

Tree Belt on Laverton Triangle

In December 2015 the site was planted with a 15m tree belt along its western boundary with the FF Development in accordance with the S106 agreement relating to the FF development and its subsequent soft landscape plan. This is to replace the line of trees, subject to TPOs and referred to in the Conservation Area Appraisal 2007, that existed along the eastern boundary of the former chicken factory which comprised the brownfield FF site (as well as on its other boundaries).

The owner proposed to remove these trees as part of the FF scheme. In the Council's consideration of the proposals, it concluded (in accordance with the Conservation Area Appraisal 2007) that these trees formed part of the character of the area and provided an important asset at entry points to the village, as well as having significant amenity value. Their presence formed part of the area's character and their significance was proven by the TPO order. As the Council will be aware, a TPO is intended to protect not only the existing trees but tree cover on the land in question in perpetuity.

The Council instructed Alex Novell FLI to review the proposals and comment on the likely impact on the local landscape, the visual amenity of the village and the character and appearance of the village conservation area. He concluded that the tree belts themselves are now an important landscape feature and they perform an important function in enclosing the [old chicken factory] site, in forming a green backdrop and in providing screening on the village/countryside boundary. In his concluding comments, Alex Novell stated (para. 10.5):

“Taking the major issue first, it would be objectionable to sweep away and build over important tree belts subject to a Tree Preservation Order merely because many of the trees within them are moribund or otherwise unsuitable for retention. Despite the removal of raison d’etre for the planting of these trees – screening of the old chicken factory, - the tree belts remain of importance to the character, appearance and green infrastructure of the village.

Either the eastern tree belt should be replanted in situ in which case a scheme of c.35 houses would be appropriate, or if a scheme of c.50 houses has planning merit, it should be replanted to the east, in which case an equally prominent and extensive belt to that lost should be established”.

To make the proposed scheme for c.50 houses acceptable, the owner proposed a 15m wide tree belt on the FFE site. The Fortescue Fields Landscape Report referred at paras. 9.7 and 9.8 to the proposed removal of these trees and their replacement with a significant 15m wide belt of native/indigenous trees and shrub species to “...assist with the integration of the development into the immediate and wider landscape and to complement and enhance views to and within the village in the longer term”.

The Council's Committee Report concluded “with regards to TPO's if they are to be removed they should be replaced with new trees that will retain the function and amenity of the existing. It is acknowledged that the screening function is no longer there; however the tree belts themselves are now an important landscape feature and provide a green backdrop to the proposed development. Many trees are proposed to be removed from the site mainly along the north and eastern boundaries of the site. The loss of these trees, especially alongside the eastern boundary is regrettable and therefore is intended to be replaced with a 15 metre tree belt between the development itself and the Laverton Triangle. This tree belt will suitably replace the loss of trees on the site and the potential wildlife they hold”.

To ensure the provision of this important tree belt, a condition was imposed and a clause was added to the S106 agreement; this legal agreement required that the tree belt be implemented and maintained in accordance with the Management Scheme by the Management Company. The owner delayed the period for planting of this tree belt due to the use of the land as a site

compound for Fortescue Fields. However, the site compound has now been removed, the field has been re-seeded and the tree belt was planted in December 2015.

This 15m tree belt is therefore of considerable significance to the village in terms of its amenity value, the contribution it will make to the character and appearance of the village, the outlook for surrounding properties (including screening the FF development) and in terms of its green infrastructure and the wildlife value it will provide. It is a tranquil breathing space to the surrounding village, including the new FF housing. By replacing the previous TPO tree belt, which was an important landscape feature with wildlife value, it is critical that this new and substantial tree belt, provided as compensation for the adjoining development, is protected for the future so that it can grow and develop into the significant asset it offers to NSP, becoming a diverse wildlife habitat and corridor for both birds and mammals which will connect with the green fields beyond.