9.0 Landscape Character and Detail

A. Landscape Strategy

The landscape of new development has a significant bearing upon its character and appearance, its impact upon the surrounding area and affects the quality of life of its residents. Therefore, in accordance with the design objectives for the site, the purpose of the landscape strategy is to improve the sense of openness and amenity; reinforce local landscape character and distinctiveness; maintain and enhance the identity and setting of Shackleford village; create an attractive living environment; contribute towards social inclusion; improve biodiversity and provide for recreation and access.

In order to achieve these objectives, the landscape strategy for the site is based upon the same principles which are integral to the overall layout of the site, namely;

- Landscape character and integration
- Identity and setting
- Permeability and legibility
- Connectivity
- Inclusion, recreation and access to the countryside
- Local distinctiveness

It is worth emphasising that the setting of the Farm within the Surrey Hills AONB has been the overarching consideration in guiding the landscape approach to the proposals. The impact of new development on the character of the existing landscape, of which Shackleford village is an important part, has been uppermost in developing the proposals, with respect to the siting of buildings, the retention of trees, the treatment of alien features such as the existing boundary conifers and views of the site within the wider landscape. Equally, the quality and character of the existing landscape has also been a strong influence in guiding the reinstatement of part of the site to its former character before the Mushroom farm was developed.

Through development of the proposals, a number of strategic landscape objectives have evolved and these may be summarised as follows;

1. Restoration: remodelling the land form and reinstating the central part of the site to an open and rural character by extending the open character of the Cyder House field into the site and extending the woodland influences of Shackleford Heath and Norney Grange into the site from the south.

2. Conservation: retaining and protecting important existing trees and vegetation, where at all possible, where native and performing valuable screening functions and minimise visual impact of the proposed buildings.

3. Enhancement: develop landscape proposals for hard surfacing materials, boundary treatments, and plantings which reinforce local rural character and distinctiveness.


These strategic landscape objectives form the basis of the landscape strategy illustrated opposite.
The success of the landscape strategy in achieving its objectives is to a considerable degree dependent upon detailed landscape design. This includes the use of hard and soft landscape treatment in public and private spaces to provide legibility and amenity; land modelling to affect changes to character, scale and appearance of the site; the selection of planting species and types of materials to reflect local landscape character and improve biodiversity and the use of boundary features and treatments to reinforce local distinctiveness and privacy. These detailed aspects of landscape design are described in the following sections.

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B. Soft Landscaping, Levels and Boundary Treatment

Introduction:

Levels within the site and their relationship with surrounding land have a significant bearing on the character of the site, its relationship with the wider landscape and the visual impact of buildings. Analysis of these factors have shown that whilst the existing site levels have done much to limit the visual impact of buildings on the surrounding area, these levels are artificial and so detract from the natural topography and character of the area and the integration of the site into the surrounding landscape.

Therefore the development proposals represent an opportunity to re-profile the site to recreate some of its original topographic character and improve its relationship with the wider landscape without increasing the visual impact of buildings on the site upon the surrounding area.

Re-profiling the site presents a significant design challenge, as there are a number of objectives to reconcile as well as steep existing slopes which would be unacceptable if retained with respect to modern DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) and building regulations. The principal design objectives are as follows:

- Need to tie in with existing levels at the road access junctions at Peper Harow Lane and Shackleford road
- Need to tie in with existing levels at site boundaries and the root protection area of existing retained trees
- Need to retain important planted buffers or slopes
- Need to provide acceptable slopes to rear gardens
- Need to provide acceptable gradients for proposed access roads
- Desire to minimise opportunities for clear views of new buildings from public views and neighbouring properties
- Desire to reduce extent and visual impact of retaining walls which would result in an overly hard and inappropriate landscape character
- Desire to maximise opportunity for disposal of clean waste material within site where possible, to reduce the extent of removal off site.

Proposed levels:

The first section of the proposed access road from Shackleford road is designed to fall gradually from 77.5m AOD to 76.5 m AOD, broadly following the existing levels of the road. It then falls more gradually than the existing gradient, at approximately 1:22, in a gentle curve towards the central open space, to a level of approximately 71 m AOD. Plots 10 to 14 drop down the slope and are accessed from the road, whilst a separate access serves Plots 15-25 at approximately 73.5 m AOD. Proposed levels within the rear of housing plots, north and south of the access road are designed to tie back in to existing levels at the site periphery, so that the Root Protection Areas of retained existing trees are not affected and boundary works are minimised.

At the central open space, proposed levels are designed to create a shallow grassed valley and recreate the topography that existed prior to development of the Mushroom Farm. In the northern sector, the levels fall gradually towards the site boundary at approximately 1:15 to 1:20 and drain towards the existing ditch that runs at the edge of the Cyder House field. The proposed access paths are designed to fall gently towards the boundary and are to be no steeper than 1:21. South of the central path, levels are flatter, ranging from 71.5 m AOD at the boundary with Shackleford Heath to around 71m AOD at the proposed Play Area.

The road access from Peper Harow Lane sweeps around the hedge boundary with Glebe Farm and rises quite sharply at around 1:16 to a level of 70m AOD from 68m AOD at the road junction. It remains broadly at this level to meet the path in the central part of the site. South of the access road, the lane that serves Plots 6 & 7 rises gradually to 71.5 m AOD, whilst drive levels also rise gradually to access the housing plots 3 and 4 in the southern corner of the site to a maximum level of 72m AOD.
Cricket Ground bund

The bund and Leylandii conifers separating the Mushroom Farm and the cricket ground are regarded as artifical features in the natural landscape. To improve the appearance of these areas, remodelling and softening the bund is proposed. The outer face of the bund which faces the cricket ground is retained to preserve its amphitheatre-like qualities and most of the existing birch and pine, whilst the rear slope of the bund is slackened. This would reduce its engineered appearance and relative height due to the proposed build up in levels at the rear of the gardens to Plots 1, 2 and 3.

The conifers would be carefully removed and replaced with indigenous tree and shrub species. This will consist of a mixture of semi-mature native trees of up to 4.5 metres height, feathered trees up to 3 metres height, and whips and transplant trees and shrubs up to 1 metre in height. At the end near the Peper Harow Lane entrance, the bund would be reduced and reshaped to curve around the cricket ground to create an attractive and more open entrance to the site and continue the bund as a boundary to the cricket ground.

Glebe Farm boundary

The boundary of the site with the garden of Glebe Farm is made up by a steeply sloping planted bund which was historically formed to reduce the impact of the poly tunnels and other Farm buildings. The top of the bund is topped by a wall and fence. A line of conifers are also prominent at the rear of the garden to Glebe Farm and have a valuable screening function.

It is proposed to reduce the height of the existing bund and lower levels within Plots 4 & 5 from existing, to minimize the potential impact of the new properties whilst ensuring that the gardens of these plots can accommodate reasonably flat levels. This will also maintain the existing levels at the base of the retained conifers and ditch and provide an acceptable slope of 1:2 maximum, between the conifers and the proposed level at the corner of plot 4.

The lower half of the existing bund, some of the conifers and the main deciduous trees at the garden level of Glebe Farm are retained to preserve their screening function. This area would also be augmented with new screen planting at the lower garden level and also at the rear garden of Plots 4 & 5 to preserve the amenity of Glebe Farm.

Burwood House boundary

The garden boundary to Burwood House also contains a number of trees groups including Birch, Cherry and a mixture of native shrubs planted on a 2.0 metre high bund which forms the boundary with the existing site car park area. The bund is to be retained at the rear of Plot 15, as this forms a good buffer. The existing bund would be retained at the higher level by a retaining wall, as the proposed levels of Plot 15 are lower.

Soft Landscape Treatment

**Existing vegetation**

Where ever possible, the aim has been to retain existing native trees such as the Oak and Scots Pine which characterise the setting of the Farm and are typical species found in the locality.

**Planting proposals**

The overall approach to the planting design is to use native varieties of tree and shrub species of local provenance and avoid exotic species, (except in small areas at housing entrances and then with other native plants).

**The strong visual influence of the woodland to the south is reinforced by new indigenous planting within the site to add to its character and visual amenity.**

**Where ever possible, the aim has been to retain existing native trees such as the Oak and Scots Pine which characterise the setting of the Farm and are typical species found in the locality.**

**The entrance to the site off Shackleford Road, is lined with a selection of mature trees. These are to be retained as they contribute to the setting of the access road and are visible from the public highway. One large Oak which lies on the boundary of the access road also serves as a traffic management ‘device’ to slow vehicles.**

**Existing perimeter vegetation is retained at the edge of Shackleford Heath to the south; the hedgerow to the boundary with Glebe Farm and the lower part of the planted slope and trees to the garden of Glebe Farm; the existing trees on the field boundary with the Cyder House field; and the scrub within the bund at the boundary with Burwood House.**

**The strong visual influence of the woodland to the south is reinforced by new indigenous planting within the site to add to its character and visual amenity.**

**Mixed native hedgerows of Hawthorn, Field Maple and Dog Rose would be used at the new plot boundaries for those large plots in the south western sector of the site and at the boundaries to the central open space. These will provide visual and wildlife linkages to the woodland.**

**Beech hedgerows are proposed as the main road frontage boundary planting, where space is more limited and a slightly more controlled appearance is called for. Small to medium sized native trees such as Rowan (Sorbus aucuparia), Birch (Betula pendula) and Holly (Ilex aquifolium) would be planted for interest and ecological value within the hedgerow boundaries.**

**Low level ornamental shrubs and groundcovers would be used occasionally at entrance frontages, to add interest and create threshold spaces.**
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Public Realm

Central Open Space

The central open space is a key element in the overall landscape strategy but will also provide amenity and opportunities for informal recreation. It comprises 0.715 hectares, which is 23 percent of the total site area. Within the Central Open space, there is further opportunity for native scrub planting using attractive fruit bearing species shrubs like Guelder Rose (Viburnum opulus) and Dog Rose (Rosa canina), which can provide a food source for birds, insects and mammals.

The central open space would largely be open grassland, managed as a wildflower meadow to create a semi-natural appearance. The proposed path across the open space would be surfaced with mulch and edged with timber. The edges and verges abutting paths would be mown regularly to allow good visibility and a tidy appearance.

Although the space is designed to be predominantly open, there is opportunity for the careful siting of locally appropriate tree species such as Oak (Quercus robur), Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris) and Yew (Taxus baccata), especially in the southern section of the central open space and along the access lane to Peper Harow Road in order to extend the woodland influence of Shackleford Heath into the site.

Access Lanes

Other areas of public realm within the site extend to the east and west of the Central Open Space, following the line of the access roads. The design approach has been to provide a distinct and legible public realm which is characteristic of the local countryside outside of villages. Since the access lanes are for shared use and there are no separate footways, this includes incidental open space alongside the roadway, which would be grassland verges or grassy swales, likely to encourage the development of a wet grassland flora, and occasional roadside trees.

A low key mown path is proposed at the perimeter of the cricket ground, to mark the public right of access proposed which provides access from the housing to Shackleford Heath. A stile would be provided at the boundary to provide access to the woodland.
Means of Enclosure and Streetscene

It is not intended to replicate the character of Shackleford village, where the predominant means of enclosure and edge to public realm is walling. Instead, to emphasise the rural location of the site, native mixed hedging is to be used as the main boundary treatment between plots and to the road frontages. This will be supplemented by some boundary trees and the woodland planting within the public areas of the site.

Close-boarded fencing is to be avoided where it may be visible in the public realm. It is to be used as the rear boundary to Plots 16-18 inclusive in combination with planting and also in part at the rear of plots 12-14 & 6-9, where space is limited and a secure private screen is required.

Play Area

A local area for play would be provided within the development. This is a small area of open space designated and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live, a ‘doorstep’ play area. It is positioned within the Central Open Space, close to the pathway that connects the two halves of the development together. It has been located away from nearby housing to avoid any potential disruption to residents; the nearest dwelling is 8 metres away and buffered by planting. Nevertheless it is overlooked by several properties which provide natural surveillance.

The Play area will be surfaced with grass and use mulch around equipment. It will be signed indicating the area is for children’s play and that dogs are not welcome.

It is proposed that equipment would be low key and use natural elements such as timber logs or stepping stones, obtained locally from site.

Pastoral influence (Wildflower Meadow)

Woodland Influence (shown is Peper Harow Lane)

Street Scene

Pastoral influence (Wildflower Meadow)

Woodland Influence (shown is Peper Harow Lane)

Street Scene

Pastoral influence (Wildflower Meadow)

Woodland Influence (shown is Peper Harow Lane)
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C. Hard Landscape & Street Furniture
Hard Landscape Treatment and Furniture

Surface treatments

The principle areas of hard surfacing within the development are the vehicular routes. The overall approach has been to minimise the impact of vehicular access and parking areas that might otherwise occur with a standard treatment and to reinforce the rural character of the roads, resulting from their simple curving geometry. A hierarchy of materials is proposed to assist in legibility for road users and to reflect local distinctiveness.

At the two access junctions, which would be adopted by the highway authority, tarmacadam is proposed as the roadway surface treatment. This would finish at an edging or rumble strip denoting the change to private roadway and change subtly to an asphalt surface with gravel chippings rolled in to the surface dressing, to create a more informal low key rural appearance. Flush kerbs would also reinforce the character of the lane.

The open parking area at the rear of the Plots 15-25 would be laid in tumbled sett paving. This would also be the treatment to the long lane serving Plots 6 & 7.

Resin bound gravel would be used as the main material within private drives and pathways. This is designed to create a low-key rural soft appearance reminiscent of the driveways to many existing houses in the locality, but has lower maintenance requirements than traditional loose gravel drives.

Seating and Litter Bins

Seating and litter bins would be provided within the central open space and use robust and durable timber equipment, to tie-in with rural character.

Lighting

It is essential that the proposed lighting scheme minimises visual impact and that conservation of the existing ‘dark skies’ are maintained within this rural area.

Surrey County Council Highways has confirmed that it will not require the junctions of the site access roads with Shackleford Road and Peper Harow Lane to be lit.

Within the development, lighting will be low level and provided by low timber light bollards, located in the verge.
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D. Landscape Appraisal

Views of the proposed development

The proposed development has been designed to be sensitive to local views and minimise adverse visual impact. Removal of the conifers to the cricket ground boundary also gives a beneficial change to views from Peper Harow Lane. The following is a description of views of the proposed development from the key public viewpoints, from outside of the site.

View from Cricket Ground

From the Cricket Ground, the view would be altered due to the removal of the conifers and their replacement by a mixture of native trees and shrubs of various sizes implemented on the retained bund. The bund would retain its amphitheatre like qualities as a boundary to the Cricket Ground.

Removal of the conifers would allow partial views of the rear of housing in Plots 1, 2 and 3. In some views, these would be seen against a backdrop of woodland in Shackleford Heath with intermittent trees and open garden areas separating the individual houses.

View from Cyder House Field

From the Cyder House field, the view would be similar to the existing view as the northern boundary trees are retained. From the village, there would be little change to the medium distance views except the removal of the existing chimneys. Closer to the site, partial views of plots 15, 5 and 4 would be possible set amongst tree planting. The Central Open Space and its continuity with the Cyder House field, would also become more apparent in close views. Views of buildings would be seen against a backdrop of woodland at Shackleford Heath and Norney Grange and would not break the tree line.

View from Peper Harow Lane

From Peper Harow Lane, the new access road will broadly follow the line and elevation of the existing road. The hedgerow to Glebe Farm would be retained and the north side of the access would have a similar appearance to existing. The principal difference in the view arising from the proposals would be the removal of the conifers and the re-profiling and lowering of the bund to the right of the access.

Re-profiling of the bund would create a less artificial and engineered boundary, whilst the south verge will also appear more open, creating a foreground to the reshaped bund behind and a more natural lane entrance, producing a beneficial change as compared to the existing view. Additional column lighting would be provided.

Beyond the verge and new tree and shrub planting, the elevation of the Gatehouse in Plot 1 and part of Plot 2 would be partially visible.

View from Shackleford Road

From Shackleford Road, the proposed access road would follow the line of the existing road, in between the existing properties. The mature Oak and Pine trees are retained along the access road and although there would be some resurfacing, the overall appearance would be very similar to existing. Additional column lighting would be provided and this would be the main change in the view.