

# Penarth Heights Landscape Appraisal Report

ON BEHALF OF CREST NICHOLSON (SW)



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## **CONTENTS**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Planning Context**
- 3. Landscape Character Assessment**
- 4. Principles for Design and Management**
- 5. Landscape and Visual Appraisal**
- 6. Conclusion**

## **FIGURES**

- Figure 1: Site Location
- Figure 2: Landscape Character Areas
- Figure 3: Existing Landscape Features
- Figure 4: Visual Appraisal
- Figure 5: Photograph viewpoint locations
- Figure 6: Photographs 1 & 2
- Figure 7: Photographs 3 & 4
- Figure 8: Photographs 5 & 6
- Figure 9: Photographs 7, 8 & 9
- Figure 10: Photographs 10 & 11
- Figure 11: Photographs 12 & 13
- Figure 12: Photographs 14 & 15
- Figure 13: Photographs 16 & 17

**Appendix - Landscape proposals and material palette figures**

- A. Detail area location plan
- B. Area 1 - Woodland Place
- C. Area 2 - Arcot Triangle
- D. Area 3 - Plassey Square
- E. Area 4 - The Crescent
- F. Area 5 - Shared Space area
- G. Hardworks Palette
- H. Shared Space Areas Palette
- I. Play Equipment Palette
- J. Softworks Palette
- K. Street Furniture Palette
- L. Landscape Framework Plan

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Nicholas Pearson Associates (NPA) was instructed by Crest Nicholson to prepare a landscape appraisal of Penarth Heights (see figure 1 for site location) to form part of a planning application for the site's redevelopment for residential use. The report comprises:

- An overview of planning policy with regard to landscape issues;
- A review of the local landscape character of the site and its setting including existing landscape features across the site, infrastructure, topography and ground conditions, archaeology and local materials.
- A visual analysis of the site and its setting
- A summary of the key features of the proposed development relating to landscape and visual issues and demonstrating a high quality approach to the landscape design;
- An appraisal of the landscape and visual effects;
- An appendix that illustrates key external realm areas of the proposed development and provides material palettes, including proposed tree and shrub species.

1.2 The report has been informed by site survey and desk-based analysis of Ordnance Survey information, aerial photographs and public consultation. Additional background documents referenced as part of this report include; Environmental Statement (Wardell Armstrong, 2004); Woodland Inventory and Management Survey (Wardell Armstrong, 2003); Amenity Standards SPG (Vale of Glamorgan Council (VGC) 2006); Design in the Landscape SPG (VGC 2006); Trees and Development SPG (VGC 2006); Public Art SPG (VGC 2005); Secure by Design; Welsh Housing Association Design Quality; Sewers for Adoption (6<sup>th</sup> edition).

1.3 Other related reports prepared as part of the planning application include:

- Ecology Report (NPA)
- Tree Survey (NPA)
- Woodland Management Report (NPA)
- Japanese Knotweed Report (NPA)
- Public Art Strategy (Continuum Public Art)
- Design Statement (ECA)
- Transport Assessment (Cole Easdon)
- Statement of Community Involvement (Green Issues)

## 2.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

### National Guidance

2.1 Planning Policy Wales (PPW 2002) and supporting Technical Advice Note 12 Design (2002) variously recognise and highlight:

- The importance of good design in protecting and enhancing environmental quality;
- That design is an inclusive process with regard to public aspirations and acceptance of new development;
- The importance of visual appearance, scale, external layout, access and setting;
- The importance of good design and seeking to ensure that the nature and scale of proposed developments reflect the sensitivity of its location.

2.2 The Design Commission for Wales (DCW), which champions the importance of the design of the built environment, has a role to play in applications for major sites, such as Penarth Heights, reviewing proposals against criteria of high quality design.

### Local Planning Policy

2.3 The Vale of Glamorgan Unitary Development Plan (Adopted 2005) provides the local planning policy framework. The core aim is the protection and enhancement of the distinctive rural, urban and coastal character with policies providing the means of securing well designed developments that respect their local context and setting.

2.4 With regard to landscape issues, Policy Env. 27 – ‘Design of new developments’ sets out the requirements to meet planning policy as follows: “Proposals for new development must have full regard to the context of the local natural and built environment and its special features. New development will be permitted where it:

- Complements or enhances the local character of buildings and open spaces;
- Meets the Council’s approved standards of [among other issues] amenity and open space;
- Minimises any detrimental impact on adjacent areas;

- Ensures existing soft and hard landscaping features are protected and complemented by new planting, surface or boundary features;
- Ensures clear distinction between public and private spaces
- Has regard to measures to reduce the risk and fear of crime.”

### 3.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 This section identifies and describes the character of the site at Penarth Heights, its wider setting and key elements of the landscape.

#### General site description

- 3.2 The site is located on an elevated ridgeline that generally runs east to west, situated toward the north western edge of Penarth. It comprises areas of open space generally comprising amenity grassland, with the dominant feature being the large, generally derelict, rectilinear blocks of apartments/ houses/ flats due for demolition. The openness of the landscape of the site contrasts with the adjacent dense woodland and scrub, that in part, provides local enclosure. There are a number of established desire lines and paths through the site and adjacent woodland. The varied topography is a key feature of the site with slope gradients varying from 1:3 or steeper.

- 3.3 A fundamental feature of the site, due to its elevated location and north facing aspect, is the visual relationship with Cardiff Bay. The topography and open nature of the site present dramatic and expansive views over Penarth Marina and across the bay toward Cardiff. Views are also available toward the Ely Valley north west of the site and to the countryside south of Penarth. Due to the site's elevation and ridgeline position the site is in an important location and a defining visual element of Penarth.

#### Landscape character

- 3.4 The following paragraphs describe the key parts of the site and its local setting (see figure 2);
- 3.5 Amenity grassland and open areas – These generally comprise poorly defined, but extensive, existing areas of mown/ managed grass, utilised for informal recreation and provide a local

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setting to the built form. The landform of the grassed areas is variable and includes level areas and more steeply sloping land. Plassey Square, adjacent to the site is a clearly defined area of grass with a gradual slope to the south. Maintenance generally comprises regular mowing during the summer season. There are scattered clumps of trees of varying maturity and offering some local amenity value. Areas that comprised children's play areas are apparent but are now derelict. Generally the overall appearance of this landscape is uniform if somewhat neglected, and lacks any distinctive features or characteristics that contribute to the overall identity or amenity of the locality. The overall quality of these areas is poor/moderate.

- 3.6 Woodland - The adjacent areas of woodland lying on the steep slopes northwards and to the north west/ west comprise predominantly secondary succession woodland of mixed deciduous species, although dominated by Ash. The dense canopy provides local enclosure and is a strong feature of considerable distinctiveness. There has been little apparent management and as such it varies in its structure, density of canopy and the location and scale of any open space within the woodland. Localised areas of fly tipping are apparent. Japanese Knotweed has previously established itself through the woodland, most noticeably to the north of the site. Routes through the woodland are restricted by the steep topography and are generally in a poor condition. A key route runs from the site down through an area called 'The Bowl' and a 'switch back' (zig-zag) path linking with Terra Nova Way. Another informal, circular path runs into the woodland to the west of the site. A small watercourse, culverted through the site, is located to the west of the zig-zag path. It is overgrown, unmanaged and not generally visible. The overall quality of the woodland is poor.
- 3.7 Built form (onsite) – This constitutes large-scale monolithic residential blocks of grey bricks and surrounding/ adjacent hardstanding and enclosed semi private gardens and courtyards. Together these imposing forms are a significant detracting characteristic in the landscape and in places block an otherwise open aspect northwards. The built form plays little regard to the topography of the site and is a scale that dominates the surrounding spaces rather than being in sympathy. Open spaces themselves, around the buildings are often dominated by highway engineering. There is a poor definition between private and public space with the inherent issues of negative use and lack of ownership.



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- 3.8 Built form (offsite) – The immediate surrounding urban area is of predominantly residential use of which the overriding characteristic is of two/ three storey brick terraced buildings with an urban streetscape of comparatively wide roads, pavements and the occasional mature street tree. The urban grain is, locally, quite tight, with good permeability and accessibility provided by the streets and pedestrian only routes, such as the ‘dingles.’ Arcot Triangle, comprising a small area of trees and hard paving, provides a local feature close to the site. However it forms little more than an enlarged ‘traffic island’, ‘cut off’ from the adjacent built form and is poorly maintained. Whilst there is some connectivity between the established urban area south of the site and the site itself, this is poorly defined and treated.
- 3.9 Allotments – This locally enclosed area is situated toward the centre of the site (which bounds it on three sides) and presents a distinctive and very different landscape character to that surrounding it. Typical of its type it includes a variety of managed and unmanaged ‘garden’ plots bordered by often unkempt boundaries/ fencing vegetation. Its internal structure is defined by the strong north facing slope/ topography, together with pathways and defined plot edges. There is no public access to this land. The overall landscape quality whilst locally distinctive is of a generally unkempt standard.
- 3.10 A range of elements within the existing landscape are set below (see figure 3).

#### Infrastructure

- 3.11 The key infrastructure of the existing site comprises the highway access points off Paget Road and Harbour View Road (Royal Close and Highview Road respectively) with associated pedestrian access. Other pedestrian routes include the route to Terra Nova Way mentioned above and another route linking Highview Road and Chichester Road with Windsor Road.
- 3.12 Recreational/ children’s play infrastructure locally comprises the existing provision of below standard area of equipment within Plassey Square and a fenced area on Paget Road to the east of the site. These areas are in need of improvement as identified by VGC. There are also derelict former play areas within the site, an area of hardstanding in the western part of the site (derelict multi use games area) and other informal areas associated with the existing built form. The areas of grassland within the site also provide for informal play.

### Topography

- 3.13 As mentioned above the site topography is the key feature and whilst the associated ridge provides dramatic views, it constrains accessibility and to an extent limits usability of the site for recreation. Steps and stepped ramps are features of pedestrian routes.

### Ground conditions

- 3.14 Ground conditions vary considerably across the site due in part to the historic use of the site as a quarry and landfill site, as well as local geology. Detailed site investigations have been undertaken to inform the proposed development layout.

### Archaeology

- 3.15 Previous studies have been undertaken on behalf of Vale of Glamorgan Council as set out in the Environmental Statement prepared by Wardell Armstrong. This concluded that, due to the extensive disturbance from previous activities and development on site, overall there is a very low potential for impact on archaeological remains, although some very limited parts of the site were not thought to have been previously disturbed. No further archaeological work has been undertaken as part of this report, or was previously recommended by Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd.

### Local materials (see photographs on figures 6-13)

- 3.16 Materials used in the local built environment comprise red brick, with stone detailing, to residential terraces, with some use of render, and with slate and clay pantile roofs. Paving materials local to the site comprise large flags, of both Pennant Stone and concrete. Pennant stone kerbs are also used. A metal horizontal bar and post railing of poor/moderate condition is a feature along Paget Road and Harbour View Road at the edge of the site.

### Visual analysis (see figures 4 -13)

- 3.17 As discussed above, the site and the adjoining areas, have an important visual relationship with Cardiff Bay. Due to the site's prominent position on a ridge, it is clearly visible from around the bay (photographs 1 and 2), although in local lower level views to the north of the

site, around the marina and along Penarth Portway (photographs 3, 4 and 5) the wooded slopes provide significant screening. The existing built forms are prominent landmarks in which the woodland acts as a frame and textural transition between the lower and higher ground. The urban area of Penarth, which partially frames the site, is apparent as a more diverse and patterned texture, with terraces stepping up the slope. The onsite built forms are distinctive but discordant features, seen in silhouette on the horizon, and detract from the more subtle, attractive and appropriate form of Penarth.

- 3.18 Views from the streets and residential terraces local to the site, including Paget Road (photographs 6, 7, 8 and 9), Harbour View Road (photograph 10) and Plassey Square often comprise panoramic views over the site and across Cardiff Bay. However, especially along Paget Road, the existing buildings block such views or limit views to glimpses between buildings.
- 3.19 Within the site itself views are locally enclosed and defined by the existing built form and the adjacent woodland (photographs 14 – 17), although panoramic views are available across the bay along Highview Road and Royal Close. Views to the south are available to the rear of existing buildings along Highview Road (photograph 15) and views eastwards toward Penarth town centre from the western part of the site (photograph 16).

#### **4.0 PROPOSALS FOR LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 The master plan for the site can be broadly divided into two components, summarised as follows. The area accessed off Paget Road comprises a series of curved terraces stepping down the slope, with a number of detached properties to the north of the access and aligned with Paget Road and a single block of apartments. The area accessed from Harbour View Road comprises a spine road (The Ridgeway) fronted by short terraces with a series of 'squares' defined by key corner buildings. The Ridgeway is terminated by a crescent formed by two taller blocks of 6 and 8 storeys and a terrace of houses between. Running off perpendicular to The Ridgeway to the north and south are a series of residential streets designed following the design principles of 'homezones' and 'shared space' and fronted by terraced housing. These are linked to the north and south by other streets defined by short terraces (along Chichester Road) and detached and semi detached properties (along Woodland Road). The Master Plan concept thus allows views of the wider landscape, particularly Cardiff Bay, to permeate through the site, thereby linking residents and visitors'

experience of the site with its impressive surroundings. Appendix figure L illustrates the landscape framework.

- 4.2 The proposals for the landscape design and management of the site have been developed through a detailed understanding of the site, the requirements of the VGC brief, VGC SPGs and other statutory authorities, consultations with VGC officers and local residents, and an understanding the client's aspirations for a high quality design.
- 4.3 The landscape design has formed an integral part of the evolution of the master plan and as such has sought to ensure the nature and scale of the proposals reflect the locality and enhance the local environment. The design approach seeks to ensure that the massing, form arrangement and appearance of the proposed development is in scale and keeping with the receiving landscape and urban context. The elements set out below comprise the key features of the design. The figures included in the appendix to this report provide information about the proposals for the external realm and are referenced as appropriate.

Shared Space (see appendix figures F and H)

- 4.4 The design promotes the principles of 'shared space' throughout the development wherever possible. The basic tenet of shared space is that the design of the external realm is focused on the needs of the pedestrian with the reduction in the dominance of vehicle related highway engineering. The intent is to provide a design that creates an environment where the driver of a vehicle acts responsibly and vehicle speeds are reduced to allow pedestrian use of the space. The design provides appropriate means of access for vehicles including for servicing and in case of emergency, with appropriate parking provision. However the surface treatments and landscape principally aim to provide a high quality of external space for the pedestrian. This is achieved variously through removal of raised kerbs and traditional 'road' edge treatments and a variety of surface finishes.

Accessibility and permeability

- 4.5 The proposed master plan and landscape design have, within topographic constraints, maximised the site's accessibility and permeability, particularly for pedestrians. The street layout provides good access throughout the site avoiding wherever possible cul-de-sacs and dead ends. More cul-de-sacs have been introduced on the strong recommendation of the

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Vale of Glamorgan Highways department than envisaged in the original scheme, but the spatial structure does allow this to be modified in the future. The routes through the site linking Paget Road and Arcot Triangle with Terra Nova Way have been enhanced with new steps, stepped ramps and where possible ramps included on the route. Routes through the woodland are retained and enhanced. The access to the rear of Chichester Road and Hill Terrace is proposed for gating off to reduce to potential for fly tipping.

#### Recreation

4.6 The design has sought to balance the requirements of the brief through good design and places considerable emphasis on the need for quality provision of space for recreation and, where appropriate, play equipment within a fenced ('dog free' area). Recreational provision as proposed therefore comprises:

- An enhanced equipped area for play (playground) in Plassey Square (see appendix figure D); to be appropriately accessed and fenced. The area will include a number of play pieces within 'safer surfacing.'
- Informal areas of open space associated with 'Woodland Place' (see appendix figure B) toward the east of the site and within 'The Crescent' (see appendix figure E) at the western end of the site;
- Informal areas of shared space within the residential streets (see appendix figure F);
- Enhanced play facilities within Paget Road (subject to VGC consideration).

4.7 Opportunities for including public art as part of play facilities will be explored as part of the public art strategy.

4.8 Further consultation will be held with VGC officers to agree the detailed specification of the play equipment.

#### Lighting strategy

4.9 The lighting of the external realm will meet statutory requirements with respect to roadways, paths and open space. Consultations have been held with VGC officers and manufacturers about the appropriate form and type of lighting (see appendix figure K). The strategy proposes the use of high quality 'white light' and will seek to use a range of lighting

fittings in appropriate locations and, if appropriate, propose the use of wall-mounted products/ fittings to reduce the clutter of street furniture. Furthermore the design, through the public art strategy, will explore opportunities to provide innovative lighting features and elements through the site to create a high quality night time environment.

#### Hard landscape

4.10 A variety of high quality paving materials are proposed (see appendix figure G). These include:

- Flag paving along pedestrian footways;
- Small unit paving (max. 400x400mm) along footways subject to vehicle crossing;
- Stone setts to ramps up to raised 'tables' and squares along The Ridgeway;
- Small unit setts and blocks laid in various bonds and patterns;
- Tarmacadam laid in panels and divided by bands of setts;
- Rolled limestone chippings to informal footpaths through the woodland.

#### Soft landscape

4.11 A variety of trees and native and ornamental shrubs are proposed through the site (see appendix figure J and L). The design and species chosen will provide clear visibility and not impede surveillance. Different species used in the residential streets to reinforce sense of place and local identity. Planting will include:

- Advanced nursery stock, standard trees (with min. 2m clear stem) along The Ridgeway and within residential side streets/courts. These will be located either within small blocks of low ground cover shrubs (<1m high) or within tree grilles;
- Groups of small and medium scale trees and blocks of mass planted shrubs along the open space/ bank adjacent to Arcot Triangle;
- Groups of native species trees and shrubs along the north facing slope adjacent to The Bowl.

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Residential amenity and boundary treatments

- 4.12 The master plan has sought to meet amenity standards as set out in VGC SPG. Residential amenity is generally provided by private rear gardens to residential properties. These are typically over 40sqm in area.
- 4.13 Boundary treatments have been carefully considered so as to provide appropriate and clear means of definition between private and public space. Private gardens are separated and enclosed variously by fencing in accordance with SPG requirements. This typically is provided by a 1.8m high fence, with the use of sections of trellis between private gardens. At ends of terraces 1.8m high walls will define boundaries. Where properties have front gardens, boundary definition will be provided by a variety of low walls and railings.

Offsite areas (Plassey Square, Arcot Triangle, Paget Road play area and woodland areas)

- 4.13 Plassey Square: The open space at Plassey Square is, and will continue to be, owned and managed by VGC. Proposals for the open space have been developed in consultation with VGC and local residents. The proposals include for the enhancement of the play area as discussed above. The location of additional seating and of 'dog bins' will be subject to further consultation and agreement.
- 4.14 Arcot Triangle (see appendix figure C): The proposal for this area has been prepared following public consultation. The key design principles are; increase openness; include public art; minimise maintenance requirements. The design proposes the removal of all trees except for two existing semi mature trees. These are located in raised beds close to two corners of the triangle. The areas of raised beds will be reduced in area to the minimum required to sustain the two trees and replanted with low ground cover shrubs of species requiring minimum maintenance. The remaining area will be repaved with the introduction of new seating and public art, the precise scope of which will be developed. Provision of crossing points will be subject to discussions with VGC Highways.
- 4.15 Paget Road play area: This area will be enhanced to provide improved play facilities.
- 4.16 Woodland areas: The woodland areas will be subject to management to increase openness; increase species diversity; improve accessibility as appropriate. The key elements include a

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new stepped ramp route (with lighting) linking with the zig-zag path down through The Bowl; newly surfaced path through the woodland to the north of the main development area; a new step/ stepped ramp up to The Crescent.

## **5.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL**

- 5.1 The following section sets out a landscape and visual appraisal of the proposed design set against planning policy and the landscape and visual attributes of the site.

### **Planning policy**

- 5.2 Crest Nicholson appointed a multi disciplinary design team out the outset of the project. This has enabled landscape and visual issues to be addressed from the commencement of feasibility. Public consultation has played a key part in the evolution of the proposals and the proposals are considered to be of a scale and form that reflects the local area. In addition the DCW have had the proposals presented to them and their comments have influenced the evolution of the design.
- 5.3 The proposals have carefully considered the existing landscape attributes of the site and the local setting and proposed a landscape design that complement and enhances the local character and open spaces; seeks to meet VGC standards; has minimised detrimental impact; provides a clear distinction between public and private space and has regard to issues of security.

### **Effect on landscape character**

- 5.4 The proposals will have a major effect on the overall character of site. There will be a complete change in the form and scale of the built environment with the removal of the existing buildings and their replacement with a layout that strongly relates in scale and grain to the adjacent residential areas. The proposals will change the character of external space from the open areas that relate poorly to the existing 'slab block' built form to a series of high quality formal streetscapes.
- 5.5 The topography of the site has been respected with the creation of a strong layout with associated access and circulation that meets the competition requirements of lin 15



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maximum slopes (1 in 12 maximum gradient to adopted highways). Ground conditions are also respected with the building areas suitably positioned.

- 5.6 The area of open space adjacent to Arcot Triangle is retained. It will be regraded and replanted with a range of trees and shrubs to provide an informal area of visual open space. Additional areas of informal open space are provided at Woodland Place. The allotment area will be retained and opportunities exist for providing enhanced boundary treatments.
- 5.6 Although none of the existing trees within the main development area are to be retained a comprehensive planting strategy that relates strongly to the new urban form is proposed. This will include a range of suitable tree species.
- 5.7 Overall it is considered the effects on the landscape character are considered to be positive with the new development providing an enhancement to the local built environment.

#### Effects on visual amenity

- 5.8 The proposed development will have a major effect on local visual amenity with the removal of the existing semi derelict development and its replacement with a new layout of different scale, form and layout.
- 5.9 Views across the site from Paget Road will be enhanced with the replacement of the long blocks with lower detached properties. This will enable views out over Cardiff Bay. Views over Cardiff Bay from properties along Harbour View Road will be retained with new development located at a level that will allow views over the roofs. Views over the allotments and across Cardiff Bay from Plassey Square will be retained with new buildings set at a lower level and designed to allow views down to the bay between the formally spaced dwellings
- 5.10 The proposed development will change the skyline when viewed from across Cardiff Bay, with the replacement of the long blocks with a more diverse built form that corresponds to the scale of the rest of Penarth seen in the view. The two taller blocks at the east of the site will be seen as more prominent elements on the ridgeline, complimenting St Augustine's church to the east. The rendered and brick gables of dwellings along the northern edge of the site over looking the bay will create a rhythmic silhouette in views from the bay.

- 5.11 Views from within the site will be varied and include open vistas over Cardiff Bay, framed by the new development, views to the south from in between terraces along The Ridgeway, as well as local enclosed views along The Ridgeway.
- 5.12 Overall it is considered that the proposed development will have a positive effect on the visual amenity within and local to the site. The proposals will remove locally detracting features with replacement by high quality development that complements the local built environment. Existing views over Cardiff Bay have been respected and new views provided.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 A landscape and visual appraisal has been undertaken of the site at Penarth Heights together with the local setting. This appraisal work, together with a range of other studies and public consultation, has been integral to the design evolution and has informed the scale, form and layout of the final proposals.
- 6.2 The appraisal has established that the existing site is in a prominent position but poor condition with considerable potential for enhancement. The key issues relate to the form and scale of the proposed development; the relationships with the adjoining urban form and woodland; the visual connectivity with Cardiff Bay and the accessibility within and through the site.
- 6.3 The proposals have responded to these key issues and comprise a built form of a scale that compliments the local area with good access and circulation and a high quality of external space. Important views have been respected and proposals have sought to maximise opportunities for providing views over Cardiff Bay.
- 6.4 Overall it is considered that the proposals will result in the removal of detracting elements and the enhancement of the local built environment in terms of both landscape character and visual amenity.

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## APPENDIX - LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS AND MATERIAL PALETTE FIGURES

