

Brislington Hill Landscape Comments Application number 22/01878/P

Landscape context

The Brislington Meadows site is the northern part of a large area of landscape in the eastern part of Brislington. It is made up of agricultural fields, park, cemetery, woodland areas and brook with landscaped edges. This area of landscape forms part of a green infrastructure continuum from the green belt through Brislington to the wooded Brislington Brook valley and the River Avon landscape edge.

The site itself is a topography steep green hillside. The north part of which is a high point within the cityscape at approximately 60m AOD, which affords extensive view over the city and to Dundry Hill beyond. It is made up of a collection of small-scale agricultural grazing fields with generous hedgerow boundaries, which have remained largely unchanged since the 1840's field pattern.

As stated in the ecology comments these hedgerows are defined as 'Ancient Hedgerows', which are irreplaceable natural assets making this site a sensitive landscape site. This is contrary to the stated value attributed to the site within the TVIA.

It is currently popular with the local residents as a natural open space giving the site community value. The southern edge of the site that borders the landscaped edge to a small watercourse which connects to Brislington Brook has a Public Right of Way providing a link between Bonville Road and the Brislington Trading Estate to the east and School Road to the west via the Allotments.

A second footpath is located on the north east corner of the site.

Landscape Comments

The proposals broadly remove the ancient hedgerows and associated trees internal to the site with only a small section of hedgerow running north/south in the middle of the site retained. This runs contrary to Policy DM17 Development Involving Existing Green Infrastructure which states;

'Proposals which would harm important features such as green hillsides, promontories, ridges, valleys, gorges, areas of substantial tree cover and distinctive manmade landscapes will not be permitted.'

Further, the site allocation information states that development should;

'retain or incorporate important trees and hedgerows within the development which will be identified by a tree survey'.

Topography and Earthworks

To accommodate a traditional housing typology with single flat finish floor level the site is proposed to be reprofiling with substantial earthworks. This has resulted in an engineered approach to the sloping topography of site with extensive;

- retaining walls and tanking to the buildings faces;
- earthworks throughout the site fundamentally altering the landform.

This approach runs contrary to the Bristol context. There are numerous examples of the distinctive approach to visually prominent steep sites both historically and recent, with a saw tooth profile following the topography retaining the existing landform designing out the need for retaining walls. The most recent examples are the Kingswear and Bridge View schemes. These housing schemes on steep sloped sites have understood the Bristol context delivering housing types with a split-level housing typology with a visually distinctive repetitive rhythm of terrace house that reflect the historical context.

Accordingly, the overly engineered approach required to accommodate a standard housing typology delivering extensive retaining walls with cut and fill impacts;

- the character of the site defined by the topography;
- the existing landscape structure of hedgerows and trees requiring removal of the majority of these elements;
- the usability the garden areas with:
 - Increased overshadowing;
 - Privacy issues for the garden and internally to the houses from the houses on the upper levels looking down on the lower level housing;
 - Reduced sunlight penetration;
 - Reduced usability of gardens due to the gradients;
 - Overbearingly large retaining wall and fence in the worse cases.

Landscape Proposals

The landscape proposals have been described as character areas, including, Wetland Meadow, The Gate, Brislington Green, Brislington Heights Pocket Park, The Greenway, Woodland and Bonville Glade. Below are comments on each of the character areas.

Wetland Meadows - Southern edge landscape strip

The Wetland Meadow along the southern edge of the site has two large areas with extensively engineered slopes along the southern edge proposed to deliver a 'Wetland Meadow' and SUDs. However, the severe banking and slopes render these areas uncharacteristic of wetland meadows inappropriate to the surrounding character, have limited amenity value and sterilise this southern part of the site reducing the amenity value

of the brook along the southern boundary and visually severing the Brook from the footpath and potentially dangerous for children. This approach is this contrary to the character of the site and the Policy DM27: Layout and Form states:

‘Through high quality landscape design, development will be expected to contribute to a sense of place with safe and usable outdoor spaces which are planned as an integral part of the development and respond to and reinforce the character of the context within which it is to be set.’

Further, the SUDs landform is contrary to the gentler slope from the high point along the northern boundary to the southern boundary along the brook. This would diminish the existing landscape setting along the footpath with unnaturally steep banking along most of the footpath within the site. This approach is contrary to DM22 which states;

‘Development which is adjacent to, or contains, waterways will be expected to: Take opportunities to enhance the recreation and leisure role on on-site waterway(s)..’

Additional information is required showing sections through this area showing the relationship with the existing tree belt with the SUDs retention basins.

Clarification is sought on the whether the cut and fill is balanced throughout the site or if more soil is being imported overall.

The Gate - Retained Central hedgerow and northern boundary hedgerows

Looking at the Isopachytes plan within The Gate landscape character area it is likely that more of the centrally retained hedgerow/trees running north/south will require removal than currently shown. Clarification is required.

This area is edged with blank house side elevations with central raised walkway providing limited space for play and a poor relationship between the footpath and small areas of play. The lack of visual permeability from the houses, topography and limited space for play makes this area inappropriate as a LAP (a local area of play for very young children).

Concern is raised that this area would attract anti-social behaviour as it is poorly overlooked with an indistinct amenity function beyond the visual of the retained central hedgerow. As proof of concept sections, to scale, are required to show the hedgerows and the proximity of earthworks to retained hedgerows and trees and amount of amenity space.

The Isopachytes Plan shows earthworks in areas also shown as ‘retaining’ hedgerow/trees along the northern boundary. Clarification is sought. The increase in earthworks in this area will likely require the removal of these areas of hedgerows.

The Greenway, Woodland and Bonville Glade

The Bonville Glade and Woodland is a stripe of broadly retained areas of existing landscape planting. The proposals fail to define the amenity value of this area and lacks road edge tree

planting definition. It is considered the side elevations of the flats edging the Bonville Glade fail to comply with secure by design principles with poor overlooking. The proposals need to demonstrate that this ecological strip and associated animal species are robust to likely human activity from the residents of the flats, especially as these residents have not been provided with garden space.

The Greenway needs to ensure both street trees and utilities can be accommodated within the space without impacting the ecology and how a footpath/cycleway will be integrated into the proposals.

As proof of concept scaled sections and species within both The Greenway and Bonville Glade areas should be provided. The information should indicate the type of planting within both areas and their robustness of these areas to act as ecological network as well as accommodating footpaths and associated human activity.

Brislington Heights and Brislington Green

The Brislington Green is a small area of green surrounded by houses with centrally retained trees/hedgerow.

It is unclear if the retained planting within Brislington Green would be appropriate to this more formal area of space surrounded by housing and how this is compatible with this area as a play space. The central planting would potentially limit visual permeability of the space and therefore contrary to secure by design principles.

The steep topography of the Brislington Heights space will limit the amenity use of this area, particularly as play space. Concern is raised that this area would attract anti-social behaviour as it is poorly overlooked with an indistinct amenity function beyond the visual amenity of the retained trees. As proof of concept sections are required to show the how the levels impact the amenity value of the space and the relationship with the surrounding houses. It should be shown that the area would comply with the design requirements for a LEAP.

It should be noted that the site has delivered no areas suitable for children to play ball games on a flat area.

Back Gardens

The back gardens have been proposed as part of the ecology network throughout the site. This cannot be considered as providing a green corridor with native garden trees species as there is no control on how these areas will be managed. Some residents will choose to remove trees and pave over gardens which will undermine the ecological value and fail to provide the continuum of a green corridor.

Streetscape

The streets proposed inadequate numbers of street trees for some streets to provide sufficient tree canopy to ensure urban heat resilience. Clarification is sought on how many trees would be in adopted areas of the street. Many seem to be located between on-plot car parking, which could potentially be removed. Each street type proposed should provide, to scale, sections through the different road types to ensure the street trees are viable, not too close buildings and with tree pits large enough to allow trees to reach maturity.

Landscape summary

In light of the Climate and Ecological Emergencies declared by the city in 2022 Bristol City Council debated and passed a motion calling for a stop to the development of green spaces within the city, including Brislington Meadows. However, this needs to be balanced with the housing crisis in the city. Accordingly, development on a site within such important landscape should broadly retain the existing landform and landscape features of ancient hedgerows and brook. The approach to this site should be landscape lead incorporating the landscape features employing a more appropriate housing typology and layout that requires minimal earthworks and eliminating the engineered approach to the landform that fundamentally changes the landscape character of Brislington Meadows. This approach would achieve a balance between the competing interests of green infrastructure and housing.

The proposals should employ a split level housing typology to design out the requirement for the extensive earthworks and retaining walls. The hedgerows create a strong sense of place and landscape setting that should be retained. This design expectation was stated in the Site Allocation.

The current landscape proposals rely heavy on areas of existing landscape infrastructure to provide amenity space without providing information that shows that these areas of ecology would be robust to these dual uses of ecology and amenity.

Accordingly, for the reasons set out above, an objection is recommended related to the landscape issues.