

# **PRESTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REGULATION 16 PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**REPRESENTATIONS SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF  
ROBERT HITCHINS LTD**

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)  
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004  
LOCALISM ACT 2011**

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## CONTENTS:

Page No:

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	REGULATION 16 PRESTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN	2
3.	REVIEW OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE BASE (JULY 2020)	8
4.	COMMENTS ON OTHER PRESTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES	15
5.	LAND WEST OF KINGSHILL LANE AND LAND SOUTH OF PRESTON	18
6.	CONCLUSIONS	20

## APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1 – ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS TO WEST OF KINGSHILL LANE

APPENDIX 2 – ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS TO SOUTH OF PRESTON

APPENDIX 3 - MHP REVIEW OF PWA JULY 2020 REPORT

APPENDIX 4 - MHP REVIEW OF PWA NOV 2019 REPORT

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Pegasus Group has been instructed to submit representations to the Regulation 16 Preston Neighbourhood Plan (PNP) public consultation on behalf of Robert Hitchins Ltd.
- 1.2 Representations on behalf of our client were submitted to the Regulation 14 Preston Neighbourhood Plan public consultation in April 2020 and are reported in the Consultation Report that comprises part of the Regulation 16 consultation.
- 1.3 Despite the detailed representations made, which in some instances made the same points as those of Cotswold District Council, the PNP continues to pursue Policy 1, designating a 'Preston Special Landscape Area'. The Regulation 16 version of the Neighbourhood Plan also introduces a green wedge 'key view' in Policy 1.
- 1.4 Robert Hitchins Ltd have land interests within the south of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. These representations provide comments on the Regulation 16 PNP and its emerging policies in so far as they would affect our client's interests in the Neighbourhood Area. Site plans indicating our client's land interests are attached at Appendices 1 and 2.

### **APPENDIX 1 – ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS TO WEST OF KINGSHILL LANE**

### **APPENDIX 2 – ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS TO SOUTH OF PRESTON**

- 1.5 At the outset the considerable time and effort put into the preparation of the Preston Neighbourhood Plan by the local community is acknowledged, including the time that has been spent in the preparation of additional evidence base by external consultants with regard to the landscape element of the PNP.

## 2. Regulation 16 Preston Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require the submission of a Neighbourhood Plan to a local authority under Regulation 15 (1) (d) to be accompanied by a;

**"a statement explaining how the proposed neighbourhood development plan meets the requirements of paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act."**

- 2.2 The statement described above is required to demonstrate how the Neighbourhood Plan meets the 'Basic Conditions' test. Basic Conditions are described in detail in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).<sup>1</sup>
- 2.3 It is necessary for a Neighbourhood Plan to meet the 'Basic Conditions' in order to progress through an Examination and progress to a community referendum. This matter is re-iterated at paragraph 37 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and again through the National Planning Practice Guidance.
- 2.4 One of the seven 'Basic Conditions' set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that the Neighbourhood Plan should be prepared in 'General Conformity' with the strategic policies in the Adopted Local Plan for the area in which they are located<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.5 The Cotswold District Local Plan 2011-2031<sup>3</sup> was adopted in August 2018, it contains the planning policy used by the Council to direct growth in the District for the period up to 2031. It is necessary therefore for the Preston Neighbourhood Plan to be in general conformity with this development plan document.
- 2.6 Paragraph 29 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) states that;

**"Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies."**

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<sup>1</sup> PPG Neighbourhood Planning - Paragraph: 055 Reference ID: 41-055-20180222 Last revised 22.02.2018  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#submitting-a-neighbourhood-plan-or-order-to-a-local-planning-authority>

<sup>2</sup> PPG Neighbourhood Planning - Paragraph 065 Reference ID: 41-065-20140306 Last revised 06.03.2014  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#basic-conditions-for-neighbourhood-plan-to-referendum>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/k2kjqvq3b/cotswold-district-local-plan-2011-2031-adopted-3-august-2018-web-version.pdf>

- 2.7 As a plan that was prepared under the NPPF (2012) the Cotswold District Local Plan does not differentiate between strategic and non-strategic policies. Therefore, in order to meet the Basic Conditions test it is necessary to consider whether the PNP is in general conformity with the adopted strategy and policies of the Cotswold District Local Plan.
- 2.8 The PNP is supported by a suite of evidence documents, including a revised Landscape Character Assessment (Rev E 17th July 2020) prepared by Portus and Whitton, which have been taken into consideration in the preparation of this response.
- 2.9 The PNP sub-divides Preston Parish into six landscape areas which are shown at Figure 6 of the document and Policy 1 sets out the PNP policy with regard to Countryside and Landscape. Further policies relate to Design, Local Green Space, Employment Land, Footpaths and Cycleways, Community Infrastructure and Transport and Village Amenity.
- 2.10 While the PNP does not preclude development in Preston, it is clear that a landscape led approach to development is proposed through the designation of 'Preston Special Local Landscape Area' at Policy 1:B.
- 2.11 It is necessary therefore to consider whether the designation of the Preston Special Local Landscape Area is in general conformity with the Cotswold District Local Plan.

The Cotswold District Local Plan

- 2.12 The Cotswold District Local Plan (CDLP) Vision states at paragraph 4.0.1:
- "Cirencester will continue to be the main focus for additional housing and employment growth, while its function as the dominant business location, service and cultural centre for much of the District will have been enhanced."**
- 2.13 Policy DS1 provides the Development Strategy for the CDLP listing the Principal Settlements, which includes Cirencester, as locations for development for housing and employment purposes for the period 2011-2031.
- 2.14 Policy DS2 of the Plan states that development within Development Boundaries on the Policies Map will be permissible in principle and Policy DS4 states that

open market housing outside principal and non-principal settlements will not be permitted unless it is in accordance with other policies of the Plan.

- 2.15 Policies S1 and S2 allocate sites in Cirencester to accommodate housing and employment growth with Policy S2 allocating land at Chesterton for 2,350 dwellings, (1,800 up to 2031), and 9.1ha of employment land, plus other associated infrastructure. Policy S3 provides for Town Centre related development at Cirencester.
- 2.16 It is noted from the Policies Map for the CDLP that land within Preston falls immediately outside the Settlement Boundary for Cirencester. Land to the north of the B4425 is within the national designation of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The remainder of the Parish has no other landscape designation identified in the CDLP.
- 2.17 The village has a Conservation Area and an employment allocation EES25 which is subject to Policy EC2.
- 2.18 The preparation of the Cotswold District Local Plan afforded the Council the opportunity to reconsider the designation of areas of 'Local' landscape value and also afforded the opportunity for consideration of whether currently non-designated open countryside should be included within any extended or new areas of 'Local' Landscape Value.
- 2.19 North west of Preston Parish the CDLP retained the 'North of Cirencester' area of Local Landscape Value, but it did not propose the designation of any additional areas of Local Landscape Value, nor did it make any landscape designations specific to Preston Parish.

#### Preston Neighbourhood Plan conformity with Cotswold District Local Plan

- 2.20 The PNP has sought to justify the inclusion of the Preston Special Local Landscape Area on the basis that the CDLP designates areas of Local Landscape Value. The landscape evidence prepared to support the PNP, the Portus and Whitton Assessment, (PWA) considers that Preston Parish has a landscape comparable with the nearest CDLP local landscape designation - 'North Cirencester Special Landscape Area'.
- 2.21 Given the CDLP failed to identify that any land within Preston Parish merited a local landscape designation it is considered that the PNP is not in general

conformity with the CDLP in proposing a Parish-wide landscape designation that takes its reference from Special Landscape Area status.

- 2.22 While it is right that Neighbourhood Plans prepare locally distinctive policies that build on the strategy of policies in an adopted local plan, such Neighbourhood Plan policies need to be rooted in evidence and subject to thorough examination. Furthermore, the Cotswold District Local Plan does not have a strategic policy that invites Neighbourhood Plans to prepare additional landscape designations.

The Strategic Need for Preston Parish to accommodate future development

- 2.23 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019)<sup>4</sup> requires at paragraph 73 for local authorities to maintain a five-year housing land supply plus a buffer. This supply is currently based on the housing requirement identified in a recently adopted local plan or an annual position statement.
- 2.24 The adopted Cotswold District Local Plan made provision through commitments and allocations for the delivery of 8,400 dwellings for the twenty-year period 2011-2031 (i.e.; 420 dwellings per annum).
- 2.25 The Cotswold District Local Plan review will provide for the development needs of the Council post 2031. This process is yet to commence, however the PNP in its introduction states that it will have a plan period up to 2036, this is not in general conformity with the plan period of the adopted Local Plan.
- 2.26 On commencement of the Cotswold Local Plan Review the Council will be required to review their evidence base including housing need, recent delivery against the adopted Cotswold Local Plan and housing land supply.
- 2.27 The PNP should not prejudice the requirements of the Cotswold Local Plan review by adopting a landscape Policy that may prevent the consideration of sites for future allocation in the Cotswold Local Plan Review.
- 2.28 Turning to the delivery of allocated sites in the Local Plan at the principal settlement of Cirencester, the Cotswold Annual Monitoring Report published in

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4

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/810197/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf)

May 2020<sup>5</sup> covering the period 2018-2019 evidences at p.6 that '0' dwellings were delivered at the S2 Strategic Site of South Chesterton.

- 2.29 The Cotswold Residential Land Monitoring Statistics report (1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020)<sup>6</sup> also demonstrates at Table 4 p.11 that completions in the District fell dramatically in 2019/20 to just 312 dwellings from an average of 824 dwellings (rounded) over the three year period 2016-2019.
- 2.30 The report also clearly demonstrates at p.39 the continued non-delivery of dwellings at the strategic allocated site in Cirencester of Chesterton's (site 9150).
- 2.31 Cotswold District Council will be undertaking a Local Plan review to plan for the long- term growth of the District beyond 2031.
- 2.32 Any such review will be required initially to plan for minimum housing need using the standard method, with account taken for any future changes to methodology introduced by changes to national planning policy and the Planning White Paper.
- 2.33 Current Government policy is to significantly boost the supply of homes (para 59 of the NPPF), this emphasis is continued in the recent consultation – White Paper: Planning for the Future and will need to be taken into account in the review of the Cotswold District Local Plan.
- 2.34 The allocated strategic Chesterton site (Cotswold District Local Plan Policy S2) , which has outline planning consent (16/00054/OUT) for 2,350 dwellings meets more than a quarter of the authorities total housing need up to 2031, consequently meeting more than local need for Cirencester. The Lichfields second edition Start to Finish Report (Feb 2020)<sup>7</sup> identifies as one of its four key conclusions that for large sites of greater than 500 dwellings, from the date at which an outline application is validated, it can take on average 5.0-8.4 years for the first home to be delivered and that such sites make no contribution to completions in the first five years.
- 2.35 It is evident that the allocated strategic site at Cirencester has so far failed to deliver development in accordance with the adopted Local Plan. In failing to

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/bztce2k3/cotswold-district-annual-monitoring-report-may-2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/4bmg5ey/1106-cotswold-district-residential-land-monitoring-statistics-2019-to-2020.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://lichfields.uk/media/5779/start-to-finish\\_what-factors-affect-the-build-out-rates-of-large-scale-housing-sites.pdf](https://lichfields.uk/media/5779/start-to-finish_what-factors-affect-the-build-out-rates-of-large-scale-housing-sites.pdf)

deliver it is clear that currently not only the principal settlement of Cirencester has no allocated site delivering homes to meet local market and affordable needs, but also the wider market and affordable housing needs of the district are not being met either. Maintaining a housing supply, including a range and choice of sites is key to ensuring housing delivery, this will also need to be addressed in the Local Plan review.

- 2.36 Cirencester has limited opportunity for expansion given the constraints that exist around its perimeter including the Cirencester Park Conservation Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the west, flooding constraints and North Cirencester Special Landscape Area to the north and the Chesterton's strategic allocation and existing employment land to the south of the town.
- 2.37 Land to the west of the town, adjacent to the existing development of Kingshill is unconstrained as shown on the Cotswold District Local Plan Policies Map<sup>8</sup> and provides the most sustainable location for new housing development being in close proximity to an existing secondary school (Kingshill), the employment opportunities of Love Lane Industrial Estate and Cirencester Town, and the large convenience stores situated to the south of Cricklade Road. Both sites referred to in para 1.4 have been submitted to Cotswold District Council in their Call for Sites.
- 2.38 Policy 1 of the PNP seeks to significantly restrain development in this location with the identification of both the Preston Special Local Landscape Area and a 'green wedge' key view, such that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan will prejudice the future sustainable development of Cirencester and the ability of the Council to meet local and wider market and affordable housing needs. An objection is therefore made to Policy 1.

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8

<https://cotswold.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=885eb94398bf4819b17bd66d64275e59>

### **3. Review of Landscape Character Assessment evidence base (July 2020)**

#### Portus and Whitton Landscape Character Assessment (July 2020)

- 3.1 MHP Chartered Landscape Architects have undertaken a thorough review of the PWA landscape evidence that underpins PNP Policy 1:B. The MHP review is attached at Appendix 3.

#### **APPENDIX 3 - MHP REVIEW OF PWA JULY 2020 REPORT**

- 3.2 There are no substantial notable or major changes to the updated July 2020 Portus and Whitton Landscape Character Assessment (PWA 2020) compared to the previous document that accompanied the Regulation 14 consultation in November 2019 (PWA 2019). Therefore, comments made by MHP to the Regulation 14 consultation still stand and are attached at Appendix 4.

#### **APPENDIX 4 - MHP REVIEW OF PWA NOV 2019 REPORT**

- 3.3 Changes to the PWA2020 document are generally limited to Chapter 4 Conclusion and Policy recommendations.
- 3.4 Clarification is provided that the northern part of Preston Parish (sub area 1) falls within Area 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands, the key characteristics of which are described. A further statement has been added to say how the characteristics apply accurately to much of the remainder of the parish landscape. However, it remains a matter of fact that the southern part of Preston Parish falls within landscape character area TV 3B The Ampneys' as identified in the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment. Although these areas share similar characteristics there is an increasing change from the Cotswold landscape to the clay vale landscape that is not acknowledged in either the previous PWA2019 or the recent update (PWA2020).
- 3.5 New wording to PWA2020 at paragraph 3 on p. 50 causes confusion as it mixes landscape character with quality and value. It suggests that sub areas 1 and 2 are similar in landscape character, whilst the character of sub areas 3 to 5 are more open. The assessment then tries to unify all sub areas by stating that they are all assessed to be of equal landscape value.
- 3.6 Whilst the Parish and their landscape consultants give equal landscape value, no assessment of landscape sensitivity is given which would assist with justifying the draft NDP policy.

- 3.7 PWA2020 does acknowledge that landscape character changes across the Parish, but then concludes that all areas of the parish are of equal landscape value. This is clearly not the case as the influence of major highways, pylons and the edge of Cirencester are notable detractors in the landscape and have an effect on landscape character in the parish and on the sensitivity of the landscape to change.
- 3.8 Additional new wording in the 6th para of p.51 acknowledges that there is a subtle landscape change in the transition to sub areas 3-5 from sub areas 1 and 2. It is clear that change in landscape sensitivity should also result from this transition, but it remains unacknowledged.
- 3.9 The final paragraph on p. 52 is a new addition and suggests that sub areas 3 to 5 retain strong rural characters in contrast to sub area 6 south of the A419. This completely ignores the visually prominent settlement edge of Cirencester which is a key characteristic of sub area 5. Reference to '*the open view of the urban town*' has been removed from the last paragraph on page 51 of the previous assessment (PWA2019) as this is an "awkward" fact that undermines the PNP argument that the landscape of the parish is all of the same value.
- 3.10 In summary, the updated landscape assessment does not change the landscape and visual baseline or conclusions drawn in the 2019 assessment. Some acknowledgment that the landscape character varies across the Parish is made with recognition that sub areas 1 and 2 are not the same as sub areas 3 to 5. This is downplayed as it undermines the position that the landscape throughout the Parish is of the same value when clearly there is variation in landscape sensitivity within the parish.
- 3.11 An issue of PWA2019 was that value was applied without justification underpinned with evidence. From comments subsequently made in the submitted PNP Consultation Report it was made clear that justification was based on resident's values not landscape value based on intrinsic landscape qualities. This has not been corrected in the updated version of the assessment.
- 3.12 The use of the term landscape 'value' is misleading and unhelpful. Professional landscape assessment of landscape sensitivity is undertaken by considering the susceptibility of a landscape with the value given to that landscape. It is clear that the landscape towards the southern and western margins of Preston Parish is less susceptible to change because of the existing settlement features (highways,

dwelling and pylons) as well as from changes in its condition. This gives rise to a potentially lower landscape sensitivity than other areas closer to the AONB/SLA or the village Conservation Area which are less influenced by urbanising features. This variation in both landscape and visual sensitivity is missing from PWA 2019 and has not been addressed in the updated assessment PWA2020.

- 3.13 The 'openness' of the landscape is a characteristic of some areas of the Parish, but it should not automatically be considered to give value to that landscape as is the position taken by the PNP.
- 3.14 Openness is a characteristic of sub area 5 that reduces the rural character of that sub area because of the influence of the existing urban edge. The loss of some of this openness to new woodland planting (for example) would therefore give rise to a stronger rural character to the landscape as visual connectivity with Cirencester was reduced and the rural setting of Preston village enhanced.
- 3.15 The PWA2020 and the PNP erroneously applies value on openness when it is maintaining separation of Preston village from Cirencester that is important to conserving the setting of the village when this does not necessarily have any correlation with the openness of the landscape.
- 3.16 MHP continue to assert, on behalf of our client, that the updated landscape assessment does not inform on variations in landscape or visual sensitivity across the Parish and as such it does not provide a robust evidence base to underpin the NDP justification for draft Policy 1 Part B.

Previous Comments to Reg 14 consultation on landscape matters

- 3.17 To assist the Examiner Pegasus repeat below comments made to the Regulation 14 public consultation on matters relating to Policy 1.
- **The conclusion that the whole of the Parish outside of the AONB would benefit from a policy that would afford an equivalent status and enforceability to that of a Special Landscape Area fails to recognise that the qualities of the landscape of the North Cirencester SLA are quite distinctive and unique to its location and that the landscape in that location forms a seamless transition of the AONB that surrounds it on three sides.**
  - **The landscape of the Preston Parish has value, but it is not all of the same value.**

- **The northern most area represented by sub area 1 has the greatest landscape and scenic beauty recognised by its inclusion within the Cotswolds AONB designation.**
- **Areas south of sub area 1 also reflect some of these qualities but not to the same extent.**
- **Areas immediately around Preston which contribute to its immediate setting similarly have a high sensitivity but there is no evidence base to justify all of the landscape of the parish having the same high value equivalent to that of the North Cirencester SLA.**
- **The PWA assessment acknowledges the varied features within this transitional landscape including significant potential detractors.**
- **The assessment then fails to translate changes in the landscape and its condition to variations in landscape and visual sensitivity. Instead, the assessment simply concludes that the Preston Parish is of high landscape quality throughout.**
- **Previous study undertaken by Cotswold District Council did not identify the landscape to have sufficient merits to justify designation and evidence provided in the PWA is not sufficiently robust to change this.**
- **Existing national and local policies which seeks to protect intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cotswolds AONB remain sufficient to protect the areas of higher landscape sensitivity within the parish.**
- **As such there appears little justification for a new 'Preston Landscape Area' policy.**

3.18 The geographical location of the SLA as illustrated in the Local Plan, is of particular note as it is contained on three sides by Cotswolds AONB designated landscape and separated from the wider rural landscape to the south and east by the main Cirencester settlement area.

3.19 The village of Preston lies outside the Cotswolds AONB and North Cirencester SLA. There are no landscape designations immediately adjoining the village and within the Parish only the area north of the B4425 falls within a designated landscape, that of the Cotswolds AONB.

3.20 The older part of Preston village has Conservation Area designation and although this primarily puts value on the built form, features and settlement pattern within the Conservation Area, the landscape which informs the setting will have value.

3.21 It is not unreasonable to recognise the open spaces immediately adjoining the Conservation Area which extend into the village, as being important to the immediate setting of the Conservation Area.

3.22 The field boundaries and landform in the Parish may reflect similar properties to those found generally throughout the Dip Slope landscape character area, however they are more greatly influenced by characteristics of the Upper Thames Clay Vale. There are also influences on their tranquillity and scenic beauty from detractors such as highways corridors, pylons, coniferous plantations and modern settlement features.

3.23 At the outset PWA2019 states that Preston Parish is located:

**'within the heart of the Cotswolds AONB'**

however, this is a deceptive statement as the village itself lies outside the AONB and only the northernmost part of the Parish is located within the AONB. This is an important point as greater value may be implied to landscape and visual sensitivity than is justified by virtue of the perceived location of the Parish.

3.24 Elevated viewpoints on local roads are included as *'important visual receptors'* with road users described as *'primary visual receptors'*. However, this is a flawed approach as road users should be concentrating on the road, not the landscape, hence the approach is likely to exaggerate assessment outcomes for visual sensitivity.

3.25 Appendix 2 states at paragraph 4.7:

**"A landscape with a low proportion of public rights of way can be considered to be less visible and as such be less sensitive to potential changes as fewer people (sensitive visual receptors) will widely experience those changes."**

3.26 Reference to Gloucestershire online rights of way mapping<sup>9</sup> demonstrates that the Parish has just one Bridleway (to the north of the A417). Public footpaths are situated within the south of the Parish providing connectivity in a westerly and southerly direction to the urbanised edges of Cirencester and Siddington, and in an easterly direction across the A417 to Ampney Crucis.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/public-rights-of-way/rights-of-way-online-map/>

- 3.27 The Parish includes large scale fields in the north, west and east away from the historically settled area while smaller scale fields are closely associated with the village and local lanes, these are important to the setting of the village and in particular the Conservation Area.
- 3.28 This demonstrates that there is not '*remarkable uniformity of defining landscape features*' across the landscape of the Parish, contrary to page 6 of the PWA assessment.
- 3.29 The Preston Landscape Area sub-parcels do not reflect landscape variation across the Parish, but are a reflection of distinct parcels as defined by the highway network. This fails to acknowledge that the Parish falls within two local landscape areas; Area 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands and Area TV 3B The Ampneys.
- 3.30 Thus, landscape character is not uniform across the Parish, the fact that landscape character changes from north to south is critical to assessing its landscape sensitivity – particularly if this is to be used for the basis of establishing adopted local policy in the PNP.
- 3.31 It appears that detractors in the landscape, including highway corridors, pylons and the urban edge of Cirencester have not informed the overall conclusions on landscape sensitivity in the WPA.
- 3.32 This matter is especially pertinent with regard to the area west of Kingshill Lane (Area 5) where pylons, the existing urban fringe, highway corridors and declining field boundaries all contribute to a lower quality of landscape and result in lower landscape and visual sensitivity.
- 3.33 All of these points cast doubt on the accuracy or adequacy of the landscape assessment undertaken as evidence base for the PNP for the purpose of preparing local planning policy.
- 3.34 Moreover, the landscape led approach to the PNP is not in general conformity with the adopted CDLP, which does not identify areas within the Parish as having landscape character of sufficient merit to warrant designation as a 'Special Landscape Area'.
- 3.35 It is considered that existing national and locally adopted planning policy provide the relevant basis for decision making with regard to landscape matters in

Preston Parish. A policy that designates the whole of the Parish as a Special Landscape Area is not a necessary or appropriate response to the protection of landscape character in the PNP and is unlikely to meet the “Basic Conditions” test on Examination of the PNP.

- 3.36 With regard to landscape matters, Policy EN5 – Cotswolds AONB would apply to that part of the Parish within the AONB and Policies EN1 – Built, Natural and Historic Environment; Policy EN4 – The Wider Natural and Historic Landscape and Policy EN7 – Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands would apply to development proposals in the remainder of the Parish.

#### Landscape Conclusions

- 3.37 Our client objects to the inclusion of Areas 4b and 5 within the proposed Preston Special Local Landscape Area at Policy 1 of the emerging PNP.
- 3.38 Our client also objects to the identified 'green wedge' key view identified at Policy 1.D in the emerging PNP.

#### 4. Comments on other Preston Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 4.1 Policy 4 – Employment Land – our client supports subsection B of this policy, but suggests that the policy should refer to all new businesses outside the Village Farm employment site, not just small businesses. As currently worded the policy is ambiguous and clarity is required.
- 4.2 Policy 5 – Footpaths and Cycleways includes a list of projects within Preston Parish for which developer contributions would be sought from new development.
- 4.3 It is important to note that developer contributions are negotiated through S.106 legal agreements at the point of determining a planning application and would be negotiated between those seeking planning permission and Cotswold District Council.
- 4.4 While any made PNP policy will be taken into consideration in the determination of an application the Council has a statutory duty to consult specific consultees, including the County Council, and Highways England where relevant, on development proposals. Requests for contributions have to be based on sound and up to date evidence at any time and considered in the light of the legal tests for planning obligations as set out in CIL Regulation 122, such evidence can be challenged where it is considered unreasonable.
- 4.5 A developer may therefore challenge the PNP evidence base on which any requests are made by the Parish, especially if it becomes outdated.
- 4.6 It may transpire in negotiating S.106 legal agreements that specific consultees and the Council consider that other 'out of Parish' footpath, cycleway, highway improvement or highway safety schemes take priority over those listed in the PNP despite a development being located within Preston Parish.
- 4.7 It will therefore be necessary for Cotswold District Council to determine the merits of those schemes identified in Policy 5 as part of any negotiated S.106 Legal Agreement in terms of the legal tests for planning obligations.
- 4.8 The Examiner may wish to consider a modification whereby the PNP sets out a list of those projects it would spend its CIL receipts on once it is 'made'.
- 4.9 Policy 6 – Community Infrastructure requires at section D for developers to consult with the local community on how options for additional community infrastructure could be met.

- 4.10 Table 2 on p.40 of the PNP lists 'necessary community infrastructure improvements' and includes additional/new village hall facilities; assistance with securing the long term lease of the playing field and children's play area; provision of long term allotment space and other facilities such as litter; dog waste and grit/salt bins.
- 4.11 It is clear therefore that the PNP anticipates new development coming forward within the PNP area despite Policy 1 which clearly seeks to limit the scale of any new development and therefore the ability to provide community infrastructure contributions.
- 4.12 New community infrastructure would be negotiated as part of any S.106 legal agreement as previously described above and requests for contributions would need to be reasonable and proportionate to the scale of development proposed in accordance with relevant regulations.
- 4.13 It would be unreasonable to expect a development of new dwellings to provide land for a new village hall when other contributions would be likely to be requested by the Council in determining such an application such as affordable homes, public open space, education and library contributions, which clearly all provide public benefit.
- 4.14 Moreover, made Neighbourhood Plan Parishes benefit from a percentage of CIL receipts therefore the Parish will receive funds for community infrastructure from new development once the PNP is made.
- 4.15 Pegasus request that the Examiner amended Subsection D of Policy 6 accordingly.
- 4.16 With regard to Policy 7 – Transport and Village Amenity it will be for the highway authority to consider how impacts on any increase in traffic resulting from development will be managed on the local highway network. They will also determine what increase in traffic is considered to be 'reasonable' and will negotiate any solutions required concerning highway safety matters.
- 4.17 Any '2018 baseline' would need to have been modelled to a standard acceptable to the highway authority and to be sufficiently robust to be used as evidence for the purposes of planning policy.

4.18 It is noted that paragraph 17 of the Transport and Village Amenity Evidence Paper states with regard to the Gloucestershire Police Traffic Survey:

**" ii. Mean speeds in the 30 mph zone were generally in line with the posted limit at the 85th percentile).**

**iii. Week day peak hour mean traffic speeds were observed to be lower than the posted limit"** (emphasis added)

## **5. Land west of Kingshill Lane and land south of Preston**

- 5.1 Our clients have previously pursued an outline planning application at land west of Kingshill Lane (see site at Appendix 1), however on indication from the Planning Inspector for the CLP that this land would not be required in the short term as an allocation in the Local Plan the application was withdrawn.
- 5.2 Land to the south of the Parish (see site at Appendix 2) has also been submitted to the Cotswold Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment call for sites.
- 5.3 Both sites have recently been submitted to the Cotswold Call for Sites 2020 which will update the Council's Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment.
- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) requires Local Plans to be reviewed within five years of adoption<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, despite not having an up to date Local Development Scheme setting out a project plan for review of the Local Plan, it will be necessary for the Council to undertake a review of the adopted Local Plan by the end of July 2023.
- 5.5 Such a Local Plan review will need to account for changes in the Standard Method for assessing housing need introduced by the Government through the revised NPPF (2019), and any future changes to this methodology as previously described.
- 5.6 The adopted CDLP provides the majority of new housing growth for Cirencester at the Strategic Allocation of Chesterton's to the south of the town.
- 5.7 Given the impact of Covid -19, the need for immediate social distancing in April 2020 and the associated moth balling of construction sites by house builders during the period of "Lockdown", the initial stagnation of the housing market and the general associated slow-down in the economy that has resulted from Covid-19, it is most unlikely that the anticipated delivery rates from the Chesterton's strategic allocation will be met.
- 5.8 Cirencester is the largest of all settlements in the administrative area of Cotswold and therefore has the highest associated housing need across all tenures within

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<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 33 NPPF (2019) & Regulation 10A of Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England)Regulations 2012.

the District. A failure to deliver new housing at the Chesterton site affects the ability of key workers to access housing at the town and exacerbates any shortage of social housing as new affordable homes fail to be delivered.

- 5.9 It may transpire that alternative sites to Chesterton need to be considered in advance of the Local Plan review in order to ensure that the plan period housing requirements of the town are met, particularly if the strategic allocation fails to deliver at rates assumed acceptable by the Local Plan Inspector.
- 5.10 Given the fact, as previously described that land around the “clockface” of Cirencester remains constrained by national and local landscape and heritage designations, as well as flood risk, the unconstrained nature of land to the west of Kingshill Lane and to the south of Preston is of particular importance as a resource to the town and the local community for future development purposes.
- 5.11 To make land west of Kingshill Lane and land to the south of Preston subject to a local landscape designation and 'green wedge' key view policy in the PNP risks the ability of the town to meet its housing and employment needs, not only in the current plan period up to 2031, but also beyond.

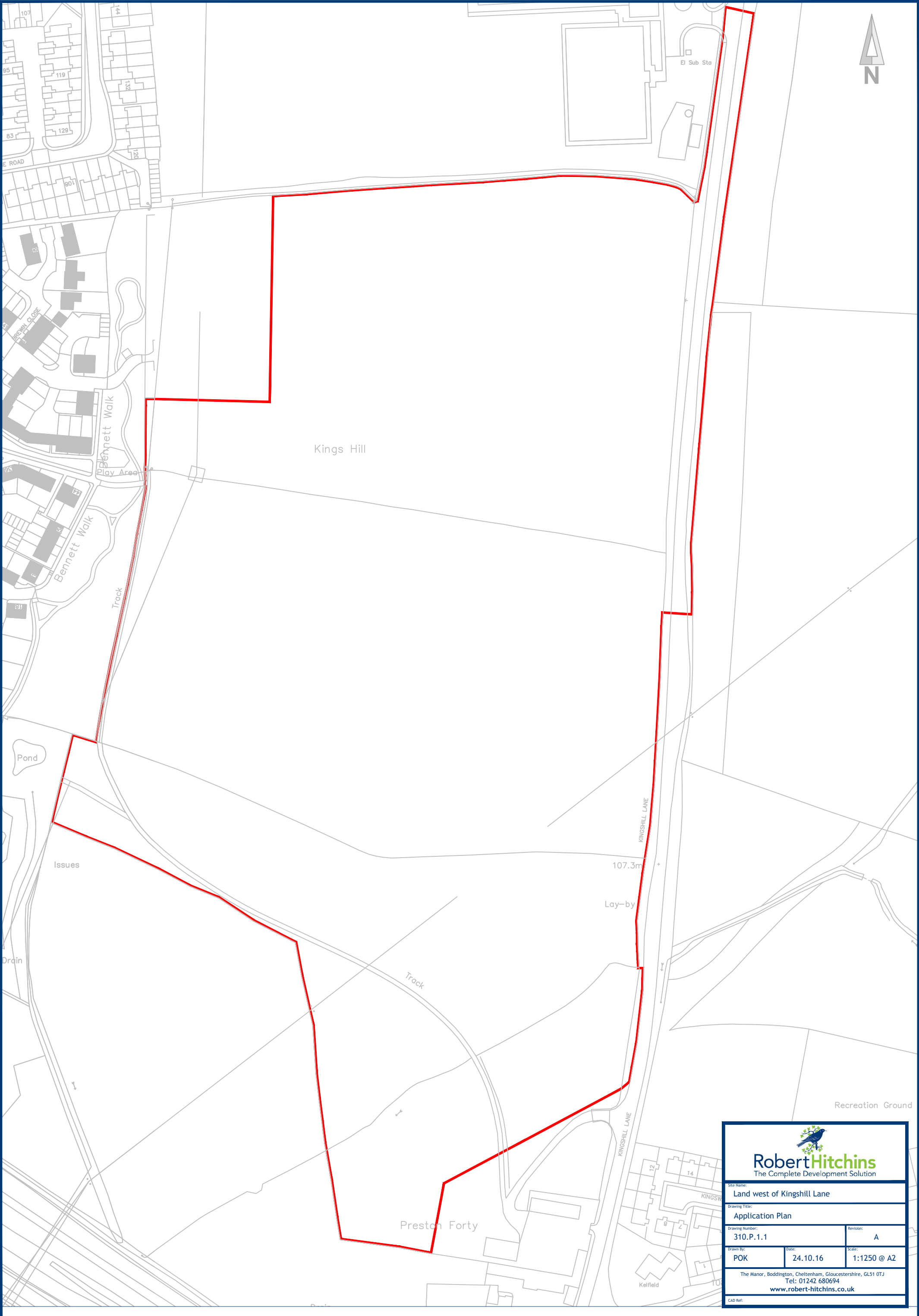
## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 These representations consider the Regulation 16 Neighbourhood Plan and its associated evidence base.
- 6.2 It is considered that the Preston Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Portus and Whitton (July 2020), which has resulted in a landscape policy similar in status to 'Special Landscape Area' for that part of the Parish situated outside the AONB, is not in general conformity with the adopted local plan.
- 6.3 It is also considered that the Portus and Whitton Landscape Character Assessment remains insufficiently robust as an evidence base for the formulation of local planning policy in the PNP.
- 6.4 Representations have also been made on policies requesting contributions towards Preston specific projects from development that occurs within the Parish.

**APPENDIX 1**

**ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS**

**TO WEST OF KINGSHILL LANE**





**Robert Hitchins**  
The Complete Development Solution

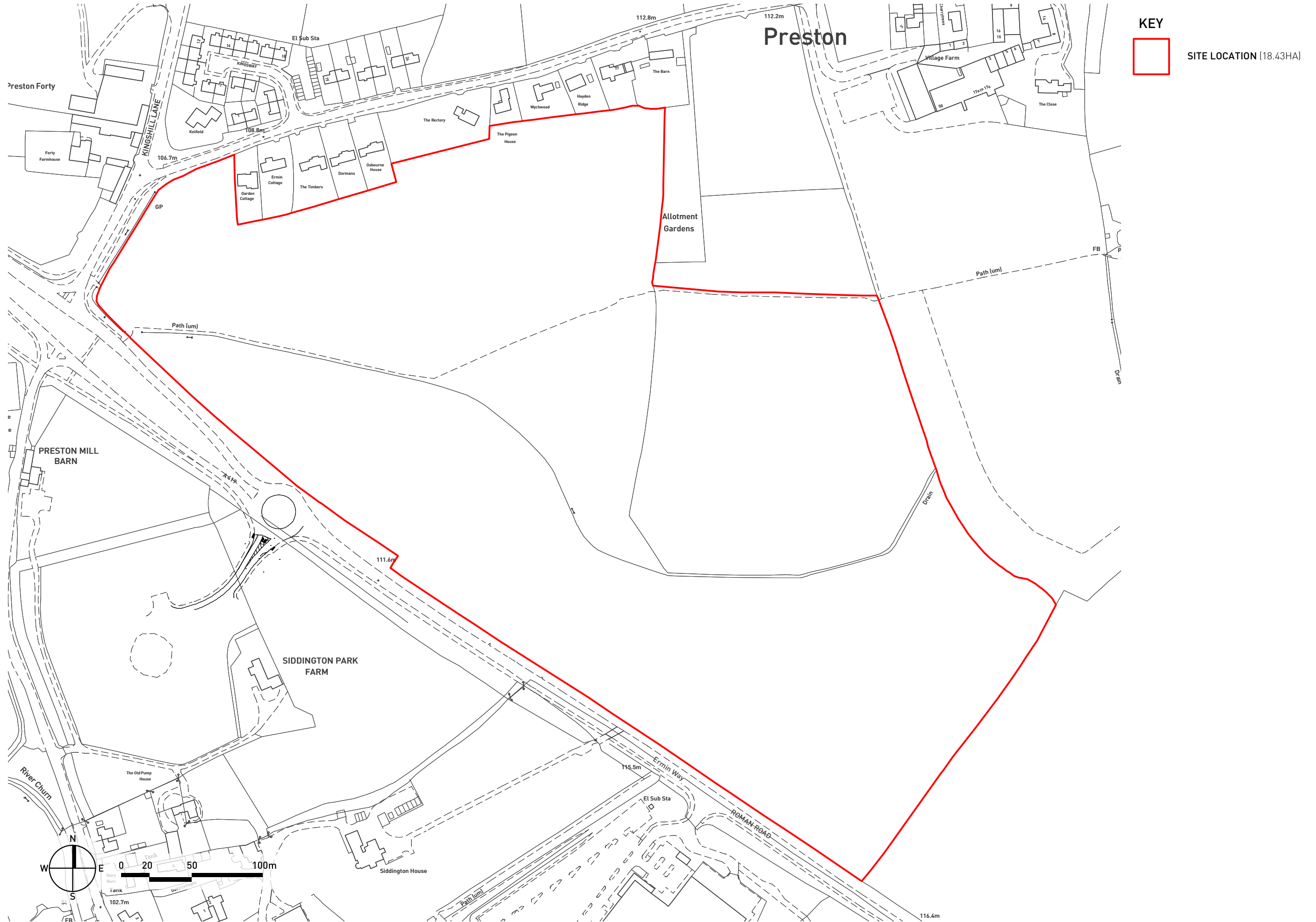
Site Name: Land west of Kingshill Lane		
Drawing Title: Application Plan		
Drawing Number: 310.P.1.1		Revision: A
Drawn By: POK	Date: 24.10.16	Scale: 1:1250 @ A2
The Manor, Boddington, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL51 0TJ Tel: 01242 680694 <a href="http://www.robert-hitchins.co.uk">www.robert-hitchins.co.uk</a>		
CAD Ref:		

**APPENDIX 2**

**ROBERT HITCHINS LTD LAND INTERESTS**

**TO SOUTH OF PRESTON**

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## LAND SOUTH OF PRESTON, CIRENCESTER - SITE LOCATION PLAN



**APPENDIX 3**

**MHP REVIEW OF PWA**

**JULY 2020 REPORT**

30<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Pegasus Group  
Pegasus House  
Querns Business Centre  
Whitworth road  
Cirencester  
GL7 1RT

For the attention of Louise Follett

Dear Louise,

**Observations on Revision E changes to the Landscape Character Assessment Preston Neighbourhood Plan (1606/R/1 Rev E 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020) prepared by Portus + Whitton and implications to the landscape evidence base**

We have been instructed by Robert Hitchins Ltd to undertake an assessment of recent changes made to the Landscape Character Assessment for Preston Neighbourhood Plan prepared by Portus+Whitton Landscape Architects. Document 1606/R/1/Rev E issued July 2020 has been assessed against the previous assessment issued in November 2019. Our assessment has focused on understanding the extent of the changes made and whether these changes affect the baseline landscape and visual assessment.

The following provides a summary of the changes identified along with our professional observations on ANY implications to the landscape and visual baseline.

- In summary there are no notable or major changes to the updated assessment. There are a number of minor rewordings and occasional corrections through Chapters 1 to 3. These do not change the assessment baseline or introduce any further new evidence or re-assessment of previous evidence. Our observation previously provided by MHP Design remain pertinent.
- Chapter 1 Introduction does not set out the changes from the previous issue which would have been helpful. However, our assessment is that changes made in this latest update are generally minor in nature. Changes predominately focus on rewording or minor corrections.
- Minor changes within Chapters 1 to 3 include an acknowledgement on page 5 that the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment is an existing relevant document. This is notable because previously an over emphasis was made in our view on the Cotswolds Landscape Character Assessment applicable to the landscape which falls within the Cotswolds AONB. With reference to the landscape of the parish this is limited to the land north of Akeman Street, identified as sub-area 1 in the Portus Whitton Landscape Character Assessment.

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- Greater changes have generally been limited to Chapter 4 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.
- Clarification is given that the northern part of the parish (sub area 1) falls within Area 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands and key characteristics are then described. A further statement has been added to say how the characteristics apply accurately to much of the remainder of the parish landscape. However, it remains a matter of fact that the southern part of the parish falls within landscape character area TV 3B The Ampneys' as identified in the Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment. Although these areas share similar characteristics there is an increasing change from the Cotswold landscape to the clay vale landscape that is not really acknowledged in either the previous assessment or recent updated assessment.
- New wording added to the updated assessment (3<sup>rd</sup> para page 50) with reference to the key landscape characteristics extracted from LCA 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands in which sub-area 1 falls.

*'The above landscape description applies accurately to much of the remainder of the Preston Parish landscape and as noted in the individual character area analysis, in terms of quality, Sub area 2 is assessed to be of a common character while the landscape within sub-areas 3-5 while characterised by their openness, are assessed to be of equal value.'*

This statement is confusing as it mixes character with quality with value. The new paragraph suggests that sub areas 1 and 2 are similar in landscape character whilst the character of sub areas 3 to 5 are more open so identifiably different to sub areas 1-2. The assessment then tries to unify all sub areas by saying that they are all assessed to be of equal 'landscape value'. Our assessment is that whilst the parish and their landscape consultants give equal landscape value throughout, changes to landscape character that occur across the parish, particularly north to south, are not fully assessed in terms of effects on landscape and visual sensitivity. In our opinion, this omission undermines the landscape evidence that is used to underpin the draft NDP policy.

- The updated assessment subtly acknowledges that landscape character does change across the parish but still draws a conclusion that all areas of the parish are of equal landscape value even though in our view there is variation in landscape and visual sensitivity. In our professional view this approach is flawed as the influence of major highways, pylons and the open, settled edge of Cirencester are notable detractors in the landscape which do have an effect on landscape character of some areas of the parish and are notable influences on the sensitivity of the landscape to change.

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- Further new wording in the 6<sup>th</sup> para page 51 acknowledges that there is a subtle landscape change in the transition to sub areas 3-5 from sub areas 1 and 2. In the same paragraph it then goes on to say that *'they are assessed to be of equal value'* justifying the draft policy that would afford protection the same as the North Cirencester SLA. It is clear that change in landscape sensitivity should also result from this transition but it remains unacknowledged.
- The final paragraph on page 52 is new and has been added to suggest that sub areas 3 to 5 retain strong rural characters in contrast to sub area 6 south of the A419. This appears to disregard the visually prominent settlement edge of Cirencester which is a key characteristic of sub area 5. We note that reference to *'the open view of the urban town'* has been removed from the last paragraph on page 51 of the previous assessment which was a factual observation that supports our view that there is variation in landscape and visual sensitivity across the landscape of the parish that should be taken more fully into consideration.
- In summary, the updated landscape assessment does not notably change the landscape and visual baseline or general conclusions drawn by the authors in the 2019 landscape assessment. Some acknowledgment that the landscape character varies across the parish is welcomed with recognition that sub areas 1 and 2 are not the same as sub areas 3 to 5. This continues to be downplayed in our view, maintaining the position that the landscape throughout the parish is of the same value when clearly there is variation in landscape and visual sensitivity.
- One of the issues of the previous landscape assessment is that landscape value was applied without assessment justification underpinned with evidence. From comments subsequently made by NDP (Consultation Statement August 2020) it was made clear that justification of landscape value is based on consultation with residents rather than through an understanding of the intrinsic landscape qualities and detractors within and adjoining the parish. This has not changed in the updated version of the assessment.
- The use of the term landscape 'value' remains misleading and unhelpful in our view. Professional landscape assessment of landscape sensitivity is undertaken by considering the susceptibility of a landscape with the value professionally attributed to that landscape. It is clear that the landscape towards the southern and western margins of the parish is less susceptible to change because of the influence of existing settlement features (highways, dwellings and pylons) as well as from changes in its condition. This gives rise to a potentially lower landscape sensitivity than other areas closer to the AONB/SLA or the village Conservation Area which are less influenced by urbanising features. This variation in landscape and visual sensitivity are missing from the earlier landscape assessment and have not been addressed in the updated assessment in our view.

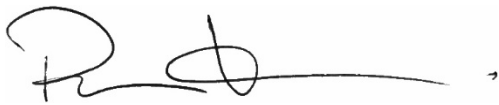
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- The openness of the landscape is a characteristic of some areas of the parish but it should not automatically be considered to give value to that landscape as the position taken by the NDP. Openness is a characteristic of sub area 5 for example that reduces the rural character of that sub area because of the influence of the prominent urban edge. The loss of some of this openness to new woodland planting (for example) would therefore give rise to a stronger rural character to the landscape as visual connectivity with Cirencester would be reduced and the rural setting to Preston village would be enhanced. The NDP erroneously applies value on openness in our view, when it is maintaining separation of Preston village from Cirencester that is important to conserving the setting of the village and this does not necessarily have any correlation with the openness of the landscape.

Overall, the changes to the landscape character assessment (Revision E) do not change the baseline provided in the previous assessment. The assessment remains flawed in our opinion as it does not fully identify or explore the variations in landscape and visual sensitivity found across the parish. As such the updated landscape character assessment does not provide the robust evidence required to underpin the NDP justification for draft Policy 1.

Yours sincerely



Paul Harris CMLI

Director  
MHP Design Chartered Landscape Architects

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **MHP REVIEW OF PWA NOV 2019 REPORT**

## **Preston Neighbourhood Plan:**

### **Comments on the Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Portus + Whitton in support of a Preston Landscape Area proposal**

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#### **1.0 Introduction and scope**

- 1.1 MHP Design Ltd Chartered Landscape Architects were instructed by Robert Hitchins Ltd to prepare comments on the document 'Landscape Character Assessment Preston Neighbourhood Plan' prepared by Portus+Whitton Landscape Architects. The landscape assessment was prepared in November 2019 to support a 'Preston Landscape Area' policy as part of the emerging Preston Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 The Portus+Whitton assessment concludes that the Preston parish is of high landscape quality and as such should be afforded a similar level of protection, as the North Cirencester Special Landscape Area (SLA), which the parish borders in part to the north west.
- 1.3 MHP Design Ltd examines the justifications that underpin this conclusion drawn by Portus+Whitton.

#### **2.0 North Cirencester Special Landscape Area**

- 2.1 The North Cirencester Special Landscape Area is enforced through Cotswold District Council Local Plan 2011-2031 policy EN6 Special Landscape Areas. This was reviewed in 2017 by White Consultants who produced a study 'Cotswold District: Special Landscape Areas Review – Landscape Context and Physical Changes. Chapter 7 of the assessment reviewed the North Cirencester SLA. The review considered the evidence underpinning the current SLA designations and built on and reviewed the substantial assessment of SLA's undertaken in February 2001 by White Consultants on behalf of Cotswold District Council.
- 2.2 Justification for the SLA's is given in section 2 of the White review over a number of paragraphs. These can be condensed to a number of points:
  - Cotswold District is probably the most rural and sensitive of the districts in Gloucestershire with around 80% of its area covered by the Cotswolds AONB. It

encompasses a range of attractive rural landscapes featuring scarp and dip slope, wold and valley.

- The constraint of the AONB, where great weight is placed on the consideration of landscape by national policy, places additional pressure for development on the landscape outside. Some of these landscapes are very similar to the adjoining AONB landscapes or are a continuation of transition to other landscape character types. Some also act as part of the setting to the AONB.
- The role of the SLA would be to protect, enhance and facilitate better management of the best of the area's landscapes outside of the Cotswolds AONB.

### 2.3 The White review of the North Cirencester SLA states of the areas relationship to the National Character Area profile and boundaries;

*'The SLA lies entirely within the Cotswolds NCA107 National Landscape Character Area. The western part forms part of the Lower Churn Valley which continues north into the Cotswolds AONB. The eastern part forms part of the dip slope which continues further north and east into the Cotswolds AONB. The river valley permanent pasture with its hedge boundaries, the locally quarried limestone of Baunton village together with the dip slope landform and later planned enclosure with its arable farming and limestone drystone walls give the area a sense of unity with the surrounding Cotswolds.'*

### 2.4 The 2017 review confirmed that the qualities of the area as defined in the SLA report are still relevant. In addition, the following qualities apply:

- The distinctive sinuous braided channels of the River Churn with the network of drains and small low key bridges.
- The simple, relatively unenclosed valley bottom which, with the valley sides, create a clear and unspoilt rural green corridor between Cirencester and Stratton.
- The Monarch's Way long distance footpath and other public rights of way along the valley and lower valley sides.

### 2.5 In summary, the qualities of the landscape which justify the SLA designation are quite specific to the North Cirencester SLA. Together they create a landscape with a sense of unity with the surrounding Cotswolds. The geographical location of the SLA as clearly illustrated in the Local Plan is also notable in that it is contained on three sides by

Cotswolds AONB designated landscape and separated from the wider rural landscape to the south and east by the main Cirencester settlement area.

- 2.6 The North Cirencester SLA is therefore quite distinctive in its own right even though it forms part of a much wider dip slope character landscape. Although the dip slope landscape character area in which the SLA lies extends southwards, the White review is clear and puts an emphasis on the relevance of the character area extending north and eastwards from the SLA into the immediately adjoining Cotswolds AONB.

### **3.0 Preston and existing designations**

- 3.1 The village of Preston lies outside of the Cotswolds AONB and North Cirencester SLA. There are no landscape designations immediately adjoining the village and within the parish only the area north of the B4425 falls within a designated landscape. This northern most section falls within the Cotswolds AONB.
- 3.2 The older village area has a Conservation Area designation and although this primarily puts value on the built form, features and settlement pattern within the Conservation Area, the landscape which informs the setting will have value.
- 3.3 Although there is no accompanying Conservation Area Statement, the Preston parish Design Statement (April 2017) identified the green areas adjoining the village as being important to illustrate the rural character of the village. Guideline G1 – Green Areas in the design statement recognises this and states that they should be retained. It is not unreasonable to recognise these immediately adjoining open spaces which extend into the village, as being important to the immediate setting of the Conservation Area.
- 3.4 All other areas of the parish remain without landscape designations. This does not mean it is without merit or is not cherished but that it has not been identified as having the same landscape and scenic value as the land at the north of the parish or importance to the setting of the AONB as the North Cirencester SLA.
- 3.5 Features such as arable land use, field boundaries and landform may reflect similar properties to those found generally throughout the Dip Slope landscape character area. However, these are likely to have less unity with the Cotswolds AONB than areas within the North Cirencester SLA. This is because of the greater influence from increasing characteristics of the Upper Thames Clay Vale as well as potentially greater influences on

tranquillity and scenic beauty from detractors such as highways corridors, pylons, coniferous plantations and modern settlement features.

#### **4.0 Portus + Whitton Landscape Character Assessment**

- 4.1 The Portus+Whitton (PWA) assessment sets out in its 'scope' that the plan 'aims to provide evidence to support and inform the policy framework to ensure that future development, which may be proposed either within or near to Preston parish is appropriate to its character and setting.
- 4.2 The assessment describes the location of Preston to be 'within the heart of the Cotswolds AONB' which is at the outset deceptive. The village lies outside of the Cotswolds AONB with only a northern part of the parish falling within the AONB designation. This is confirmed in Figure 6 page 23 of the assessment which clearly identifies the relationship of Preston with the Cirencester, the AONB and in particular the wider agricultural landscape to the east and south which falls outside of the AONB boundary.
- 4.3 The assessment correctly identifies that the parish is situated at the fringe of two National Character Areas: NCA107 Cotswolds and NCA108 Upper Thames Clay Vales. Not disputing that the landscape in which the parish lies forms a transitional area, it is clear that Preston does not lie in the heart of the Cotswolds. This is important as the statement implies a quality and sensitivity which should not be assumed until confirmed through field study and the assessment process.
- 4.4 If landscape susceptibility and value are assumed to be high due to geographical relationship with the Cotswolds AONB then the assessment may identify landscape and visual sensitivity greater than is justified.
- 4.5 This potential for implying greater value than is justified is further compounded by the approach to sensitivity of potential visual receptors. Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition sets out accepted guidance for landscape professionals. However, page 8 of the PWA chooses to apply greater importance to road network users due to there being only a limited number of public rights of way within the parish.
- 4.6 The assessment describes road users as 'the primary visual receptors' and goes on to assume that 'the most utilised routes are very minor rural roads where drivers are likely to be driving slowly and appreciating the view.' Drivers may be more likely to be driving slowly but they will also be concentrating on the road unlike walkers or other potential

visual receptors. This approach is then used to justify the inclusion of several elevated viewpoints on local roads as '*important visual receptors*'.

- 4.7 This approach is flawed and potentially produces an exaggerated assessment outcome for visual sensitivity. A landscape with a low proportion of public rights of way can be considered to be less visible and as such be less sensitive to potential changes as fewer people (sensitive visual receptors) will widely experience those changes.
- 4.8 The PWA provides background information which assists with understanding that the landscape features of the parish are varied. Figure 5 Topography page 14 clearly shows the more elevated landscape in the north of the parish has a strong correlation with the Cotswolds AONB. This higher ground of the Cotswolds AONB extends to the east and west including a broad sweep of elevated land within the North Cirencester SLA.
- 4.9 The village of Preston is seen in a much broader area of lower slope at its transition with the clay vale.
- 4.10 Historic maps also show variation in field patterns which have a potentially strong influence on landscape character across the parish. Historic small scale fields are closely associated with the village and local lanes. Large scale fields are seen to the north, west and east away from the historically settled area. These clearly show that the small fields immediately adjoining the village and village lanes are important to the setting of the village and in particular the Conservation Area.
- 4.11 These local variations are subtle but important and show that there is not 'remarkable uniformity of defining landscape features' across the landscape of the parish, contrary to that stated on page 6 of the assessment. Further evidence of landscape variation is provided in the assessment through the identification of 6 sub areas as illustrated in Figure 13.
- 4.12 Unfortunately, the Preston sub areas do not reflect landscape variation across the parish but create land parcels defined by the highway network. This is very unhelpful where the study sets out to provide evidence 'to ensure that future development, which may be proposed either within or near to Preston parish is appropriate to its character and setting'.
- 4.13 The variation in landscape is further confirmed in the acknowledgment that the parish falls across two local landscape character areas. The northern part of the parish, corresponding

with the Cotswolds AONB is confirmed as being within Area 11A South and Mid Cotswolds Lowlands, part of the Dip Slope Lowland area LCT11 (Cotswolds AONB LCA). This has a strong rural Cotswold character and correlation with the designated landscape. The remainder of the parish falls within the Area TV 3B The Ampneys (Gloucestershire LCA) with stronger physical and visual relationship with the Upper Thames Basin landscape to the south of Preston.

- 4.14 Understanding that the landscape is not uniform and that the character changes from north to south is critical to assessing landscape sensitivity, particularly if providing evidence to inform policy framework. The PWA identifies that these changes exist but appear not to adequately take them into consideration when assessing sensitivity and implications for development. An example of this is that the PWA assessment confirms no guidelines or strategies are available for the broader 'Ampneys' landscape character area so chooses to rely only on guideline and strategies for the broader Dip Slope Lowland character type. These guidelines and strategies are relevant for the northern part of the parish but not so Preston and its immediate landscapes to the west, east and to the south.
- 4.15 The PWA uses the guidelines and strategies of the Dip Slope Lowland character area within the Cotswolds AONB to justify higher sensitivity to the parish outside of the AONB. Whilst some elements of the guidance may be appropriate in a transitional landscape this has to be balanced by accepting that they potentially become less relevant south of the AONB as other influences are introduced to the landscape. This has the potential to justify higher landscape sensitivity across the parish which would not be underpinned by the evidence on the ground. It also has potential to suppress local variations in landscape sensitivity and polarise sensitivity across the parish. This does not provide a strong local evidence base to assist decision makers on capacity of the landscape to future changes.
- 4.16 The individual sub area assessments also identify features or issues of sensitivity which have important implications to understanding local landscape and visual sensitivity. Sub area 4a to the east of Kingshill and north of the village identifies that 'A key characteristic of Preston village is the way in which the rural landscape permeates into the village and its main road, with the presence of gaps between the houses enabling views through the open countryside.' This is a fair assessment, but the nature of the views is not assessed. These views are experienced between settlement features and have an emphasis to the open landscape to the north. Indeed the assessment goes on to say that 'It would be desirable to implement a succession tree planting plan to replant the woodland copse

between Church Farm and Kingshill Lane with native tree species to screen views of the urban edge of Kingshill Meadow and to extend the shelterbelt along Kingshill Lane southward.' This implies two issues which impact on local landscape and visual sensitivity.

- 4.17 The first is that the woodland copse referred to has a high coniferous content which is less preferable than a deciduous woodland copse. The assessment is identifying a less desirable but prominent landscape feature and suggesting enhancement. However, in the overall assessment of landscape quality, this is not seen to influence outcomes even though it clearly illustrates variation in landscape condition and potential sensitivity.
- 4.18 The assessment also tells us that the views to the west are not of the same value as views to the north and that screening would be beneficial along Kingshill Lane. This clearly identifies a lower quality view with correspondingly lower visual sensitivity of the land west of Kingshill Lane which new tree planting could enhance. None of this comes through within the conclusions drawn by the assessment.
- 4.19 The assessment for sub area 5 confirms views of the Kingshill Meadow estate are prominent on the approach to Cirencester but acknowledges that the recently planted parkland will provide screening. It is clear that new tree planting in this landscape can provide screening which would be beneficial to local views as identified in the assessment of sub area 4a along Kingshill Lane. The assessment identifies that the open agricultural land west of Kingshill Lane is important to maintain the separate identity of the village. However, the assessment has already put little value on views into sub area 5 from the village. This suggests that sub area 5 does not make a significant contribution to the setting of the village although it will contribute to a wider rural setting. This detailed level of assessment is missing and the PWA fails to conclude that these variations have an effect on both landscape and visual sensitivity in the southern part of the parish.
- 4.20 Detractors in the landscape such as highway corridors, pylons, and the urban edge of Cirencester are clearly important considerations when assessing landscape and visual sensitivity. Although these are referenced throughout, they do not seem to inform the overall conclusions on sensitivity drawn in the assessment. Pylons, existing urban fringe, highway corridors and declining field boundaries all contribute to a lower quality landscape west of Kingshill Lane and result in lower landscape and visual sensitivity.

## 5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The PWA assessment concludes that the quality of the landscape of the parish outside of the Cotswolds AONB, differs only marginally in character. As such it concludes that Preston Parish is of high landscape quality. This it justifies by the continuity of character with sub area 1 and overall uniformity of the landscape excepting that the character of sub area 6 is more closely linked to the commercial fringe of Cirencester.
- 5.2 The conclusion then drawn is that the whole of the parish outside of the AONB would benefit from a policy that would afford an equivalent status and enforceability to that of a Special Landscape Area.
- 5.3 This conclusion fails to recognise that the qualities of the landscape of the North Cirencester SLA are quite distinctive and unique to its location and that the landscape in that location forms a seamless transition of the AONB that surrounds it on three sides. The landscape of the Preston parish has value, but it is not all of the same value. The northern most area represented by sub area 1 has the greatest landscape and scenic beauty recognised by its inclusion within the Cotswolds AONB designation. Areas south of sub area 1 also reflect some of these qualities but not to the same extent. Areas immediately around Preston which contribute to its immediate setting similarly have a high sensitivity but there is no evidence base to justify all of the landscape of the parish having the same high value equivalent to that of the North Cirencester SLA.
- 5.4 The PWA assessment acknowledges the varied features within this transitional landscape including significant potential detractors. The assessment then fails to translate changes in the landscape and its condition to variations in landscape and visual sensitivity. Instead, the assessment simply concludes that the Preston parish is of high landscape quality throughout.
- 5.5 The landscape of the parish does have some high value landscape but not throughout. Previous study undertaken by Cotswold District Council did not identify the landscape to have sufficient merits to justify designation and evidence provided in the PWA is not sufficiently robust to change this. Existing national and local policies which seek to protect intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cotswolds AONB remain sufficient to protect the areas of higher landscape sensitivity within the parish. As such there appears little justification for a new 'Preston Landscape Area' policy.

March 2020

Version V1