






Station Area, Leamington Spa

Landscape Constraints

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Prepared by	Jennifer Aston			
Signature				
Checked by	Katy Mayhew			
Signature				
Authorised by	Alison Banks			
Signature				
Project number	12261313			
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WSP Environmental UK
One Queens Drive
Birmingham
West Midlands
B5 4PJ

Tel: +44 (0)121 352 4700
Fax: +44 (0)121 352 4701
<http://www.wspgroup.com>



1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report considers the potentially significant issues associated with the landscape and visual resources of the site and the surrounding area. Existing landscape information relating to the land at the Ford Factory, Leamington Spa has been reviewed to gain an insight into the character of the receiving landscape and to identify any landscape designations and potentially sensitive receptors. The desk based review was also assisted through a site walkover to gain a greater understanding of the visibility and character of the site and immediate surroundings and identify key issues and constraints.



2 Overview Of Baseline Conditions

2.1 TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE

2.1.1 The site area is relatively flat sitting at approximately 50m Above Ordinance Datum (A.O.D.). The location of the site adjacent to the River Leam and the Grand Union Canal means that it is located at one of the lowest points in the area. Princes Drive, within the site boundary, carries traffic into the town centre. The road passes underneath the railway bridge, causing a relatively steep downwards slope to reach the roundabout with Park Drive which also results in the restriction of views of the site from this access. The topography of the surrounding area generally slopes up to the north and the town centre, with steep slopes evident on the banks of the River Leam.

2.1.2 There are no waterbodies within the site, although the River Leam and the Grand Union Canal are located immediately adjacent, the surroundings of both of which are well vegetated.

2.2 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL

2.2.1 The development of Royal Leamington Spa has happened in a relatively short space of time. Originally a small village, the discovery of the healing spa water catapulted development in the area. In 1814 the Royal Pump Rooms and Baths were opened, transforming the area into a popular spa resort for the rich and famous. Additionally, its close proximity to Birmingham and Coventry meant that it became attractive as a commuter township. This required a considerable amount of housing comprising of grand Georgian and Regency Town Houses; these houses provide much character and distinction to today's townscape.

2.2.2 Originally the town was separated from the built form of Warwick, but urban spread is now engulfing land in between. The spread of Leamington has also engulfed the villages of Lillington and New Milverton. Currently Leamington has a population of approximately 45,000, a proportion of these residents are students from Warwick University.

2.2.3 Whilst a considerable portion of Leamington is formed of the iconic Regency Town houses there are areas of modern housing which do not conform to the high quality townscape.

2.2.4 The site itself has developed around the Grand Union canal and the railway line which dissects the site. The Grand Union Canal which runs from Birmingham to London was one of the major industrial movement routes of the 19th Century; however the rapidly developing railway systems soon began to take over industrial movement across the country. The railway station, one of the principal site features, was in fact the secondary rail station in Leamington, but with the closures of the original station it is now the gateway into the town by rail. The station layout and connectivity is ill equipped to deal with the commuter traffic which it sees today; but the building itself is listed and an impressive piece of architecture.

2.3 LAND USES OF THE SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS

2.3.1 The site is formed of a number of land uses and building forms. It contains several industrial units, including the Ford Foundry and a Bus depot as well as the railway station and a large amount of hard standing. The hard standing provides spaces for car parking, maintenance areas for the railway and bus depot, and a car sales area. Most of the land within the site boundary is privately owned. Areas of the site appear to be derelict, particularly areas of hard standing which are becoming colonised by plant communities. This detracts from the character of the railway station building and much of the building within the town. There is a small amount of tree planting between the Ford Foundry blocks and the road, providing some screening functions for adjacent areas. The railway station is the only feature within the site boundary which falls within the Leamington Spa and Lillington Conservation Area.

Land to the North

2.3.2 Directly to the North of the site is Park Drive/ Avenue Road, one of the main movement routes to the town centre. This road is tree lined and adjacent to a bowls green and playing fields which connect to the wider green network surrounding the River Leam. Beyond this is the town centre which displays the traditional Regency housing style, as well as a mix of shops, pubs and restaurants.



Land to the South

2.3.3 The Old Warwick Road forms the Southern boundary of the site, directly adjoined by the Grand Union Canal and green link footpath which runs along side it. Beyond this, a mix of industrial units, large retail areas, trading estates, and housing can be seen. A considerable amount of green space is evident to the South West, although this is private farm land; smaller pockets of public green space are evident to the South East in the suburb of Sydenham.

Land to the East

2.3.4 The eastern edge of the site is formed by Lower Avenue, beyond that there are a number of industrial units coupled with housing. The River Leam runs from east to west across the town, its green surroundings forming the main area of green space to the east of the town. The Grand Union Canal also provides a physical link from the town into the open countryside beyond.

Land to the West

2.3.5 The most western part of the site is detached from the main site area by Princes Drive, although it is connected via a footpath over the road. This section of the site contains a mix of large retail units and beyond the site, large detached houses, set back from the road, denote the entrance into Warwick. There is no break in development between Leamington and Warwick, however development becomes sparser and then the density increases further into Warwick centre.

2.4 STREET PATTERN, CONNECTIVITY, MOVEMENT AND OPEN SPACE

2.4.1 The street pattern within the site and its immediate surroundings is highly varied due to the mixed use nature of the area. The site itself has two roads penetrating the boundary, giving access to the station and also additional unofficial station parking. The area is encompassed by the major roads which run in and out of the town centre. The current street pattern is dominated by the primary roads which traverse the site and feed traffic into and out of the town.

2.4.2 In the older areas of the town the street pattern is more traditional and grid like, with examples of Victorian Street Patterns and Regency Patterns.


2.4.3 Connectivity around the site is poor, as it is private access, with two main vehicular and pedestrian access points. Smaller access roads allow movement within the site to the different units. A footpath leads from the train station into the town centre; a route which runs under a subway and through into the Pump Gardens. This route is narrow, poorly signposted and badly lit and generally an unattractive route through into the town centre. Contrastingly the Grand Union Canal footpath is tree lined and green, providing a pleasant route between the town and the surrounding countryside. The National Cycle Network also flows through the town, including a section of it which passes through the site boundary.

2.4.4 The primary roads dominate the immediate surroundings of the site creating poorer and less easy pedestrian access into the town; however they also serve to connect the area to surrounding urbanisations and other routes such as the M40 and A46. Movement in and out of the town centre is dominated by the roads which surround the site, but the pavements along these roads create pleasant walks as they are generally tree lined.

2.4.5 There are minimal areas of public open space within the site. Some of the areas of hardstanding have been colonised but local flora and fauna, with the potential to create valuable habitats. Surrounding the site the closest area of green open space is evident to the North, with the Bowls club, adjoining cricket pitch and a green walkway which connects to the River Leam. This footpath runs alongside the river connecting the main body of green spaces along it and through the length of the town. This central green space is a mix of formal parkland comprising of Victoria Park, The Pump Room Gardens and Jephson Gardens, and connects further green spaces such as Welshes Meadow Nature Reserve to the East of the site. Within the areas of dense housing, generally within the Conservation Area, there are few pockets of public open space. More modern developments, however, have small areas of open space which can be used for recreational purposes.

2.5 URBAN GRAIN, HEIGHT AND MASSING

2.5.1 The urban grain within the site boundary is open; the buildings which exist on site have a large footprint and large surrounding areas of hard standing, some of which is getting into a state of disrepair. The town centre to the North of the site with its Conservation Area has a generally tight urban grain and a higher massing of building units with terraced town houses, town centre retail units, office blocks and official buildings.



2.5.2 The central park land area of the town is one of the open areas within the town's setting. Other areas including modern housing areas have a similar open grain and lower density; they are formed mainly of detached and semi detached properties with large back gardens and smaller front gardens. Other residential areas such as Sydenham have a tighter grain of terraced housing, but with pockets of green public open space between, reducing the massing of building units within the area. The industrial parks, trading estates and works which are dotted along the towns have a similar urban grain to the site itself, with large building blocks set with larger areas of open space or hard standing.

2.5.3 There is not a great variety in building heights across the site. The similar form of industrial units gives visual cohesion to the area; however the Ford Foundry plant does encroach onto the skyline from many views around the site. The town centre is mainly formed of three to four storey Victorian or Regency town houses which are either residential or have been altered for office use. Some more modern infill containing blocks of flats have been developed which can extend up to six or seven storeys.

2.6 LANDSCAPE FEATURES, DESIGNATIONS AND LISTED BUILDINGS

2.6.1 The site is surrounded to the North by the Leamington and Lillington Conservation Area which also includes the Railway Station and most of the town centre. This area is defined as a Conservation Area due to its historic appearance representing the area's heritage and development, as well as displaying fine examples of architectural styles. The parks which are formed on the banks of the River Leam are also Grade II listed by English Heritage. Of particular importance to these designated areas are potential changes to their setting as a result of any new developments. These areas are therefore considered as potential constraints in relation to their setting.

2.6.2 There are a large number of listed buildings within the Conservation Area extending from part of the site itself (the railway station) into the town centre, including landmark tourist buildings such as The Royal Pump Rooms and Spa. These listed buildings within are also considered as potential constraints, particularly in terms of their setting.

2.6.3 The only listed building within the site boundary itself is the train station which is also located within the Leamington Conservation Area. Other than this, the listed buildings located on Bath Street are some of the closest to the site and therefore potentially most affected by proposed developments on the site.

2.6.4 Additionally, the two major water courses which run through the town (the River Leam and the Grand Union Canal) are large features which have contributed to shaping the landscape of the area.

2.6.5 Some of the Key Landscape Features are shown in Figure 1: Key landscape Features and Character Areas.

2.7 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

2.7.1 Joint Character Areas were created by the former Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage in 1996, combining English Nature's Natural Areas and the Countryside Commission's Countryside Character Areas. Royal Leamington Spa is located within Joint Character Area 96: Dunsmore and Felton which is characterised by a generally wooded countryside but with extensive open farmland, as well as a plateau landscape of open, flat, rather empty character and a strong urban influence in several areas. Leamington Spa is located on the Eastern edge of the character area.

2.7.2 Following on from the desk based review and site walkover, four local areas of distinctive character have been identified. These areas are shown in Figure 1 and are described below.

Character Area 1 – Industrial

2.7.3 This character area is defined by large industrial units generally surrounded by large areas of hardstanding, car parking or maintenance yards and with little or no green space, planting, or public access. The buildings are functional to accommodate their industrial needs, although they are relatively low in height thereby minimising their encroaching into the skyline. There are two main areas that highlight this character area are both located to the south of the River Leam. The site itself is located within this character area; the quality of which is typically medium to low.

Character Area 2 – Leamington and Lillington Conservation Area

2.7.4 The Conservation Area, which includes most of the town centre, is characterised by terraced Regency town houses and wide, well maintained streets. The streets within this character area are typically tree lined, and modern buildings generally sympathetic to the surrounding traditional style and character; they use modern materials



sensitively but retain individuality through design. The area as a whole is well managed and maintained. There are very few areas with evidence of anti social behaviour and therefore the area is of High landscape quality.

Character Area 3 – Modern Suburbs

2.7.5 This character area is typified by more modern housing developments, typically constructed in the last 20 years. The housing comprises of a mixture of terraced blocks, detached and semi detached houses. Such areas within 1km of the town are generally well kept family areas with wide streets, front gardens and medium sized back gardens, although often with few street trees. Their character is generally pleasant and most of the areas represent the quintessential town suburb. The landscape quality in these areas is therefore considered to be medium.

Character Area 4 –Green Open Spaces

2.7.6 Two areas of the town are taken up with areas of green open space. They are not contained within the designated conservation areas and have little historic development or heritage but are important areas for the surrounding communities. Footpaths and access routes traverse the areas, which are generally well maintained offering important green spaces and vistas on the town's edges. They have a distinctly more rural feel than the green spaces within the town centre through their informal style, creating a transitional space between the built urban form of the town and countryside beyond. They are designated as 'Areas of Restraint' in the local plan, limiting development opportunities which would affect their character. The landscape quality of these areas is considered to be medium.

2.8 VISUAL AMENITY

2.8.1 One of the most prominent features within the application site is the Ford Foundry. Located on the south west corner of the site, it is one of the main visual features for road users accessing the town centre. The small amount of tree shelter planting between the foundry and the road has little impact on limiting views into the site.

2.8.2 The site visit identified several points from where the site is particularly visible, and which may be impacted if development on the site were to occur. These areas are described below.

2.8.3 When accessing Leamington town centre via Europa Way (which connects the town to the M40), clear views of the site and the Ford Foundry on the South West Corner are visible. This building dominates the view and skyline at this point due to its proximity to the road, along with a backdrop of further industrial buildings and character. There may therefore be the opportunity to screen the site from this location.

2.8.4 Views on the Eastern edge of the site are limited due to the road sloping down sharply beneath the railway bridge. The vegetated road edges and steep banks further limit views into the site, although the chimney tops of the Ford Foundry are still visible. The footbridge over Princes Drive allows clear views into the site as the current planting does not visually shield the site from this location.

2.8.5 Park Drive, which forms the Northern boundary of the site, is a tree lined roadway which leads into the town centre and separates the site from the protected parkland to the North. Some of the site may be visible through the trees, particularly of the taller buildings on site. Views into and out of this area are particularly important due to its designation as a Grade II listed Heritage Garden.

2.8.6 Similarly, views into and out of the Leamington and Lillington Conservation Area, along with its setting, should be important considerations as it both borders, and is contained within, part of the site.

2.8.7 Further east along the Conservation Area Boundary the views of the site are limited due to the intervening housing and vegetation, although there is the potential for taller buildings to be visible from this location, or for large blocks of buildings to be more clearly visible between existing buildings and vegetation.

2.8.8 A considerable amount of vegetation also stretches along the length of the railway embankments which is aided by fencing and topographical changes to limit views across the site.

2.8.9 The footpath which runs along the Grand Union canal is moderately sensitive to site changes due to its close proximity to the site boundary; however the large amount of vegetation and steep banks will serve to limit views, depending on proposed development heights. The vegetated nature of the canal edge means that views from further a field are also restricted, although building above the tree line would be clearly visible.

2.8.10 A summary of the visibility of the site and photographic locations can be seen in Figure 2: Site Visibility and Viewpoints.



3 Conclusions

3.1.1 As a result of the desk based review and site visit, the following have been identified as potentially key sensitive receptors to proposed development:

- Listed Buildings including the Railway station and those closest to the site along Bath Street;
- The Leamington and Lillington Conservation Area;
- Potential views towards existing church spires within the Conservation area;
- Existing vegetation belts;
- Adjacent residential areas, particularly to the north along Park Drive;
- Users of the Grand Union Canal and footpath;
- Users of the National Cycle Path Network;
- Users of the mainline railway and station;
- Users of adjacent Bowls club, cricket pitch and green walkway which connects to the River Leam;
- Users of Europa Way;
- Users of the footbridge over Princes Drive; and
- Users of, and views from, the adjacent Grade II listed Heritage Gardens along the River Leam.

3.1.2 The following have been identified as the key issues, constraints and opportunities of the site:

- The site is relatively low lying, but due to adjacent vegetation and steeply banked boundaries, views into it are limited.
- The heritage of the area contributes considerably to the street pattern, movement and connectivity network, landscape designations and landscape usage and forms within Leamington Spa, including the Leamington and Lillington Conservation Area. The site is surrounded by, and contains part of, this Conservation Area. The site itself currently detracts from the Conservation Area and its setting due to its the derelict nature and expanse of concrete hard standing. New development therefore has the potential to enhance the setting of the Conservation Area subject to careful detailed design.
- The current site does not generally contribute or impact on skyline views or vistas due to its lack of tall buildings. The only exception is the Ford Foundry which dominates the skyline on the Western part of the site. Visually the building has a negative impact on views into this part of the site. New development would need to be mindful of its impact on the skyline and vistas if development is taller than adjacent residential buildings. There is the potential to incorporate a landmark building connecting the Grand Union Canal to the Town Centre, subject to careful design and consideration of longer distant views, particularly from within the Conservation area.
- Views from the south and north are currently restricted by dense belts of vegetation and steep banks. In order to retain the green character of this area of the town, the retention of the vegetation belts would be desirable, particularly areas around the railway station to retain and potentially enhance their setting. Additional vegetation planting may further screen views of the site at certain locations;
- The existing connectivity of the site to the surrounding town is poor; redevelopment should aim to improve this, with the potential to create an iconic route way through into the town connecting it to the Grand Union Canal. This could maximise the surrounding heritage of the area as well as improving the connectivity of the site to the town centre and Canal; and
- The mix of residential, retail and industrial land surrounding the site means that there are a variety of development forms, although only a small number of these encroach onto the skyline. This varied character therefore has the potential to allow a more varied character within the site itself and allow the creation of an appropriate setting to the listed railway station and adjacent Conservation Area.



3.1.3 The proposed development site is relatively contained visually by the surrounding boundary vegetation, although there are locations from where clear views are obtainable. Sensitive areas such as the Conservation Area which border a large portion of the site are sensitive to development changes, particularly in relation to their setting. The existing site however does not enhance the setting of the existing Conservation Area or associated listed buildings, nor does it enhance the character of the area. There is therefore the potential for sensitive development of the site to enhance the visual amenity and character of the area and create a more suitable gateway into the town centre.