would retain the miners memorial and consider options to retain, refurbish or re-use historic buildings or the layout of the site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The masterplan presents significant local economic and social opportunities which will result in the redevelopment of derelict parts of the site such as unsightly spoil mounds and the restoration of water bodies formerly used for industrial purposes.

Minimal woodland losses will arise.

### Table 1.5  Landscape Forces for Change and Cinderford Masterplan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased tourism and recreation in the central forest and housing land with associated infrastructure on the fringes of Cinderford</th>
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<td>Increased pressure on sensitive habitats.</td>
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<td>Seek to conserve and enhance perceptions of remoteness and tranquillity throughout the central forest.</td>
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<td>Conserve and restore features of the forests industrial heritage.</td>
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<td>Conserve and enhance areas of high nature conservation value</td>
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<th>Evaluation against the Cinderford Masterplan</th>
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<tr>
<td>The masterplan site is on the urban fringe of Steam Mills and Cinderford and is one of the least tranquil and remote parts of the Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin landscape character type. In this regard, built development associated with the masterplan is largely located on the eastern side of the site and will be associated with existing settlements and/or existing or derelict industrial areas. The enhancement and conservation of industrial features is referred to in the above section. In addition the masterplan has been developed in a fashion to present and maintain key opportunities for tourism and recreational use of the wider area without the need for direct incursions into these areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The masterplan presents significant local economic and social opportunities which will result in the redevelopment of derelict parts of the site such as unsightly spoil mounds and the restoration of water bodies formerly used for industrial purposes. Minimal woodland losses will arise.
1.5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The scale of the proposed AAP and masterplan is small in the context of both county and national landscape character. The proposal is well concealed from the wider landscape owing to its valley location and the screening provided by the surrounding wooded cover. The implications of the change proposed are therefore considered to be insignificant in the context of the county landscape character and national landscape character.

In the context of the Forest of Dean District landscape character, the AAP and masterplan will bring about a relatively small change to a site which features a landscape altered by previous industrial activities. The scale of the landscape change within the Wooded Syncline and Settled Forest Margin is small and is well concealed from the wider area owing to its valley setting. In addition, the change will affect an area of relatively low landscape sensitivity and will bring about minimal physical change in terms of loss of woodland cover as the wooded landscape setting has been carefully considered in the master planning design process.

The AAP and masterplan represents an opportunity to bring about positive changes to the receiving landscape as it represents an opportunity for regeneration. In this regard, many of the objectives set out in the landscape strategy for the Forest of Dean District for the Cinderford area will be realised in the regeneration proposed in the AAP and Masterplan as already outlined.
Analysis is based on OS Landform Panorama DTM
All trees areas within a 5km radius of the centre of the site are assumed to create visual blocks 10m high
The effect of screening by man made structures, minor cuttings and embankments is not taken into account
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