



Final LANDSCAPE REPORT to Camlin Lonsdale for Urban Splash on Watchet Harbour, Proposed East Wharf Development



Draft Report To:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Brief

1.1.1 ADAS Ltd have been instructed by Camlin Lonsdale to produce a landscape report for Urban Splash looking at the landscape character and visual impact issues for East Wharf Proposed Development, Watchet Harbour, Somerset.

1.1.2 The brief set out the following tasks:

- Field survey
- Review existing Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) by Swan Paul Partnership [2001]
- Assessment of landscape issues identified from field work, the Swan Paul LVIA and the current Urban Splash proposals

1.2 Scope of Study

1.2.1 The Swan Paul Partnership provided a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (hereafter referred to as the Swan Paul LVIA) as part of the Posford Haskoning Environmental Statement in October 2001 for Dean & Dyball. This was a full impact assessment and provides a baseline for considering current proposals.

1.2.2 The objective of the 2001 LVIA was to assist the local authority in determining if the development proposal could be satisfactorily assimilated in the built fabric of the town and the setting of East Wharf. Much of the original Dean & Dyball proposal from 2001 is relevant to the current Urban Splash design and therefore a combination of a review of the Swan Paul LVIA and ADAS field visit should provide sufficient landscape information for an impact assessment of the current proposals to be completed. The following sections combine the findings from a recent ADAS field assessment (January 2007) with a review of the Swan Paul LVIA (where appropriate).

1.2.3 The Scoping Opinion for the 2001 Dean & Dyball proposals identified the *'effect on landscape character and setting and the impact on views'* as being the main consideration for the impact assessment [Adopted by WSDC April 2001]. The Opinion is still relevant today and this report has ensured that it covers these considerations.

1.2.4 Whilst the historic environment was considered in the field survey, the scope of this report does not cover an historic landscape character assessment of the harbour area and associated town.

2. LANDSCAPE SURVEY

2.1 Site Location

2.1.1 The site is located on the Bristol Channel coastline between Minehead and Bridgewater (inland) within the county of Somerset [OS Grid Reference ST 073 434].

2.1.2 East Wharf takes up the eastern side of the harbour and the harbour itself is located to the north east of the main street in the town of Watchet.

2.2 Site Context

2.2.1 The area along this part of the coast was designated under the West Somerset Local Plan as an area of Special Landscape Value. Within the context of new Local Development Plans these designations should be reviewed by local authorities. Due to the proximity of Bridgewater Bay and the northern edge of the Quantocks, the landscape of this area is likely to be an important consideration in any current or future landscape impact assessment.

2.2.2 Watchet lies on the edge of the Quantock Hills where they reach the coast at Bridgewater Bay. The Washford River passes through Watchet before it flows out to sea via the open harbour.

2.2.3 The harbour area was redeveloped in 2000 with a new marina opening in July 2001. The marina comprises of an impounded water basin accessed via a retractable tidal gate at high tide, and a series of pontoon moorings providing berths for around 250 boats. This has left the original open harbour to the west and at low tide the open harbour is drained of water. The harbour is made up of Eastern and Western Piers and the East Wharf development is near the Eastern Pier and is approximately 0.6ha.

2.3 Landscape Character

2.3.1 Landscape character of countryside around Watchet

The site lies within the Natural England Joint Character Area *146 Vale of Taunton & Quantock Fringes*. The key characteristics of this area (*Quantock Fringes*) is described as:

- Lowland farmland qualities in sharp contrast to surrounding upland landscapes.
- Lowland, mixed farming landscape, with dense hedges, sparse woodland and frequent settlement.
- Contrast between floodplain, low clay vale and higher sandstone vale edge.

- Scattered settlement of farmsteads and hamlets linked by winding lanes.
- Scattered villages.
- Red sandstone buildings and prominent Perpendicular church towers.
- Variable hedgerow tree cover, with some areas of abundant hedgerow oaks.
- Open and windswept coast with low cliffs.

2.3.2 A field survey carried out by ADAS (January 2007) has confirmed that the landscape character of the countryside around Watchet consists of rolling hills, coastal scenery with headlands, bays, low cliffs and short beaches. The bays are both sand and pebbles and some inter-tidal rocky landforms are revealed at low tide. Shelterbelt trees and small groups of mixed plantations divide arable fields into distinct square fields. These are predominantly medium sized fields with continuous hedgerows and some hedgerow trees. A few notable single trees line roads and the railway. Permanent pasture and rough hill grazing can be found with cattle grazing to the edge of the sea in some places.

2.3.3 This is a small, confined, colourful landscape with a varied texture. The landscape is also made up of rolling and curved hills. The buildings and structures form a simple diversity while the nucleated form of settlement and the clearly defined fields present a balanced organisation of the landscape. There is a calm feel to the landscape as not so much movement was observed at the time of the survey (likely to be more busy in summer). The fields create a regular pattern while the location of the houses and the form of the coastline are irregular in form.

2.3.4 There are a number of traditional settlements nestled into the rolling landscape many with modern buildings on the outer fringes. Although an important road for accessing settlements along the coast, the B3191 is a minor road off the A39. Overhead power lines and telephone lines link the coastal settlements with the main grid inland. An operational steam railway runs from Minehead to Taunton via Watchet. A number of large caravan parks are situated along the coastline.

2.3.5 Watchet Harbour context

East Wharf, Watchet Harbour is currently derelict and lies on the northern edge of the town of Watchet and the predominant landscape characteristics are derived from the townscape.

2.3.6 Watchet used to be an important harbour from which iron ore from the Brendon Hills would be taken across to Wales by ship and timber props imported in for the mines. The West Somerset Railway also runs by the harbour and still has a station located right by the harbour. The town developed from trading and shipping activity along the harbour. However since then there has been significant change, which has seen

the development of modern residential buildings on the hillside to the south west of the town.

- 2.3.7 The ADAS landscape character field survey looked at the area in the immediate vicinity of East Wharf. Although the harbour is historic due to its long association with commercial activity, much of the character expected in the old harbour has been lost due to modern intervention. There are only a few stone buildings with the stone revealed, most older buildings have been rendered and painted. Generally the architecture of the harbour area is of poor quality due to modern intervention.
- 2.3.8 Although the town is centred around the harbour, few of the buildings have windows facing East Wharf (possibly due to the fact that the harbour was in the past a work site, rather than an amenity area). Around the harbour there is a mix of styles and ages of property (e.g. the harbour walls are modern). The high street to the southwest of the harbour contains most of the buildings of the old harbour village.
- 2.3.9 Administrative structures of historic importance include the present police station and harbour authority buildings. The church looking onto the station car park was built in 1871 and was built in local red sandstone (from the Quantock Hills). A selection of other buildings (e.g. the library, social hall) adds to the amenity of the area. The marina, within the harbour is used for mooring leisure boats. On the cliff top behind East Wharf lies a disused coast guard lookout building. Daw's Castle Enclosure (scheduled monument) lies on hill overlooking village.
- 2.3.10 The original harbour has been divided by an impounding wall (sheet piling and concrete), forming a marina to the east and an open tidal harbour to the west. The western area (close to the Swain Street and a number of old buildings) still retains some of the original harbour features. The eastern area is almost entirely covered in concrete and contains an existing warehouse similar in construction to a modern agricultural barn and an old crane on caterpillar tracks.
- 2.3.11 A rough embankment rises up behind to the derelict coastguard lookout and the railway line. The embankment is eroding in places. The western and eastern areas are connected by the Esplanade, which is open space fronting some small low rise buildings used for a variety of purposes (e.g. police, tourist office, library). The Esplanade has been landscaped (hard) within the last ten years and contains shelters, street lighting and paving of a style now commonly associated with many town centres across the country. A number of art installations and interpretation boards add to the amenity and interest in the area.
- 2.3.12 The Swan Paul LVIA considered that;

'Although the East Wharf directly relates to the marina and Esplanade, these elements differ in character. The Esplanade is clearly a public open space and an inviting thoroughfare between the railway, Harbour Road car park and the town. It is a

pleasant place from which to view the activity within the marina. In contrast the East Wharf appears clearly as an open commercial yard, with boat related activities. Although a commercial yard with boat related activities, next to a marina it is not incongruous or unexpected, it's expanse and openness does appear out of scale with the marina. This perception is reinforced by the general lack of daily activity diminished by the decline in commercial shipping in the harbour.'

2.3.13 The key landscape receptors in this area are therefore considered to be East Wharf & eastern pier; West Wharf and western pier; marina; esplanade; buildings around harbour; open harbour; Coastguard building; Swain street; houses to west of harbour and railway.

2.3.14 The condition and quality of the landscape provides a baseline for assessing the degree of change and visual impact of a given area. Overall, the quality of the landscape of area in the immediate vicinity of East Wharf is poor due to the degree of modern intervention; East Wharf and eastern pier (modern intervention); West Wharf and western pier (modern intervention); marina (modern); esplanade (modern intervention); buildings around harbour (mix of historic, modern intervention and modern); open harbour (historic and modern intervention); Coastguard building (disused); Swain street (historic with modern intervention). The landscape condition of the eastern part of the harbour is poor as it has become derelict in recent years. Other areas, whilst not remaining in good historical condition, have been redeveloped and new uses found for old buildings.

2.4 Visibility

2.4.1 This assessment considers the visibility of key landscape features and the location of visual receptors.

2.4.2 In selecting viewpoints for a field survey, ADAS in common with Swan Paul, found that there were far fewer viewing opportunities than would normally be selected for such a development in a similar context elsewhere. Swan Paul commented,

'...uncommonly in this case the secondary visual envelope is strongly affected by topographical changes and intervening features.'

2.4.3 The Swan Paul survey provides a comprehensive set of viewpoints from surrounding roads and footpaths selected on the basis that they would provide a fair representation of views in relation to distance, direction and elevation. These provide a good overview of long and short distance views and cover many points that do not contain a view of the development. The ADAS field survey focused in on confirming a few key viewpoints around the harbour and a supplementary point that wasn't considered in the original SP LVIA (residential properties to the west of the railway).

2.4.4 The ADAS field assessment (January 2007) confirms that, 'the steep approaches into Watchet limit views of the harbour to its immediate

vicinity' [Croft *et al.* SCC 1995]. The Swan Paul Partnership provided a summary of the restricted views of the harbour area in 2001, which is still valid today.

'The zone of visual influence extends from the lighthouse along the length of the Western Pier to the back of Market Street. Glimpses of the harbour can be obtained from the two access points beneath an arch and adjacent to public conveniences. Continuing east along Market Street, harbour views are obstructed by shops and other properties as far as the slipway entrance situated at the end of Swain Street. The harbour can be seen from the Esplanade, but not from further inland. Partially obscured views of the eastern side of the harbour, including the East Wharf area, can be gained from the lower end of Harbour Road and the railway line. The zone of visual influence on the eastern side of the harbour extends across the East Wharf area and up the hill just beyond the railway embankment. Limited views can be gained from the Memorial Ground.'

2.4.5 Whilst the town is arranged around the harbour, the main street and key residential areas are to the south, south east and south west. Probably due to its history as a commercial harbour, many of the surrounding buildings do not have many windows facing the harbour. Therefore few of the former harbour buildings that have been converted to residential use have views into the harbour. The railway provides a dividing line between the older town centre and more recent residential development on rising land to the south east. Despite the rising land, there are still only a few properties that have a view down into the harbour and many of these are some distance away.

2.4.6 The main viewpoints are:

- Lower Brendon Road and Harbour Road (SW Viewpoints 1-4, 11 & 20)
- Residential properties west of the railway (ADAS Viewpoint)
- The Esplanade (SW Viewpoints 6 & 7)
- Western Pier (SW Viewpoint 8)
- Cleeve Hill (SW Viewpoint 14, 15 & 16)

2.4.7 The key visual receptors are:

- The West Somerset Steam Railway
- Residential properties west of the railway
- Buildings and promenade along the Esplanade
- Residential Properties on Cleeve Hill
- Daws Castle on the cliffs to the west

3. LANDSCAPE & VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Current landscape character and visual impact assessment guidelines (Landscape Institute/ Scottish Natural Heritage) recommend that an assessment should cover both the fabric and character of the landscape as well as potential visual impacts. The identification of landscape receptors and visual receptors and an assessment of their significance, quality and condition provides a baseline against which potential change arising from a development can be assessed. The effects arising from a proposed development are then considered in terms of potential magnitude of impact and an overall conclusion generated.

3.1.2 As the proposed development was considered small, the County Council back in 2001 indicated that a full assessment may not be necessary, but that basic principles of an LVIA should be adhered to. The Swan Paul LVIA was completed in accordance with guidelines. However, it appears that landscape impacts were not separated out from the visual assessment. This may have been due to the site being located within a townscape as opposed to open country and the footprint of the proposed development being located on derelict land. The three main objectives which the Swan Paul LVIA followed were:

- Identify all the potential landscape and visual impacts of the development
- Predict and estimate their magnitude as accurately as possible
- Assess their significance in a logical and well-reasoned way

3.1.3 The results of the ADAS field survey describing the characteristics of the wider rural landscape around Watchet is useful for as a description of landscape context. However, it has not been drawn into the main Assessment as the limited visual envelope around the harbour results in a townscape environment.

3.2 Development Proposals

3.2.1 The Dean & Dyball development proposals assessed by Swan Paul 2001 were for a mixed-use development,

'18 housing units of two and three storeys, public service building, conversion of existing buildings to marina offices, workshops and an area for boat storage. The housing comprised ten three storey units each with a floor area of 139 square metres and eight two storey units each with a floor area of 116 square meters with eleven visitor parking spaces. Taken together with the ancillary buildings the overall built footprint is approximately 1600 square meters. On a site of approximately 6000 square meters, this represents a site coverage by buildings of only 26%. The housing units will be situated in three blocks. The northern most block occupies a similar footprint to the existing warehouse.'

In 2001 there was also some associated development proposed. Workshops in association with a boat storage area to the north close to the Eastern Pier and a redevelopment of the existing Harbour Office Buildings & Quayside Radio close to the site entrance (Roof ridge heights approx. 9.5m and 12.5m respectively).

3.2.2 Urban Splash's 2007 proposals for the East Wharf development are similar and involve the following uses:

- ❖ A mix of 1 and 2 bedroom apartments (86 in total)
- ❖ A flexible community space that can accommodate a bistro with all day use, a function room and meeting space, Town Council offices and Tourist Information Centre.
- ❖ New public toilet facilities
- ❖ Offices for Key West Radio.
- ❖ New Reception and offices as well as new marina facilities (WCs, showers, laundry) and a secure boatyard for the Marina operator and possibility of associated retail opportunities such as a yacht broker or chandlery.
- ❖ Car parking for residents/occupiers.
- ❖ Retail and leisure space for a mix of different retailers and operators to create a lively waterfront environment.

3.2.3 Key features of the proposals for East Wharf are:

- ❖ Boat building – 6 storeys building with a boat like prow that creates a focal point at the far end of East Wharf and which will be visible from Harbour Road, the sea and key long views.
- ❖ Wharf Buildings – 3 to 5 storey buildings that bring street level activity and interest to the entire length of the East Wharf harbour frontage.
- ❖ Discrete parking and service access to the rear of the crescent
- ❖ Belevedere Building: A single storey building with ramped access to a viewing terrace which creates an additional focal point at the key corner of Harbour Road; East Wharf and The Esplanade;
- ❖ An amazing view across the Harbour from the East Somerset Railway created by replacing the graffiti covered two-storey brick buildings with the Belevedere Building;
- ❖ The removal of these buildings also creates another great view from the harbour back up to High Bank Cottages;
- ❖ A fixed boat lift crane on East Quay which will remove the conflict with pedestrians and the existing mobile boat crane;
- ❖ Improvement to the layout of harbour Road to increase parking capacity and accommodate additional boat storage.
- ❖ Increase in public realm, allowing full access and use of the East Quay frontage with the marina.

3.2.4 Standard practice for very large construction projects dictates that an assessment is carried out for all stages of development: construction, operation and decommissioning. However, as the site is small and

decommissioning is unlikely to be considered at this early stage of regenerating the harbour area, this assessment has considered the operational phase (buildings complete and occupied) as being the most appropriate stage for assessing impacts.

3.3 Landscape Impact

3.3.1 The ADAS field survey is combined with the Swan Paul LVIA to provide a brief assessment of the potential landscape impact of the proposed East Wharf development. The condition and quality of the landscape provides a baseline for assessing the degree of potential change arising from the development.

3.3.2 The most significant potential landscape impacts associated with the proposed development are likely to be the positive effects on the quality and condition of the built environment around the harbour area. The key **landscape receptors** in this area that are likely to be directly impacted upon by the proposed development are East Wharf, eastern pier; marina, esplanade and some buildings around harbour. As noted in section 2.3.14 the overall condition and quality of the landscape of the area in the immediate vicinity of East Wharf is poor due to the degree of modern intervention. So, whilst the potential sensitivity of the settlement and point features (buildings) is considered to be of **Medium** sensitivity the proposed new development is likely to strengthen the landscape fabric and the potential impact and is considered to be **Medium** and **Positive**. In a similar way, whilst the current landscape experience is considered to be of **Low** sensitivity the improvement in the area should result in a **Medium** impact and a **Positive** change.

3.3.3 The effect on other landscape receptors under Settlement and Point Features (West Wharf, western pier; open harbour, buildings around harbour, Coastguard building; houses to west of harbour) and on Landform, Water (sea), Linear Features (railway) and Other Land Uses is less tangible. As the development will not have a direct landscape impact on these receptors and they are considered to be of **Low** sensitivity, the potential impact has been judged to be **Low**.

3.4 Visual Impact

3.4.1 The ADAS field survey is combined with the Swan Paul LVIA to provide a brief assessment of the potential visual impact of the proposed East Wharf development.

3.4.2 The most significant visual impacts are associated with the views from the West Somerset Steam Railway and the Residential Properties west of the railway. These **visual receptors** (Railway and Residential) are

of **Medium** sensitivity and as key views of the harbour and out to sea will be curtailed, the impact is considered to be **Medium**.

3.4.3 The visual receptors within the harbour, in particular the Marina and the promenade along the Esplanade (Open Space & Recreational Areas), are also considered to be of **Medium** sensitivity. However, as no key views will be blocked by the new development and the overall character of the harbour area is likely to be enhanced, the visual impact is considered to be **Medium Low**.

3.4.4 Other key visual receptors in the area (Minor Roads; Public Rights of Way; Residential; Workplaces; Important Views) have varying sensitivity, B3191/ B3190 and local streets and footpaths (**Low**); Public buildings around the harbour (**Low**); the Residential Properties on surrounding hills (**Medium**) and the views from Daws Castle on the cliffs to the west of the town (**High**). However, due to the visual envelope for East Wharf being very restricted, the enhancement of the built environment and the viewing distances involved, the visual impact is considered to be **Low**.

3.5 Overall Assessment Result

The overall effect of landscape and visual impact is summarised in the following table:

RECEPTOR	Landscape								Overall
	Sensitivity				Impact				
	H	M	L	I	H	M	L	I	
Landform			X				X		Low
Water		X					X		Low
Woodland									n/a
Agriculture									n/a
Boundaries									n/a
Other land uses			X				X		Low
Settlement		X				X			Medium +
Linear features			X				X		Low
Point features		X				X			Medium
Experience			X			X			Medium +
RECEPTOR	Visual								Overall
	Sensitivity				Impact				
	H	M	L	I	H	M	L	I	
Trunk roads & Motorways									n/a
A & B roads									n/a
Minor roads			X				X		Low
PRoW			X				X		Low
Important Views			X				X		Low
Railways		X				X			Medium
Open space & recreational areas		X					X		Medium/ Low
Public buildings			X				X		Low
Residential		X				X			Medium
Workplaces			X				X		Low

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The proposed mixed residential development on East Wharf is likely to have an overall medium impact on key landscape receptors in and around the harbour. Direct landscape impacts on the site arising from the proposed development are minimal due to the existing derelict nature of the site. Indirect landscape impacts are considered to be of a beneficial nature and the new development would have a positive effect on the built environment of Watchet.
- 4.2 The visual impact arising from the apartment buildings on views from a few nearby residential properties and from the steam railway (an important tourist attraction) will be significant. It is considered that an overall medium impact on these visual receptors adjacent to the proposed development will arise from the curtailing of existing views into the harbour and out to sea.
- 4.3 The overall conclusion on the potential effect on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area is that the proposed development by Urban Splash for East Wharf Proposed Development, Watchet Harbour, Somerset will have a **Medium Positive Landscape Impact** and a **Medium Negative Visual Impact** on nearby receptors. Effects will be focused on the immediate environs of the harbour. Mitigation of the visual effects will be need to be achieved through appropriate architectural design.
- 4.4 These conclusions support earlier statements made by others;

Somerset County Council's Landscape Architect in 1995,

'I feel that if handled well the town should gain an overall landscape and visual benefit if development involves the improvement of unsightly areas such as the Eastern Wharf or the improvement of details such as the junction between the new sea wall and western pier.'

Swan Paul Partnership in 2001

'It is concluded that the proposed development of the East Wharf is appropriate in terms of setting landscape character and views and that any negative impacts are far outweighed by the potential benefits.'

5. APPENDIX
(see separate document)