## Key Issues –

Winchester is an historic Roman town with numerous nationally and locally listed buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) and the Winchester Conservation Area covering a large area of the city. Additionally, the South Downs National Park (SDNP) lies beyond the site to the south and east. As a result, the key issue in BDP’s Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was the proximity of the site to the South Downs National Park and various landscape and cultural heritage assets.

During the first stage of the LVIA, BDP produced an initial landscape impact summary for the development’s EIA Screening. This included a preliminary assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the Winchester Sport and Leisure Centre development. Again the key issue for the EIA Screening was to identify the landscape and visual baseline, identify key mitigation features of the design and to consider the likely effects of the development. This comprehensive EIA Screening methodology, which was updated by the EIA 2017 Regulations, helped to ensure that visual impact was considered from an early stage in the design.

## Purpose of the project

BDP was commissioned by Winchester City Council to undertake an EIA Screening initial landscape impact summary and subsequent Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the new Winchester Sport and Leisure Centre, to the east of Winchester City Centre. The purpose of the screening assessment was to determine whether any likely significant effects on landscape and views were anticipated, and whether a full EIA is required.

## Description of the project

Demolition of existing pavilion and erection of new multi-use Sport and Leisure Centre incorporating a 50m Swimming Pool, Training Pool, Sports Hall and Fitness Suite, Hydrotherapy Suite, cafe and ancillary accommodation with associated access arrangement, car park and landscaping.
### Lessons learnt

*Forming a robust landscape and visual baseline in the context of a National Park*

BDP’s first task for the EIA Screening and LVIA was to identify the key landscape and cultural heritage assets within the site and in the surrounding area. The purpose of this task was to form a robust baseline assessment of the wider views from surrounding SAMs, the South Downs Way and Pilgrim’s Way due to their cultural heritage and landscape value and location within the SDNP.

BDP produced a desk based analysis of the site and potential assessment viewpoints resulting in the adjacent plan. Following this, the team visited the site and surrounding area, in order to understand the potential visual impact of the development. The site visit led to the omission of views where the development would not be visible, and the addition of views from the SDNP where it was considered that there may be some value in additional assessments.

The site’s proximity to the SDNP, St Catherine’s Hill (SAM), the Roman Road (SAM), Wolvesey Palace (SAM) and Winchester Cathedral Close (SAM) required early engagement with the SDNP Authority and Winchester City Council (WCC). A number of pre-application meetings took place in 2017 with BDP gaining support from the SDNP and WCC on the initial assessment viewpoints. The EIA Screening process was undertaken prior to the production of AVR1s wirelines, and it was therefore crucial to present a robust landscape and visual baseline of the site and surrounding area, in order to gain support from WCC and the SDNP. The EIA Screening therefore took into account the professional opinion of the SDNP Authority and WCC on these baseline views, enabling a considered preliminary assessment to be presented. Additionally, the comprehensive EIA Screening process helped to ensure that the visual impact of the development was considered at an early stage in the design and ultimately helped to minimize the visual effects.

### The Importance of early engagement with the SDNP

Early engagement with the SDNP Authority proved important for both LVIA and EIA Screening purposes. As such, after presentation of the initial views, continuing engagement on the final selection of views, night views and photomontages for assessment took place with WCC and SDNP from October 2017 to February 2018.

On presenting the AVR1 wirelines in March 2018, the SDNP and WCC requested further information on the location of views from St Catherine’s Hill (SAM) within the SDNP. Whilst a robust clarification for the chosen viewpoints was presented by BDP, it was decided to undertake two extra views from this sensitive location in order to reduce planning risk. This process added approximately one month on to the programme of the final LVIA, and would be factored in to any future planning applications in the context of Winchester and the SDNP.

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