APPENDIX 6B - LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of the proposed project, has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd. This encompasses the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment 2002, and Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (LCA) published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage 2002.

1.2. In summary, this states:

"The baseline information for the assessments, obtained through comprehensive desk and field studies, should include description, classification and analysis of the landscape and visual resource. The assessment process identifies likely landscape and visual effects, establishes their magnitude and the sensitivity of the receptor, and determines the significance of the effects. Mitigation measures – designed to avoid, reduce, remedy or offset negative or adverse effects – are identified, and their likely effectiveness also assessed."

1.3. In defining landscape and visual effects, the Guidelines state:-

"Landscape and visual assessments are separate, although linked, procedures. The landscape baseline, its analysis and the assessment of landscape effects all contribute to the baseline for visual assessment studies. The assessment of the potential effects on the landscape is carried out as an effect on an environmental resource, i.e. the landscape. Visual effects are assessed as one of the interrelated effects on population. (2.13)."

"Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape, which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. This may in turn affect the perceived value ascribed to the landscape. The description and analysis of effects on a landscape resource relies on the adoption of certain basic principles about the positive (or beneficial) and negative (or adverse) effects of change in the landscape. Due to the inherently dynamic nature of the landscape, change arising from a development may not necessarily be significant. (2.14)."

"Visual effects relate to the changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people's responses to the changes, and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity. (2.15)."

Addressing baseline studies, the GLVA states at 6.1 and 6.2:-

"The initial step in any landscape or visual impact assessment is to review the existing landscape and visual resource – that is, the baseline landscape and visual conditions. The data collected will form the basis from which the occurrence, estimation of magnitude and significance of the landscape and visual effects of the development may be identified and assessed".

1.4. The purpose of baseline studies is to record and analyse the existing landscape features, characteristics, the way the landscape is experienced, and the value or importance of the landscape and visual resources in the vicinity of the proposed development. This requires research, classification and analysis of the landscape and visual resources as follows:-

1.5. Research / survey involve both desk and field studies to assemble basic information.

1.6. Classification entails sorting landscape into units or groups of distinct and recognisable type and character.

1.7. Analysis involves the detailed examination of the constituent parts of the landscape and visual resources in order to understand how they are made up and experienced. It can also include the process of ascertaining the relative importance of the various aspects of the landscape and visual resource. "

1.8. It is important that the visual area potentially affected by the project is as accurately defined as possible. Paragraph 6.24 of the Guidelines suggests:-

"The area of study for the visual assessment may extend to the whole of the area from which the development is visible (the visual envelope). In practice the extent of the area to be reported on may be limited by agreement with the regulatory authority on the distance from the proposed development within which the view is expected to be of interest or concern".

1.9. The sensitivity of the landscape and visual resource must then be determined. This is the degree to which the resource affected can accommodate change without detrimental effect. The GLVIA suggests the following criteria in determining the sensitivity of landscape and visual resources:-

- *"existing land use;*
- *the pattern and scale of the landscape;*
- *visual enclosure / openness of views, and distribution of visual receptors;*
- *the scope for mitigation, which would be in character with the existing landscape;*
- *the value placed on the landscape"*

1.10. The magnitude of change or effect depends upon the scale and nature of the development proposal and its duration. It is important to recognise that change can be either adverse or beneficial.

1.11. Finally, the significance of the effect can be assessed. The GLVIA provide checklists for general guidance as follows:-

Landscape

"The loss of mature or diverse landscape elements, or features, is likely to be more significant than the loss of new or uniform / homogenous elements.

Effects on character areas, which are distinctive or representative, may be more important than the loss of areas in poor condition or degraded character which may, however, present greater opportunities for enhancement.

The loss of landscape elements, features or characteristics will be given greater weight if they are identified as being of high value or importance. Thus effects on landscape areas or characteristics recognised for their national importance are likely to be of more significance than effects on areas or characteristics of local importance. The test is whether the integrity of the landscape and objectives of designation are compromised or not.

The sensitivity of the landscape is dependent on both the attributes of the receiving environment and the characteristics and effects of the proposed development and can only be established by

carrying out the assessment. However, landscapes with a high value and sensitivity to the type of change proposed are likely to be more seriously affected by development than those with a lower sensitivity.

The test of significance is not directly related to planning policy. However, this may be an important consideration where policies identify commonly held objectives and values."

Visual

"Large scale changes which introduce new, discordant or intrusive elements into the view are more likely to be significant than small changes or changes involving features already present within the view.

Changes in views from recognised and important viewpoints or amenity routes are likely to be more significant than changes affecting other less important paths and routes.

Changes affecting large numbers of people are generally more significant than those affecting a relatively small group of users. However, in wilderness landscapes the sensitivity of the people who use these areas may be very high and this will be reflected in the significance of the change.

All stages of the project life-cycle should be addressed such as: site preparation; construction, operation, decommissioning and restoration."

Summary

1.12 Overall, assessment of landscape and visual impact takes into account any design and mitigating measures included as an integral part of the development proposals. These measures avoid, reduce and, if possible, remedy significant adverse effects. Mitigation also includes beneficial environmental improvements.

2.0 LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT METHODOLOGY

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Threshold Criteria

2.1. For this assessment the following general criteria applies. A degree of flexibility is required depending upon the nature and context of a particular character area:-

Landscape Sensitivity

2.2. High: Landscape areas with particularly distinctive or positive characters or with valued landscape features. The areas may be sensitive to relatively small changes, and are worthy of conservation.

2.3. Medium: Landscape areas with reasonably positive character, but with some evidence of alteration or degradation of the character or features. Potentially tolerant of some change, and worthy of enhancement.

2.4. Low: Landscape areas with a generally weak character or relatively few features of value, potentially tolerant of significant change, requiring the restoration of structure.

Magnitude of Landscape Change

2.5 High Adverse: Total loss of, or major alteration to the key characteristics or features of the landscape area.

2.6 Medium Adverse: Potential loss of, or alteration to the some key characteristics or features of the landscape area.

2.7 Low Adverse: Minor loss of, or alteration to the key characteristics or features of the landscape area.

2.8 No Change: Very minor alterations to the landscape characteristics or features of the area, which would have an insignificant overall effect on landscape character.

2.9 Low Beneficial: Minor improvements to the key characteristics or features that outweigh any adverse landscape effects of the proposal. Removal of minor incongruous features

2.10 Medium Beneficial: Notable improvements to the key landscape characteristics or features, or improvements resulting from removal of inappropriate land uses or features.

2.11 High Beneficial: Major landscape improvements, through the creation of a new landscape structure, and/or the removal of large scale inappropriate or incongruous features.

Landscape Effects

2.12 Overall landscape effects are determined by correlating the sensitivity of the landscape resource with the magnitude of landscape change. Professional judgement is used to determine the overall significance of the effect based on these two elements.

2.13 Overall significance is classified by **Substantial, Moderate, Slight** or **Negligible** and the effects can be **adverse** or **beneficial.**

Visual Assessment

2.14 Once again, flexibility is required when assessing the sensitivity of receptors depending upon their nature and their visual context. For this assessment the following general criteria applies:-

Visual Sensitivity of Receptors

2.15 High: Occupiers of residential properties with important views or viewpoints potential affected or altered by the proposal. Communities, and, or, recognised routes [Rights of Way] where users have important viewpoints and valued views, potentially affected or altered by development.

2.16 Medium: Occupiers of residential properties with secondary views, primarily from first floor level. Users of less important paths or routes [footway users], and Rights of Way users where it is considered that the landscape is not the significant feature. Users of outdoor recreation and leisure facilities where the view is potentially less important than the activities (e.g. sports pitches)

2.17 Low: People travelling through the landscape in cars, buses or on trains, or people at places of work where the view is less important than the activities or with limited views potentially affected by the development (e.g. Industrial sites).

Magnitude of Visual Change

2.18 High Adverse: Where the scheme would cause a significant deterioration, or change in the view, being a dominant and, or, an incongruous feature in the scene.

2.19 Medium Adverse: Where the scheme would cause a noticeable deterioration in the view, or form a visible and, or, a recognisable incongruous new element readily noticed by a casual observer.

2.20 Low Adverse: Where the scheme would cause a minor deterioration in the view or a small incongruous element in the scene that could be missed by a casual observer.

2.21 No Change: Where the scheme overall would not form a noticeable deterioration or improvement in the view.

2.22 Low Beneficial: Where the scheme would cause a minor improvement in the view or a small improvement to the scene that could be missed by a casual observer.

2.23 Medium Beneficial: Where the scheme would cause a noticeable improvement in the view or form a recognisable improvement that could be noticed by a casual observer.

2.24 High Beneficial: Where the scheme would cause a significant improvement in the view.

Visual Effect

2.25 Overall visual impact is determined by correlating the sensitivity of the receptor with the magnitude of visual change. Professional judgement is used to determine the overall significance based on these two elements.

2.26 Overall significance is classified as **Substantial, Moderate, Slight** or **Negligible** and the visual effects can be adverse or beneficial.