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Planning. Design. Economics.

**Landscape and Visual Impact
Assessment**

Proposed Lodge Development

Alton Towers

18 February 2014

03224/IR/HW

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared by Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners to examine the landscape and visual impact of the development proposals.

1.2 The consideration of the landscape and visual impacts of the proposals involves two separate but inter-related assessments:

- 1 consideration of the impact on the character and quality of the landscape in the vicinity of the site; and
- 2 an evaluation of the visual impact of the development on views, viewers and visual amenity.

1.3 While the assessment has also taken into consideration the heritage receptors in the vicinity of the site, including conservation areas and listed buildings which may be affected by the development proposals, specific consideration of the significance and impact of the proposed development on heritage assets is set out in the Heritage Statement prepared by Archaeological Research Services Ltd.

1.4 This report:

- 1 explains the methodology used, including the planning policy context;
- 2 establishes the approximate zone of visual influence for the development;
- 3 identifies potentially sensitive receptors and describes the existing landscape character and quality in the vicinity of the site and the sensitivity of views towards the site;
- 4 examines and evaluates the changes to the landscape and views as a result of the proposed development whether adverse, neutral or beneficial; and
- 5 identifies the potential for the mitigation of any adverse effects arising from the development.

2.0

Policy Context

Site designations A review of national, regional and local policy has been undertaken to establish the policy baseline for development which may affect the landscape character of Alton Towers Resort and the surrounding area. Various landscape and heritage designations apply to the site and can be summarised as:

- 1 Alton Towers Resort is located within the countryside and planning policies seek to protect and enhance valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils (NPPF).
- 2 The gardens at Alton Towers Resort are listed Grade I on the Register of Parks and Gardens and incorporate several listed structures and buildings, including the Grade II* listed Towers. These elements are all designated heritage assets (NPPF);
- 3 Development should promote a high standard of design (SMDC policy N9) and should not detract from the high quality landscape (SMDC Policy N8).
- 4 The estate is located within the Alton-Farley Conservation Area (designated 1971) the character and appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced. The site is also within a Special Landscape Area.
- 5 The Bunbury Earthworks, located to the south west of the Towers, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 6 An area of the meadows to the north of the application site is identified as a 'Grade 1 County Site of Biological Importance'. The effects of the development on the nature conservation value of the site are considered in the separate Staffordshire Ecological Services (SES) report.

2.2

Plan 1 in Appendix 1 identifies the boundaries of these designations.

2.3

In addition to these site specific designations, national regional and local level policies relating to landscape protection have also been reviewed. The key principles of these policies are summarised below.

National Planning Policy Framework

2.4

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) aims to support growth and protect and enhance natural and historic environments. The NPPF is a material consideration when determining applications and drawing up plans.

2.5

The NPPF introduces a '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*' to underpin local plan preparation and decision making. There are three dimensions to sustainable development:

- 1 Economic
- 2 Social; and
- 3 Environmental.

- 2.6 The NPPF identifies that these dimensions should not be considered in isolation as they are "*mutually dependent*". Therefore to "*...achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously...*" (para 8).
- 2.7 Twelve core principles underpin the NPPF, one of which identifies the need to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Local Policy

The SMDC Local Plan (saved policies)

- 2.8 The Local Plan was adopted in 1998 and contains three policies which are relevant to the landscape and heritage of Alton Towers Resort. These are:
- 1 Policy R21 which states that in considering applications at Alton Towers Resort the local planning authority will have regard to: "its duty to conserve and enhance the conservation area, the amenity of residents living close to the estate and the main traffic routes to it and also the economic and employment benefits of the proposed development."
 - 2 Policy R22 states that development proposals at Alton Towers Resort should:
 - a) protect the peripheries of the estate from visual and aural intrusion.
 - b) protect the historic gardens.
 - c) protect the towers (listed building) and other listed buildings and their settings.
 - d) protect the historic landscapes of the estate and its trees and woodlands.
 - 3 Policy R23 states that where planning permissions are granted for new development within the leisure park planning conditions will require a high standard of landscaping, materials and finishes.
- 2.9 The local plan contains various policies which are relevant to development affecting ancient monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas. All apply to a lesser or greater degree to development at Alton Towers and the aims are expressed more specifically in the site specific policies for Alton Towers quoted above.
- 2.10 In conservation areas, the Council will allow development which can be shown to preserve or enhance the appearance and character of the area (policy B10). The retention of trees and buildings which make a positive contribution to conservation areas is encouraged (policies B9 & B11).

Other Material Considerations

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Development Framework

- 2.11 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is in the process of producing its Local Plan and once adopted the LDF Documents will replace the 1998 Local Plan Policies.
- 2.12 The Core Strategy is at an advanced stage of plan production and is expected to be adopted in March 2014.
- 2.13 Emerging Core Strategy Policy SS7 'Churnet Valley Tourism Corridor' is supportive of the development of short and long stay accommodation and the expansion of existing tourist attractions. It also seeks to enhance, protect and interpret the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley.

Emerging Churnet Valley Masterplan

- 2.14 To inform the Masterplan preparation, NLP on behalf of Alton Towers, prepared a Long Term Plan and accompanying technical studies which set out the resort's plans for the next ten years. Alton Towers consulted the community regarding this plan in the summer of 2009.
- 2.15 The Council has produced its own evidence base to inform the emerging Masterplan. As described further below, this includes the Churnet Valley Landscape and Character Assessment (2011), which identifies that development should consider the sensitive nature of the Registered Historic Parkland, maintain the character of the landscape and take account of the parkland setting.

Alton Towers Supplementary Planning Guidance (1988)

- 2.16 In March 1988, the District Council adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance for Alton Towers. The guidance is not statutory but was produced to assist the Council in its decision making and to provide guidance to the owners of the site as to what would be acceptable in development terms. The guidance sets out two key objectives:
- the need to preserve and enhance the conservation area and protect the countryside and the amenities of local residents; and,
 - to ensure that tourism policies succeed with the resulting employment and economic benefits for the wider area.
- 2.17 In an attempt to balance these aims the guidance identified areas at Alton Towers which were either to be protected or where development could be located. Areas to **protect** are:
- the periphery of the estate
 - the historic gardens
 - the historic buildings

- 2.18 The general aim is to avoid visual and noise impacts resulting from development beyond the Park boundary.

Conservation Area Designation

- 2.19 The Alton/Farley Conservation Area was designated for statutory purposes in 1971 by the County Council. The area was specifically designated to encompass the villages with the Alton Towers Estate as a linking element. The conservation area designation describes the estate as it was in the early 1970s with particular emphasis on the House, the Bunbury Earthworks and the Gardens. The designation states:

“Most appropriately, the estate has become a vast pleasure ground open to the public on a commercial basis, having passed in 1924 from the hands of the Talbot family to the present owners who have ensured that the gardens and grounds have been well-maintained...The whole of the parkland is included in the Conservation Area in recognition of its very high landscape value and historic interest, and so as to encourage the maintenance and safeguarding of these qualities.”

Landscape Character Assessments

Natural England Character of England Project (2005, updated from 1996 Map)

- 2.20 Within the Countryside Agency (Natural England) Character of England Project, the landscape in which Alton Towers Resort is located has been identified as being within National Character Area 64: Potteries and Churnet Valley.

Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment: Planning for Landscape Change (SLCA) (2001)

- 2.21 In addition to the Natural England landscape classification, a more detailed assessment of the landscape character in the Staffordshire country area was carried out by Staffordshire County Council. This assessment identified the Alton Towers Resort as being within Dissected Sandstones Cloughs and Valleys: Parkland. To the north the Dissected Sandstones Cloughs and Valleys continues which carries a sub-classification of ‘Forest’. To the south of the site is an area of Dissected Sandstone Uplands.
- 2.22 Following on from the Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment 2001 (SLCA 2001) a number of additional landscape assessments have been commissioned by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
- 2.23 The Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment 2008 (LSCA 2008) provides a short landscape character summary for the Churnet Valley. In conjunction with this report, the

Churnet Valley Landscape Character Assessment (CVLCA) provides a detailed assessment of the landscape character for the Churnet Valley.

2.24 The CVLCA refers directly to Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment 2001 (SLCA 2001) confirming conformity of landscape character types between the three reports (paragraph 2.11).

2.25 The LSCA includes sub-character areas for Dissected Sandstone Cloughs and Valleys: Alton and Oakmoor (1a) and Dissected Sandstone Uplands: Alton (2a). These sub-character areas relate to the character areas identified by NLP in Table 4.1 below. NLP character areas 1-5 are within LSCA 2008 sub-character area 1a, and NLP Character area 6 is within LSCA 2008 sub-character area 2a.

2.26 These landscape character assessments have been used in forming the descriptions of Character Areas and in establishing the sensitivity of the views assessed.

Guidance and Relevant Documents

2.27 The following supplementary guidance and independent reports have also been referred to in preparing this assessment.

Woodland Management and Ecology

2.28 A Woodland Management Plan (WMP) was produced in October 2005. This contains background information on the site and a description of the Woodlands including identification of the relevant ecological designations and an identification of species likely to be present on the site. The watercourses on the site and their characteristics are also identified. The woodlands are characterised by area (34 separate Character Areas are identified). The WMP sets out a long term vision for the site which is summarised as an intention to “maintain and restore the woodlands and woodland walks with regard to their historic character as laid out in the early 19th century”. The WMP has been updated (May 2011) and rolled forward to 2019 as part of Alton Towers Resort’s Long Term Plan.

Ecological Appraisal

2.29 Staffordshire Ecological Services Ltd (SES) has produced an Ecological Appraisal of the wider Alton Towers Resort which provides an ecological assessment and strategy for mitigation of any potential ecological impacts of the Long Term Plan.

2.30 The assessment, through field survey and desk study, identifies two Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) within the Alton Towers Resort. Abbey Wood SBI is summarised as mixed woodland with ancient woodland ground flora and Alton Park SBI is described as parkland with veteran trees.

2.31 The Appraisal identifies current areas of positive management and makes recommendations for actions to increase the overall biodiversity value of the

site. Strategies for mitigation of the potential effects of the Long Term Plan on landscape character and visual amenities are also set out in this report.

- 2.32 Additional surveys (pond activity, bat activity, invertebrate survey and updated phase 1 habitat survey) were undertaken during 2011, the results of which are set out within a separate appraisal (December 2011).
- 2.33 Finally, SES has prepared a site specific ecological assessment for the current planning application.

Methodology Guidance Documents

- 2.34 A number of other documents have been use in development of the methodology for this assessment. These documents include:
- The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage - Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)
 - Landscape institute Guideline for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (2013).
 - Landscape Institute - Advice Note 01/09 "Use of photography and photomontage in landscape and visual assessment" (2009)

3.0 **Assessment Methodology**

Approach to Assessment

3.1 This study has been undertaken using a methodology for landscape and visual impact assessment based on wide experience of analysing the effects of developments in urban and rural areas and devising measures to mitigate potential effects. The methodology is in general conformity with the approach set out in the guidelines prepared by the Countryside Commission and the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (3rd edition 2013).

3.2 This report comprises two interrelated assessments: an assessment of the impact, or change, on the character and quality of the landscape and an assessment of the visual impact of development on views, viewers and visual amenity. Landscape and visual impacts generally, but do not necessarily, coincide.

3.3 The assessment comprised a three-stage process:

- 1 a desk based study and field survey of the site and surroundings (the information gathering stage - the baseline);
- 2 analysis of the information gained to establish the character of the Site and the surrounding landscape, the existing impact of the Site and the views and viewers likely to be affected by the Development; and
- 3 an assessment of the impact on the character and quality of the surrounding landscape and impact on views, viewers and visual impact due to the Development.

3.4 The significance of the effects on the landscape and/or visual resources is a function of the sensitivity of the affected landscape and visual receptors and the magnitude of change that they will experience. The resultant effects on the landscape and visual resources can be beneficial, neutral or adverse.

3.5 The assessment considers the significant environmental effects during the construction period as well as in the long term when the development is in use. In addition to the indirect effect the development would have on the wider landscape it also considers the direct environmental effects on the existing landscape within the site where there is potential loss of features of landscape value.

3.6 The night time lighting effects are also considered within this assessment.

The Proposals

3.7 It is proposed to develop 61 double lodges and 10 tree houses with associated restaurant and service buildings, play areas, hard and soft landscaping, parking and drainage works on land to the east of the existing Alton Towers

Hotels. The development will be located within the existing boundaries of Alton Towers Resort on an area of land which is currently used for occasional over-spill car parking. Three category C trees would be removed on the application site.

Lodges

- 3.8 The lodges are subdivided into standard (9m x 8m) and accessible (10m x 8m) accommodation typologies and these result in the creation of 122 accommodation units. Both types of lodges would have a maximum height of 4m. The ten tree houses would be timber clad and raised on stilts and would be located to the southern edge of the site. There are three types of tree house which vary in dimensions and have a total area of between 93.1 and 100.7sqm (including the terrace). The maximum height is 12.85m above ground level including stilts.

Service Buildings

- 3.9 A restaurant building is also proposed as part of the development. This will be located towards the centre of the site, south of the main access road, so it is easily accessible from the lodges/tree houses. The restaurant will have a total floorspace of 694sqm (GEA) (including the covered terrace), whilst the CHP, kitchen bin stores and substation will provide an additional 35.5sqm, 25.5sqm and 20sqm respectively. A service area is also proposed at the rear of the restaurant building. It is proposed that restaurant building will also provide the arrivals/check in area for guests.
- 3.10 Three service buildings each with a total floorspace of 28.6sqm (GEA) will be distributed throughout the site. These will act as a storage facility for laundry, cleaning and other operational supplies. A substation is also proposed which will provide power for the development.
- 3.11 A new network of internal roads and pathways to the lodges and tree houses will enable visitors to safely move through the development. The lodge and tree house site will be car free with the exception of the drop-off area and for disabled parking. All cars will therefore park permanently in car park J (existing) or in the 14 spaces to the west of the tree houses (proposed) once they have checked-in.

Extent of Study Area

- 3.12 A baseline assessment has been undertaken using a combination of desk-based study and fieldwork to:
- 1 Establish the visual envelope of the site (i.e. where views of the site would be obtained);
 - 2 Identify the location of potentially sensitive receptors within the visual envelope (for example, designated areas, conservation areas, listed buildings, public footpaths and recreational areas);

- 3 Analyse the existing character and quality of the landscape in the vicinity of the application site;
- 4 Define the current role of the site in the landscape; and
- 5 Identify key views and vistas and important landscape features.

3.13 The extent of survey and analysis for the assessment of landscape value and character has been based on the landscape and visual assessment work already undertaken in connection with the Alton Towers Long Term Plan. This identifies landscape character areas and key views. The lodge development forms part of the Long Term Plan and its effects are confined to a sub-set of the views identified in the Plan. However, it should be noted that the applicationsite is to the south of the area originally proposed in the Long Term Plan, The latter showed the lodge site on the meadow to the north of the Alton Towers northern access road.

Landscape Assessment Methodology

3.14 Landscape is a product of the interaction between a range of physical characteristics (e.g. topography, vegetation and buildings) and human activity (e.g. land use, human culture and history).

3.15 The assessment of landscape effects requires the existing characteristics and quality of the application site and the surrounding area to be considered. The relative quality and sensitivity of the surrounding landscape is defined and quantified in order that the proposed development and its effects can be evaluated. Sensitive landscape components include landscape designated areas and in this case, the Alton Farley Conservation Area and listed buildings and structures (specifically the listed buildings on the Alton Towers site).

3.16 Landscape impact assessments require a balance of objective and subjective techniques. Objective techniques usually involve measurement and quantification of the various components which make up the environment. These techniques establish the “character” of the area. Subjective approaches, on the other hand, rely on the judgement and responses of the surveyor. They are generally more descriptive and seek to evoke the aesthetic characteristics of the landscape and the reactions of people to it. They establish the “quality” of the area.

3.17 For each character type/area identified, the key characteristics which give the area its distinct sense of place are listed. These are usually positive features but can also be negative and are important indicators of the current character of the landscape. If the key characteristics identified were to be lost or changed, there would be consequences for the current character of the landscape. This would normally be negative but can be positive where the original feature had a negative influence on the character, as is often the case in urban fringe locations. Key characteristics are therefore seen as sensitive receptors that could be directly or indirectly affected by the Development.

3.18

The assessment of landscape character/type comprises a factual description of the overall character for each character type/area, with reference to landform, land cover, land use and settlement and how these interact together. Comments on condition, or quality, are included as appropriate. This is followed by a judgement of the value, or importance, of each character type/area and the potential for improvement which, combined, are an indicator of the ability of a landscape to sensitively accommodate new development. The assessment of the value of is based on the criteria given in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Landscape Value

Value	Typical Criteria
Very high (Exceptional)	Strong positive landscape character/structure or visually coherent groups of well-designed buildings/streets and spaces Distinctive/rare/unique features worthy of conservation Strong sense of place May be protected by national or international landscape or heritage designation (world heritage site/National Park/AONB) No detracting features Sensitive to inappropriate change
High	Strong positive landscape character/structure or coherent groups of well-designed buildings/streets and spaces Distinctive/rare/unique features worthy of conservation Strong sense of place May be protected by national or regional landscape or heritage designation (National Park or Conservation Area) Occasional detracting features Sensitive to inappropriate change
Medium	Recognised landscape character/structure or relatively coherent grouping of buildings reasonably well-related to the public realm Some features worthy of conservation Sense of place Some detracting features Potentially sensitive to inappropriate change
Low	Distinguishable landscape character/structure Buildings of limited visual interest with poor spatial definition Some features worthy of conservation No particular sense of place Some detracting features Scope for positive change
Poor	Weak landscape character/structure or undistinguished area lacking sense of place No features worthy of conservation Frequent detracting features Frequent scope for positive change
Very Poor	Degraded/damaged landscape character/structure or poor townscape lacking cohesive form and structure with very little or no visual interest Extensive detracting features Significant scope for positive change

3.19 The magnitude of landscape and townscape effects is set out in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Definition of Magnitude of Change to Landscape/Townscape

Classification	Magnitude
High	Total loss or major alteration to key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline and/or or totally out of character with the receiving landscape
Medium	Partial loss or alteration of one or more key elements, features or characteristics and/or introduction of elements that may be prominent but not substantially uncharacteristic when considered in the context of the receiving landscape
Low	Minor loss or alteration of one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline and/or introduction of elements that may not be uncharacteristic in the context of the receiving landscape
Negligible	Very minor loss of one or more key elements, features or characteristics of the baseline and/or the introduction of elements that are very similar to the existing landscape

Visual Assessment Methodology

3.20 The assessment of the visual impact of the development relates to the changes that will occur in views as a result of the development, viewers' responses to those changes and the effect the changes have on visual amenity. The existing situation - the baseline - has been recorded, establishing the components, character and amenity of the existing scene. Analysis of the effects of the proposed development on those views has then been undertaken with reference to the application plans, photographs of the existing situation and the visualisations produced by Nichols Brown Webber.

3.21 To establish the visual role of the study site, a desktop assessment was carried out using GIS software followed by fieldwork to identify key public viewpoints and to confirm the site's "visual envelope". This term refers to the zone within which the study site is currently visible. The extent of the visual envelope is influenced by three main factors. These are:

- obstacles between the viewer and the site, (vegetation, mounds or buildings);
- topography; and,
- weather conditions.

3.22 The result of the GIS assessment and fieldwork led to the identification of a number of key views in the Alton Towers Long Term Plan. From this more general work, 12 views have been selected as ones which could be affected by the proposed lodge development (see Plan 373/85/20 at Appendix 3) and are described further below.

3.23 The field survey was undertaken on a number of dates in order to identify both summer and winter visibility. As the establishment of visibility and important

views is constrained by the levels of public accessibility, the study considers visibility from roads, public footpaths beyond the site and public open space. The effect of the development on walkers using the footpaths crossing the Alton Towers Resort is considered under Landscape Character.

3.24 Visual effects relate to changes in available views of the landscape and the effects of those changes on people. Visual impact assessment is concerned with:

- direct effects (adverse or beneficial) due to proposed development upon representative views through intrusion or obstruction;
- the reactions and numbers of viewers who may be affected; and,
- the overall effects on visual amenity.

3.25 The effect on a view is a factor of the sensitivity of the view and the magnitude of the change to it. The sensitivity of visual receptors to change is categorised according to a number of factors: the quality and sensitivity of the landscape, the activity and expectations of the receptors and the importance of the view. Sensitivity to change is rated as set out in **Table 3.3** below

Table 3.3: Sensitivity of Receptors of Views

Classification	Sensitivity (capacity of people, at particular locations - the visual receptors - to accept change).
High	Public open spaces where focus is on views/ public rights of way through highly valued landscapes, immediate setting of elements of national cultural heritage value that are not compromised, residential properties with good visual amenity
Medium	Public rights of way through landscapes of moderate scenic/ value, setting for elements of local cultural heritage value or national value whose settings are already compromised, residents with compromised visual amenity
Low	Observer within area of low landscape quality, or medium landscape quality where significant elements detract, people at work or transient views receptors such as motorists.
Negligible	Observer within area of very low landscape quality (e.g. industrial areas/busy main roads) that has very few positive characteristics

3.26 The magnitude of the change to representative views has been predicted using the visualisations which provide an understanding of the distribution of land use, heights and location of buildings set out on the application plans. The magnitude of change is categorised as negligible, low, medium or high and these are set out in **Table 3.4** below.

Table 3.4: Definition of Magnitude of Visual Effect

Classification	Magnitude
High	Very large change to the view. Development comprises major new component in the view. No/limited screening.
Medium	The proposals are a visible and recognisable new element within the scene and would be readily noticed. May replace existing development. Screening of some but not all elements.
Low	The proposals can be seen but would comprise a minor component in the view. Awareness of the proposals would not have a major effect on the scene. Significant screening
Negligible/Nil	Nil to very slight change to views.

Significance Criteria

3.27

The significance of the effect on the landscape or view is categorised as being high, medium, low or negligible. The nature of the change to the landscape or view is categorised as being beneficial, neutral or adverse dependant upon the character of the existing scene/area and the new development's role within it. The matrix for identifying these effects is shown in **Table 3.5** below. Those cells shaded grey represent landscape or visual effects which are likely to be environmentally significant:

Table 3.5 Matrix of Effect Significance

	Sensitivity of Receptor/Receiving Environment to Change/Effect				
Magnitude of Change /Effect		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	High	Major	Moderate to Major	Minor to Moderate	Negligible
	Medium	Moderate to Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Minor to Moderate	Minor	Negligible to Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

3.28

It is important to note that while the matrix above provides a tool for assessing the effects of the development. Professional judgement will need to be applied in reaching conclusions rather than a mechanistic application of the formula.

Consultation

3.29

The representative views contained in this assessment have been discussed and reviewed with officers at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council as part of the pre-application process.

4.0 **Baseline**

History of the Site

- 1.1 Alton Towers Resort is located in the Parish of Farley in Staffordshire approximately 19km west of Stoke on Trent and 29km west of Derby. The main site area is some 195 hectares in size, although additional areas of land (totalling approximately 28 hectares) owned by Alton Towers Resort are located to the north of Alton village and to the north and east of Denstone village.

Current Site Description

- 1.2 The Alton Towers site occupies a small ridge above the wooded valley along the river Churnet to the south and a minor tributary stream to the north. The topography of the site ranges from 140m AOD to the north east to around 188m AOD to the west at the highest point of the site. The southern half of the site is predominantly mature woodland. To the north east of the site the land cover is more open with meadows and areas of car parking – the Alton Towers Hotel and Splash Landings Hotel are located in this area. To the western side of the site there are the themed areas of the park, the Towers and original Gardens.
- 1.3 The most visible structures on the site include the Towers (Grade II*), the Flag Tower (Grade II), the Alton Towers Hotel and Splash Landings Hotel. Several of the more recent rides have elements reaching approximately 20-25m above ground level. The existing trees on the site range in height, on average, from 15m to 20m tall. However, there are several notable specimens of up to 30m in height.
- 1.4 The application site is located to the east of the Alton Towers Hotels and occupies an area of approximately 3.95ha. The site is used for over-spill parking when large events are hosted at ATR, such as the fireworks and concerts. The application site is generally well screened either by mature woodland planting to the east and south, by the existing Alton Towers hotel developments to the west and by land form and further planting to the north. As a result the site is well contained in terms of view from beyond the Alton Towers Resort site boundary. There are a small number of existing mature trees within the main body of the site, which is bisected by two Public Footpaths.
- 1.5 To the north of the application site is an area of further overflow parking, whilst to the east, beyond the woodland screen, is the JCB testing site.
- 1.6 Alton Towers Resort is located within an area that is subject to a number of landscape specific designations. These designations, as set out in Section 2.0, have been considered as part of establishing the sensitivity of the landscape to change.

Desk and Field Study Results

Landscape Character Baseline

- 1.7 The scope of the landscape assessment includes landscape Character Areas immediately surrounding the Alton Towers Resort. Character Areas have been identified and classified in Table 4.1 below, this table also defines the current role and character of the Alton Towers site in the landscape. The proposed Lodge development is contained within Character Area 2.
- 1.8 The Alton Towers Resort has the character of an original parkland house and gardens which has been gradually developed to include themed attractions and other visitor amenities. The Alton Towers Character Area is formed of several sub-areas. Character Areas and sub-areas are shown at Appendix 2.

Table 4.1 Landscape Character Baseline

Character Area	Description	Receptors	Character Area Sensitivity
1. Alton Towers - Woodland and Gardens	This area includes the main Towers building, the wooded valley sides and mature broadleaf woodland in the Alton Towers Resort. The average tree height is approximately 20m with some notable examples of Redwood and Pine reaching 27-30m (approx. 212m AOD). A variety of additional woodland species both native and non-native have been added to the registered park and garden through its history as a country residence and park visitor attraction. Within this Character Area is an Iron Age hill fort.	Registered Garden, Iron Age hill fort, and listed buildings. Within the Alton/Farley Conservation Area. Nature conservation site and site of Biological importance.	High sensitivity - Preservation and enhancement of heritage and biodiversity encouraged. Direct and setting effects on listed buildings
2. Alton Towers - Car park	Open area with little built form. Predominantly large areas of hard standing used as car parking as well as grassed areas east of the Alton Towers Hotel and Spa	No biological receptors. Within the Alton/Farley Conservation Area. Footpath bisects land to east of Alton Towers Hotel	Low sensitivity - Potential for improvement.
3. Alton Towers - Meadows / Overflow car park	Landform in this Character Area comprises open grass land (used as overflow parking), individual mature and veteran trees.	A Site of biological importance but not applicable to the application site. Within the Alton/Farley Conservation area.	Medium sensitivity - Potential for improvement.

4. Alton Towers - Themed attraction areas and Hotel	Visitor rides and attractions are interspersed with mature trees and ancillary visitor and service buildings. Attractions are connected with pedestrian walkways. Built form in this Character Area is predominantly between one and two storeys with an average height of approximately 192m AOD. Theme park rides in this Character Area are up to 201m AOD in height (Rita).	The setting of The Towers and other listed buildings. Within the Alton/Farley Conservation Area	Low sensitivity - Potential for improvement.
5. Alton Village	Small village sheltered within a dip in the landscape to the south of the steep wooded valley of the Churnet. This Character Area predominantly made from brick and sandstone residential development with notable buildings of Alton castle and St Peter's Church.	Alton Castle, St Peter's Church and listed buildings (approx 40). Within Alton/Farley Conservation Area	Medium Sensitivity - setting of historic buildings should be protected.
6. Landscape to south of the Churnet (Dissected sandstone uplands)	Flat open fields with hedgerows and some mature trees. Dispersed villages on smoothly undulating upland pasture. Narrow lanes follow boundaries of late 18th century field enclosure in regular rectangular pattern.	Countryside character. No specific heritage receptors.	Medium/high sensitivity – Potential for hedge row improvement.
7. Landscape to the north of the Churnet (Dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys, sub type forest)	Land rises above the Churnet to peaks at Cauldon and Weaver Hills. Hills give clear views across the lower plateau to the south. Land use is primarily pasture with substantial field boundaries, although some are in need of repair.	Countryside character. No specific heritage receptors.	Medium/high sensitivity – removal of landscape detractors encouraged.
8. Highland fringes of limestone, gritstone and dissected sandstone	Hill tops are covered by open grassland allowing long views across the surrounding landscape. Detractors to the character include quarries extracting limestone.	Countryside character. No specific heritage receptors.	Medium/high sensitivity – removal of landscape detractors encouraged.

Source: NLP

4.1

The Character Areas above identify that the landscape to the north and south of the Alton Towers Resort has a medium/high sensitivity to change, with existing detracting features such as quarries and degraded hedgerows. Although the Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment identifies these areas as very sensitive to change they are not classed as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or any other national designation. As a result, they are considered to have a medium/high sensitivity to change in this assessment.

- 4.2 The Alton Towers Resort is divided into four distinct sub Character Areas; (1) the Towers, woodland and gardens, (2) the car park, (3) the meadows/overflow car park and (4) the attractions and hotels. The car park character area is identified as having a low sensitivity to change. While the whole of the ATR area is within the Alton/Farley Conservation area, the sensitivity to change varies according to the nature, presence or proximity of existing development. Areas of the Alton Towers Resort site are therefore considered to vary from low to high in relation to their sensitivity to change

Visual Impact Baseline

- 4.3 The scope of visual impact assessment includes nine viewpoints which have been assessed in connection with the proposed development. Each view is classified in terms of its receptors and sensitivity. The numbering is based on the Long Term Plan Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. These numbers will be used in all site specific visual assessment work in order to achieve consistency and avoid confusion. In this summary table, the existing role of the Alton Towers Resort is identified, as this sets the baseline for future development on the site. Photographs for each view (as existing and proposed) are contained in Appendix 4.

Table 4.2 Baseline View Sensitivity

View	Role of Alton Towers/view descriptions	Receptors	Sensitivity
2	The Towers and Flag Tower are visible above existing woodland on the site. Glimpses of the north car park are available between hedgerows marking the southern boundary of the meadows. The JCB test track is just visible. The application site is not visible	Walkers	High
3	View from Green Lane. Flag Tower and Towers are visible. The application site is not visible	Walkers, horseriders	High
4	View from footpath at Longshaw which includes a clear view of the Towers and Flag Tower. The application site is not visible	Walkers	High
5	The Alton Towers northern meadows are visible in the middle ground. The application site is obscured by trees.	Walkers	High
9	The Splash Landings Hotel is glimpsed as a red and white roof line amongst the existing woodland on and surrounding the site. The turrets of the flag tower are glimpsed on the tree line. No other built form within the park is visible. The application site is not visible	Walkers	High
12	View from Town Head (1) footpath. Glimpses of Glimpses of Splash Landings, ATH, mobile masts and light masts. The application site is not visible	Walkers, horseriders	High
13A	View from Town Head (2) footpath. Glimpses of Glimpses of Splash Landings, ATH, mobile masts and light mast. The application site is not visible	Walkers, horseriders	High
13B	View from Town Head (3) footpath. Glimpses of Glimpses of Splash Landings, ATH, mobile masts and light mast. The application site is not visible	Walkers, horseriders	High

13C	View from Town Head (4) footpath. Glimpses of Glimpses of Splash Landings, ATH, mobile masts and light mast. The application site is not visible	Walkers, horseriders	High
A	Footpath to west of application site – view south	Walkers	Low
B	Footpath to west of application site – view north	Walkers	Low
C	View from footpath at east end of application site	Walkers	Medium

4.4 The numbered views are a subset of those identified in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment produced for the Long Term Plan. These have been selected as a representative of views for testing. In other views the application site is not visible due to topography or other screening or because of the direction of the view.

Night

4.5 At night, the Alton Towers Resort contains a number of lighting sources which are visible in the views identified above and in the wider landscape. These include:

- Streetlamps on internal access roads
- Safety and security lighting (for example in car parks)
- General amenity lighting
- Light from moving vehicles
- Light spill from the windows of buildings

4.6 These effects combine to create a higher level of artificial light source than would be typically found in a rural area.

5.0

Assessment

5.1

The baseline assessments identify the sensitivity of the relevant surrounding landscape character and identified views of the application site. The sensitivity is used to assess the potential locations identified for new development in order to establish parameters for the scale of new development which can be accommodated without significant effect to the landscape character or visual amenity surrounding the site.

5.2

The assessment below is based on a series of visualisations produced by Nichols Brown Webber and set out at Appendix 4. For each of the nine numbered viewpoints, the visualisation sheets show:

- 1 The view as existing (winter views with the exception of View 2)
- 2 The view as proposed showing the development as a grey wirelines

Effects on Landscape Character

5.3

The proposed development is within the Alton Towers Meadows/Overflow Car park character area. The predicted effects on the character area are set out in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Landscape Character Assessment

Character Area	Character Area Sensitivity	Character Area Sensitivity
2. Alton Towers - Car Park	Low sensitivity	The effects on this Character Area will primarily relate to the visibility of parts of the Lodge development in views from the public footpath which passes through the Alton Towers Resort, immediately to the east of the Alton Towers Hotel and parking areas and the loss of part of the open grassland area within this character area. The proposed development is low rise and comprises a modest extension to the existing Resort (theme park and hotels) which is set within a wider landscape. The cumulative effect of the development proposals on existing walkers is not considered to be significant in terms of its effects on Landscape Character in this regard.

Visual Impact

5.4

As well as assessing the general effects on Character Area 3 of the landscape, the effects of the proposed lodge development is also assessed in terms of its potential specific role in the six identified key views from the landscape surrounding the Alton Towers Resort.

Table 5.2 Visual Effects Summary (winter - without mitigation)

View	Sensitivity	Effect	Comment
2	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
3	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
4	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
5	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
9	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
12	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
13A	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
13B	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
13C	High	Nil	No part of the Lodge development is visible
A	Low	Minor Adverse	The proposed ATH spa extension would be visible to the west. The proposed hedgerow planting would obscure views of the lodge development to the east. In the early years of the development the lodges would be seen above and between the hedge planting with a gradual reduction in visibility over time. The visual effect would be seen in the context of the existing substantial built development of ATH and the periodic existing use of the application site for overflow parking
B	Low	Minor adverse	The proposed ATH spa extension would be visible to the west. The proposed hedgerow planting would obscure views of the lodge development to the east. In the early years of the development the lodges would be seen above and between the hedge planting with a gradual reduction in visibility over time. The visual

			effect would be seen in the context of the existing substantial built development of ATH and the periodic existing use of the application site for overflow parking
C	Medium	Moderate Adverse	This view is taken from the point at which the footpath cross the ATR internal access road looking across the grassed area periodically used for overflow parking. The edge of lodge development would visible beyond the shelter belt of proposed planting, including views of the proposed restaurant. The visual effect of the lodge development will reduce over time as the shelter belt matures, as indicated on the lower of the three images and considered further in the section on mitigation below

Night

- 5.5 The proposed lighting strategy is based on low level lighting which would be sensitive to the potential for bats in the area. Lux levels would therefore be relatively lower than existing sources at the resort. Accordingly, it is not considered that the proposals would lead to any landscape character or visual harm as a result of the introduction of additional sources of artificial light.

Overall Effects

- 5.6 Overall, the effects of the proposed lodge development would range from nil/neutral (no change) to minor adverse in the case of Views A and B, and moderate adverse in View C, *without mitigation*.

6.0 Mitigation

Mitigation Strategy

6.1 The assessment at Section 5.0 has identified minor and moderate adverse landscape character and visual effects arising as a result of the lodge development. This assessment is made without taking into account any mitigation proposals. In this case the strategy for mitigation is based on:

- a structural planting
- b mitigation through design is proposed, primarily through the selection of materials which would blend into the landscape. The main materials include timber for walls and roofs (shingles).

Residual effects

6.2 The effects of mitigation proposal would be to reduce both the visibility of the proposed structures and their prominence in the representative short range views identified (A, B and C). As a result the *residual effects* of the development (i.e. after completion and the implementation of mitigation measures) would reduce to negligible adverse in landscape character and visual impact terms in the three identified views where the lodge development would be visible).

7.0 **Summary and Conclusions**

- 7.1 This assessment has considered the landscape and visual effects of the proposed Alton Towers resort lodge development.

Landscape Character Effects

- 7.2 The proposals involve the development of part of the Alton Towers Meadows/Overflow Car Park character area. Only a small part of this area would be affected by the proposal and, with planting mitigation and the appropriate use of materials, the effect on Landscape Character would be negligible. The footpaths within the site already pass through the Alton Towers Resort and the scale and impact of the development on this part of the footpath network within the Alton Farley Conservation Area would be modest.

Visual Amenity Effects

- 7.3 Detailed assessments have been undertaken for nine viewpoints previously identified as part of a comprehensive assessment for the Alton Towers Long Term Plan as well as three short range views from the footpaths within and adjoining the application site. With regard to the long range views, the application site, and the proposed development on it, would not be visible. The proposals will be visible from the three representative short range views. These are views which include existing theme park development (primarily the Alton Towers Hotel). With mitigation (structural planting and mitigation through design of the lodge buildings), the effects would be reduced to negligible adverse effects in the short range views.

Overall Conclusions

- 7.4 The assessment concludes that with appropriate mitigation, the lodge development would not result in any materially adverse effects on the landscape character or key views.