



# **VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

## **RETIREMENT VILLAGE**

**Green Hills Trust P/L**

**Wilton Drive, EAST MAITLAND**

**FEBRUARY 2018**

**Ref: 18018**

**VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
RETIREMENT VILLAGE**

**62 Mount Vincent Road and 6 Wilton Drive, EAST MAITLAND  
Green Hills Trust P/L**

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## 1. Introduction

Insite Planning Services has been engaged by Green Hills Trust P/L to prepare a Visual Impact Assessment for a proposed retirement village to be located on land on the corner of Mount Vincent Road and Wilton Drive East Maitland to be known as the Hunter Grange Lifestyle Village. This assessment has been requested by Maitland City Council in their assessment of the development application.

This assessment is based on three site inspections carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> November and 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017, and 28<sup>th</sup> January 2018 using key viewpoints and locations with potential views towards the site. The report details the results of the field work, documents the assessment of the landscape character and visual setting, and potential visual impacts.

As cadastral information has little influence in defining visual catchments, this assessment aims to identify the landscape character, and dominant features of the relevant visual catchment that the development site lies within. The purpose of this report is to provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the visibility and potential visual impacts of the proposal.

### 1.1. Documents Consulted

I have perused the following documents in the preparation of this assessment report:

- DA Plan set prepared by ACM Landmark and dated 15.01.16 including design perspectives, site plan, floor plans, elevations, sections.
- Statement of Environmental Effects prepared by ACM Landmark and dated January 2016.
- Photomontage prepared by ACM Landmark

### 1.2 Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

Insite Planning Services uses the visual impact assessment methodology developed by renowned landscape assessment expert Dr Richard Lamb.

Dr Lamb's methodology addresses important aspects related to visual impact assessment as required by the relevant planning framework, namely "what is the nature and extent of the activity that causes visual effects on the environment and what is its importance (ie. the impact) of the effects." He describes his assessment methodology as follows:

"The assessment of visual impacts is a field that requires a degree of subjective judgement and cannot be made fully objective. It is therefore necessary to limit the subjectivity of the work by adopting a systematic, explicit and comprehensive approach. This has the aim of separating aspects that can be more objective, for example the physical setting, visual character, visibility and visual qualities of a proposal, from more subjective aspects, such as attractiveness and compatibility of the proposal with the setting.

The basic methodology used is partly related to the methods developed in the USA described as the Visual Management System (VMS) and still current in landscape assessment practice in the USA (USDA Forest Service, 1995; Visual Resource Management Manual USDA (1991)) and in Australia (eg. Scenic Spectrums Pty Ltd (Victoria), Visual Evaluation Model). Dr Lamb has modified these methods based on his own knowledge and experience of empirical research concerning environmental perception and cognition, incorporating visual impact assessment.

A flow chart which describes the components of the method used in this assessment and the logic of connection between them can be seen at **Figure 1**.

The first part is the view analysis which describes the existing and desired future character of the site and the surrounding context, its scenic quality and identifies the existing and potential visual resources of the development site. It then describes the features of the proposed development and how it responds to the identified visual resources of the development site.

The second part of the method consists of an objective analysis of the visual effects of the proposal. The analytical section of the report is intended to identify and document the objective visual effects which will occur because of construction of the proposed development and also the relative size or magnitude of those effects (what effects and how much). It starts with an analysis of the area in which the proposal would be visible (its visual catchment) and the factors which condition its visibility. An analysis is then made of the extent of visual change that would occur in the catchment as a result of the construction of the development.

Change is considered in relation firstly to the existing, emerging and desired future character of the site itself and secondly to the existing, emerging and desired future character of the surrounding context. Finally, an analysis of the factors which either increase or decrease a viewer's sensitivity to the potential change to the site and locality is made. Specific visual effects are also considered to include potential view loss effects, interruption of predominant view lines including those to and from heritage items and in general terms the likely effects on visual privacy and visual amenity of the existing and future residents.

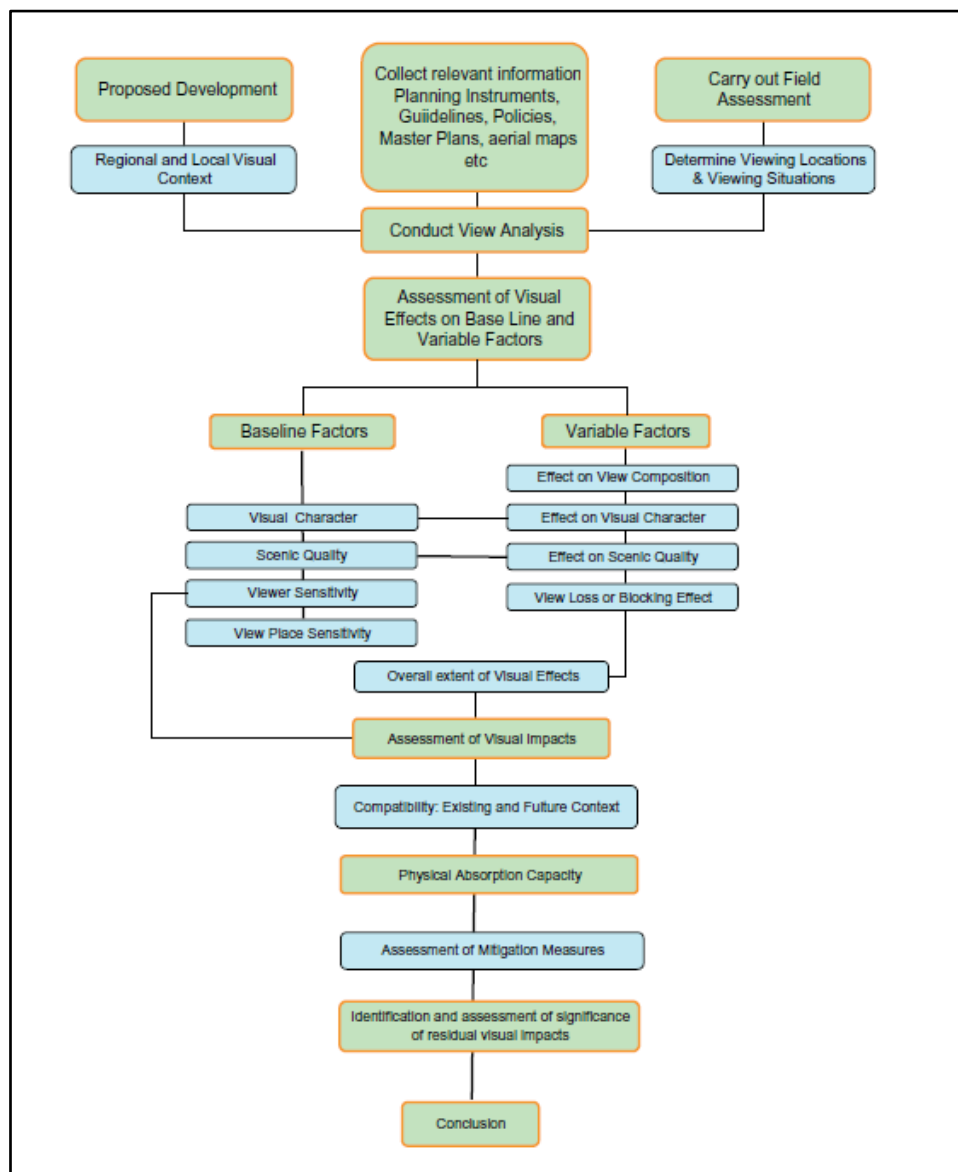
The third main component of the method comprises the visual impact assessment. It considers the appropriateness and impacts on scenic quality, landscape character and on specific views and items of significance by assessing factors such as the physical absorption capacity and the compatibility of the proposal with the existing and desired future character of the development site and the surroundings. The impact assessment also includes consideration of the strategies incorporated into the proposal to mitigate potential visual impacts and an assessment of the significance of visual impacts and whether there are significant residual visual impacts.

A six-point qualitative scale is used throughout the assessment with regard to explaining the relative visual effects or potential impacts of the proposal. The scale values range from negligible, through low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high to high, ie, moderate is the mid-range value where there is a measurable effect. The ratings in the visual impact factors (ie, the Physical Absorption Capacity and Compatibility) work in the reverse order compared to visual effects rating. For example, a High level of Physical Absorption Capacity means Low level of visual impact.

A six-point scale is used throughout the report with regard to explaining the relative visual effects or potential impacts of the proposal. The scale values and the qualities which are equivalent to each are described by way of an example showing ratings of the extent of the visual effects parameters in **Table 1** below." (Dr Richard Lamb)

| <u>Extent of effect</u> | <u>Qualities</u>  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Negligible              | The proposal has no visual effect on the landscape  |
| Low                     | The proposal is evident but is subordinate to other elements in the scene by virtue of its small scale, screening by intervening elements, or difficulty of being identified            |
| Low-Moderate            | The proposal is evident and identifiable in the scene, but is less prominent, makes a smaller contribution to the overall scene, or does not contrast substantially with other elements |
| Moderate                | The proposal is a substantial element, but is equivalent in prominence to other elements and landscape alterations in the scene.  |
| Moderate-high           | The proposal is more prominent than other elements in the scene, by virtue of its size, character, location or a combination of these.  |
| High                    | The proposal visually dominates the scene due to its relative size, isolation, location in a focal point, contrast of form, colour or line, or a combination of these                   |

**Table 1:** Six Point Evaluation Scale



**Figure 1** Visual Impact Assessment Methodology Flowchart

## 2. Proposal Details

The proposed retirement village will provide a range of residential / accommodation options primarily for people aged 55 years and over. The provision of independent living in the form of serviced housing and supported accommodation options will enable people with differing care needs to access the site, or remain on site as their circumstances change. The accommodation options are as follows:

- 62 single storey detached 3 bedroom self-contained retirement units
- 72 single storey 2 bedroom self-contained retirement units in a duplex style

The development will be a gated community, meaning that the area will be secure, and entry / exit will only be via determined access points. An on-site manager will be employed who will monitor the day to day operation of the facility as well as coordinate access to the site by tradespeople etc.

The proposed development will have a range of services and facilities and create a community type setting, promoting liveability within the retirement village. The services and facilities include the following services and facilities that will be available to residents within the community centre as illustrated on Table 1 below:

|   | SERVICE                 | INCLUDING  |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Therapy Centre</b>   | Hydro Spa<br>Gymnasium<br>Spa & Sauna<br>Massage Room<br>Swimming Pool   |
| 2 | <b>Medical</b>          | Doctors Rooms<br>Nurses Room<br>Chemist Prescription<br>Delivery Service<br>Swimming Pool<br>Direct Connect 24 hr Emergency Monitored Call   |
| 3 | <b>Convenience</b>      | Mail Room<br>Bar/Snooker Table/Pool Table<br>Library/Computer Room<br>Craft Room Lounge<br>Swimming Pool   |
| 4 | <b>General Services</b> | On Site Management<br>Complete Home Management<br>Complete Garden Management & Maintenance<br>Mail Collection & Storage<br>Prepared Meals within Commercial Kitchen & Dining Area (Community Facility)<br>Men's Shed/Workshop<br>Maintenance Facility<br>24/7 Gated Security & Keypad Entry<br>Village Community Bus Service<br>BBQ Areas<br>Child Friendly Play Areas |

**Table 1:** Community Centre Facilities and Services

The master plan for the site (refer below) shows the layout of the facility which incorporates open / recreation areas which will promote active living within the resort environment.



**Figure 5: Site Masterplan**

The development is proposed to be a retirement village on land adjacent to urban zoned land under the provisions of Clause 17(1)(C) and 17(2)(C) of State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for Seniors or People with a Disability) 2004 (Seniors SEPP).

A retirement village has the meaning within the Retirement Villages Act 1999 *“is a complex containing residential premises that are a) predominantly or exclusively occupied, or intended to be predominantly or exclusively occupied, by retired persons who have entered into village contracts with an operator of the complex”*.

The proposal is to contain serviced self-care housing within a retirement village.

The proposal is to be consistent with Walka Grange Lifestyle Village at Rutherford which the proponent of the subject proposal developed and currently operates. We have also viewed this property to understand the scale and character of the development and how it will fit within the environment of the development site and surrounding areas.



### 3. Visual character, exposure and resources analysis

#### 3.1 Site Description

The subject land is located on the western side of Mount Vincent Road at East Maitland. It has frontage to Mount Vincent Road along its eastern boundary and the site also has its proposed direct access via adjoining Lot 8 and Wilton Drive which is being incorporated into the subject proposal. Lot 8 has frontage to Wilton Drive. Historically in 1837 the site was part of a land grant to Houston Mitchell, the brother of Surveyor General at the time Thomas Mitchell, being 500 acres extending south from Ultimo Street and known as 'Rathluba'.

Mount Vincent Road forms a regional road linking East Maitland with the Hunter Expressway and Kurri Kurri. Wilton Drive along the north of the site is a local access road servicing existing residential development within the Rathluba Estate. The subject land is formally identified as:

- Lot 8 DP 855275; and
- Lot 141 DP 1225076.

This land is proximate to the business and commercial centre of Green Hills which is located approximately 1.6km to the north east of the site. Green Hills provides significant service centre, shopping, support services and employment to the immediate and wider locality. Direct pedestrian access via formed and paved footpaths exists from the commercial precinct to the subject site.

The land is described as vacant and predominately cleared land in the development footprint which is used for low level cattle grazing.

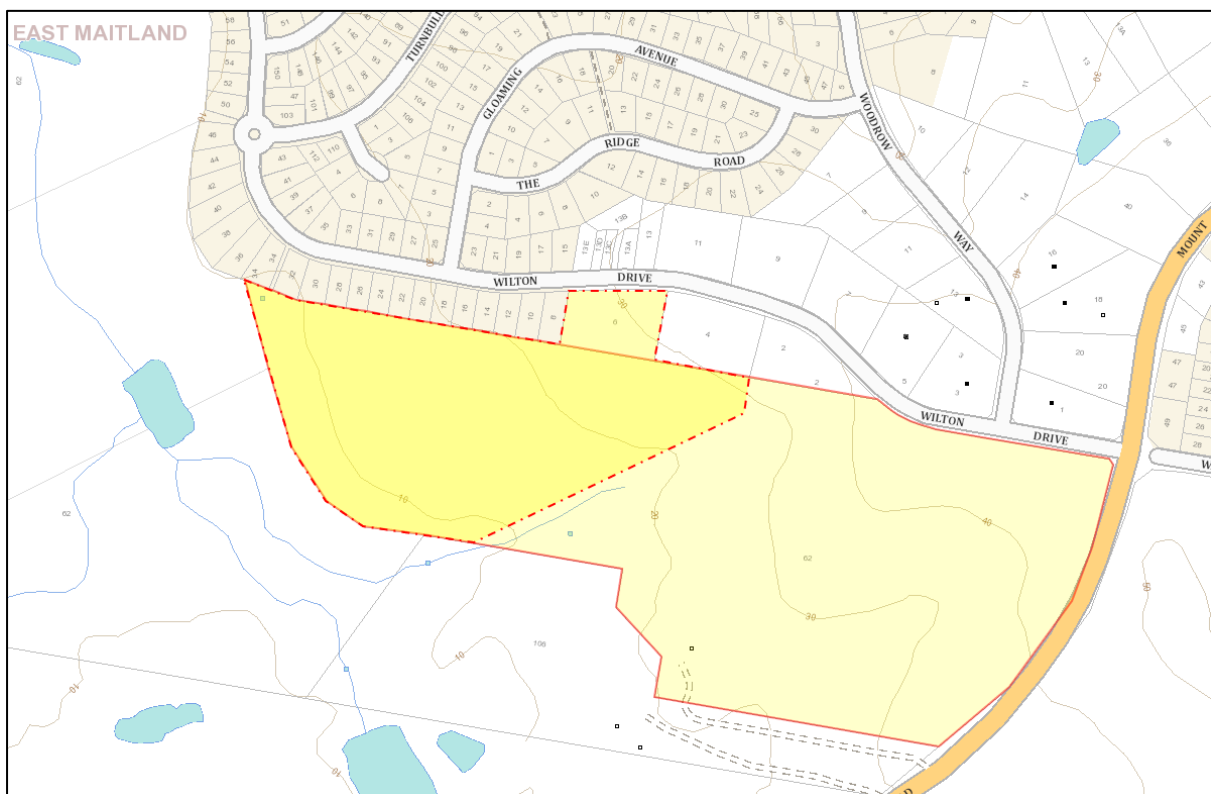


Figure 2: Subject Land and Development site

Lot 42 has an area of 26.73 hectares however only approximately 10 hectares is proposed for the development footprint (the development site) with the remainder comprising vegetation retention and open space separation areas. Lot 8 adjoining has an area of 6156m<sup>2</sup> and provides access to the development site of Lot 42 from Wilton Drive.

As illustrated in figure 2 above, the Development Site itself is located within the subject land with the development site being represented by the darker yellow line and dashed red line. The subject land is that land and the remaining land shaded a lighted yellow with a red outline.

The underlying topography of the development site, and that of the subject land generally, is a gently undulating side slope of a minor ridge that extends from Mount Vincent Road and generally follows the southern side of Wilton Drive before plateauing out over the Wallis Creek floodplain. As such it trends approximately from the eastern boundary to the south west. Slopes range in grade in the range of 5% to 7% within the development site.

The retirement village will be located within the development site and is proposed as an extension to the existing residential properties located on the southern side of Wilton Drive extending to a point on the southern, south western and western edges which is above the 1:100-year flood level which extends up the slope of the ridge mentioned above.

The remnant vegetation located on the eastern side of the subject land is proposed to be retained.

### **3.2 Visual Character of the site and the surroundings**

The landscape of the site itself is unremarkable and of a kind that is common in the locality. It can be described as a cleared rural paddock located at the lower elevation of a ridge above the floodplain.

The subject land is bisected by a 1<sup>st</sup> order watercourse running in a south westerly direction through the property from Wilton Drive approximately 250m from its intersection with Mount Vincent Road. Along Mount Vincent Road and the eastern boundary of the land in a westerly direction to this watercourse/ depression the site is covered in remnant vegetation as mentioned above.

The subject land sits on the urban fringe of East Maitland to the north being the residential properties that are part of Rathluba Estate. The visual catchment to the north is limited to this residential estate.

To the east the development site itself is restricted in view to the remnant vegetation located along the eastern portion of the subject land. Further east is located Mount Vincent Road and on the eastern side of that road is located undeveloped rural land. To the north east of the subject land is further residential development that extends to Greenhills; to the south west the East Maitland Waste Management facility which is not visible from the development site and located some 500m+.

To the west and south of the site are tributaries of Wallis Creek and the adjoining floodplain. It is low lying land located around various watercourse and is typical grazing land. There are also extensive areas of remnant bushland to the south of the subject land and to the south west is located the large lot residential areas of Louth Park.

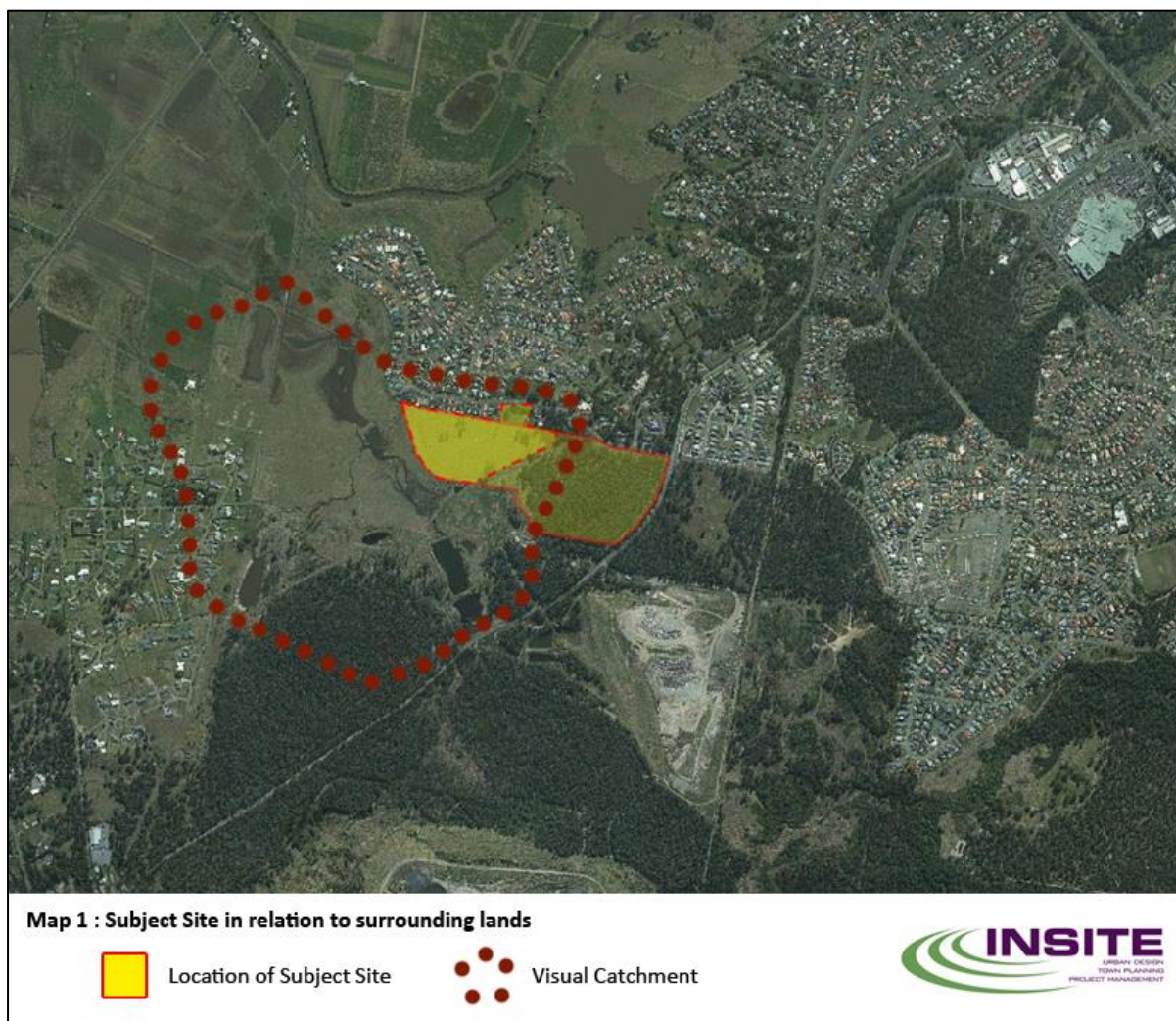
Figures 3 and 4 of the Report describe the character of the site and its context.

### 3.3 Scenic Quality

The development site is of overall low scenic quality and does not feature any significant scenic resources. However, the subject land does have a number of positive visual attributes. As noted above, the development site is situated on the lower section of a low lying ridge below the existing residential area of Rathluba Estate just above the flood plain. It contains no significant visual features.

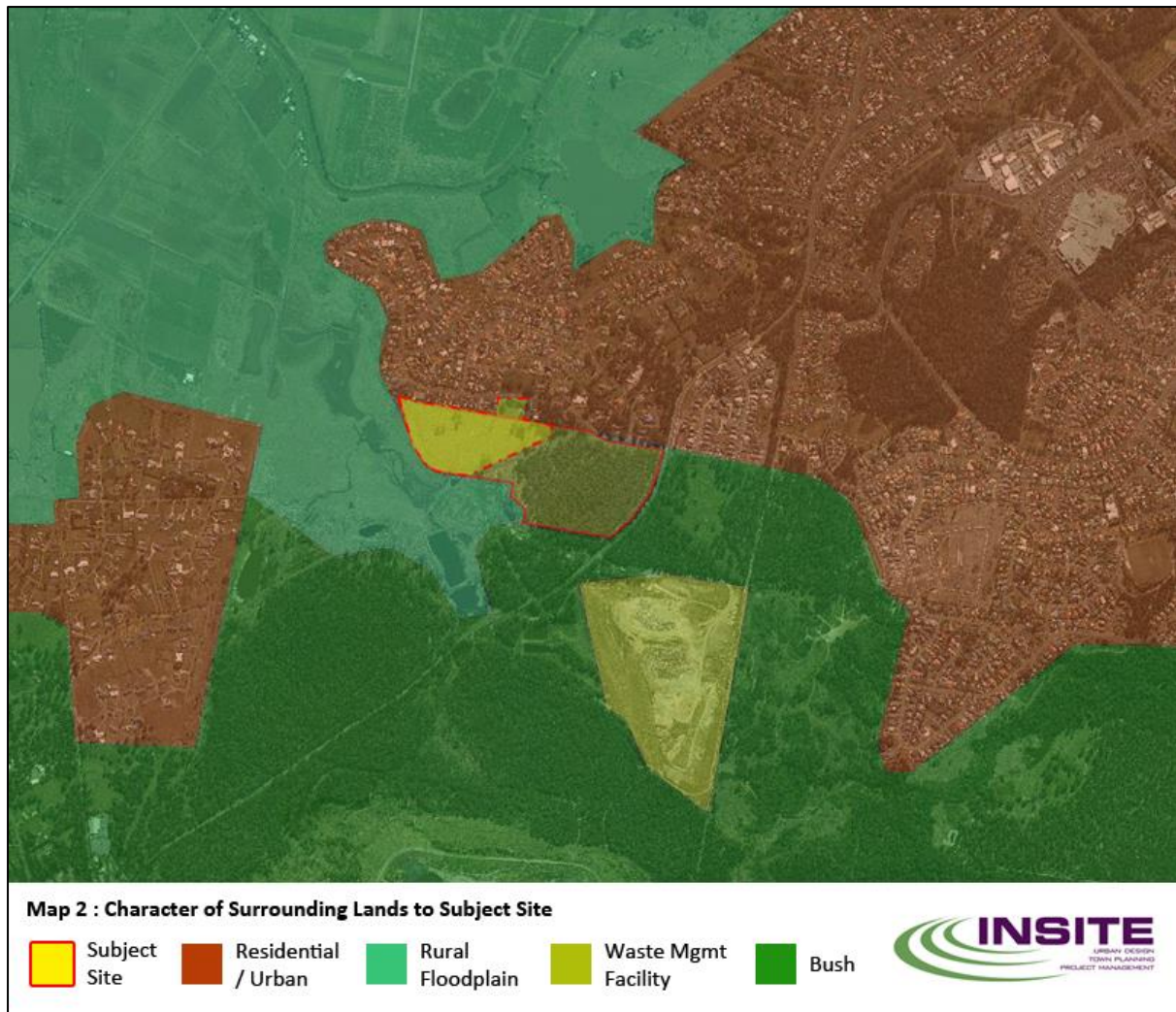
The subject land along the eastern edge does contain visually significant vegetation that connects with bushland areas to the south and east of the development site and is an elevated part of ridge above the floodplain. The development site lies outside and below this area of the subject land.

The development site is largely cleared of vegetation with the exception of a number of isolated trees and small stands of vegetation. These are not significant from a visual resource perspective. The vegetated areas of the subject land along the eastern sections of the property adjacent to Mount Vincent Road will be retained providing a positive visual backdrop to the development site.



**Figure 3:** Visual catchment of Development Site





**Figure 3:** Illustrating the Mixed Character of land surrounding the Development site

**Figures 2 and 3 above** illustrates the general immediate catchment of the proposed retirement village.

### 3.4 Visual Exposure of the Development Site

The visual exposure of the development site is determined through a definition of the visual catchment in the first instance. The visual catchment is limited to that area where the proposed development would be noticeable to the viewer, an obvious feature in a viewing plane or landscape. The visual catchment was determined from visiting the development site and taking note of the landscape features which could be seen from it as well as visiting public places in the local area to ascertain where the development site itself could be seen. The visual catchment is determined to be that area as defined in **Figure 2**.

Visual exposure is determined by both landscape features and the nature of the development itself and can be classified as follows:

- **Immediate Exposure Areas** – These are areas which immediately adjoining the development site and where the development site is located within the foreground of any viewing plane.



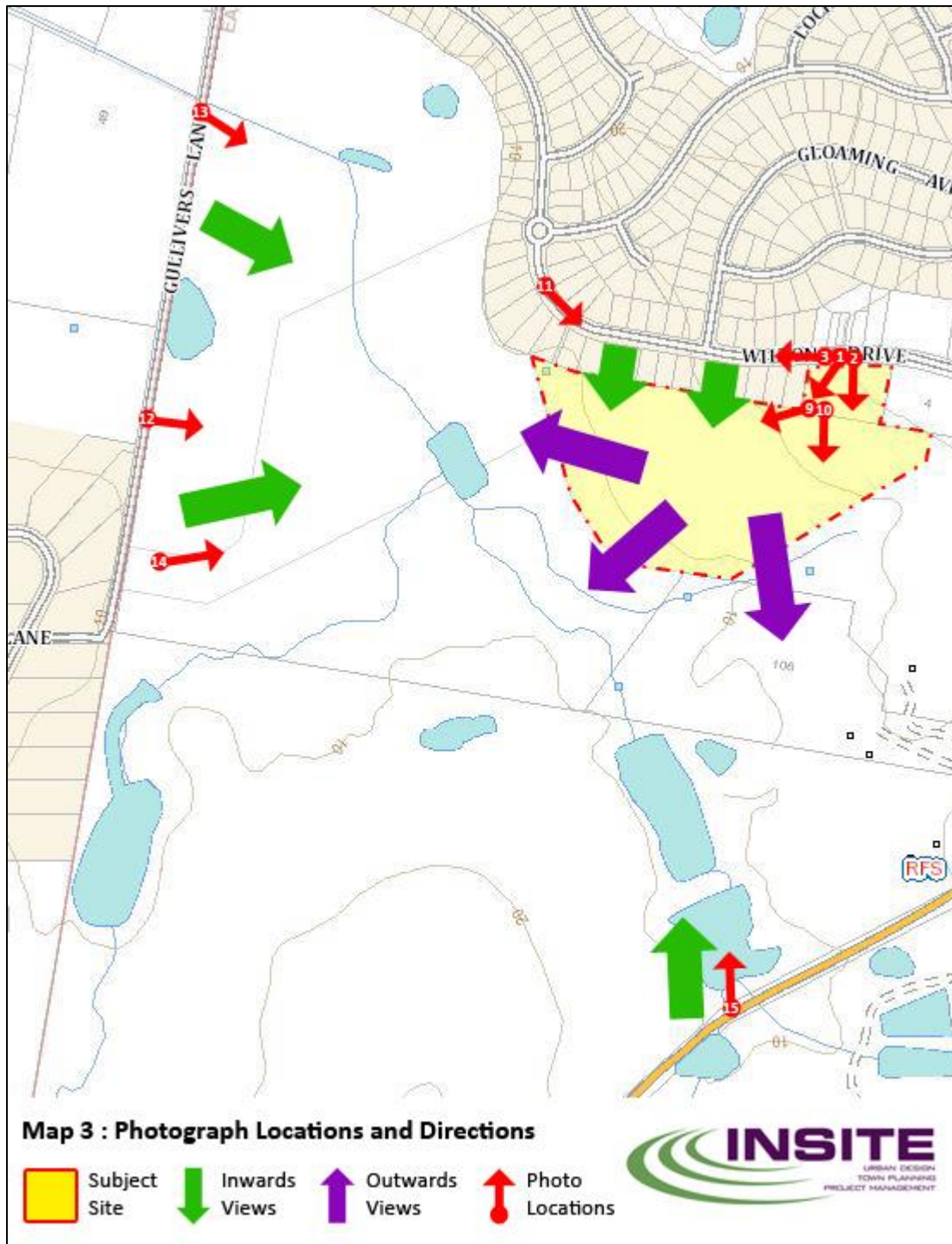
- **Intermediate Exposure Areas** - These areas are located between the foreground and distant views and where the development will become a feature within the viewing catchment.
- **Distant Exposure Areas** – These areas are where the development will be exposed within a relatively small and distant part of the viewing plane.

It is important to note that potential for visual impact is not determined by the location of a viewing point within the viewing catchment and the respective exposure areas. Specifically, visual impact can be greater from within distant exposure areas than intermediate or immediate exposure areas. For example, if a development is proposed on an elevated and heavily vegetated ridgeline and requires extensive clearing for the development of a dense, tall and large in area development, then that development might be exposed to a particularly wide catchment and have a significant impact within the distant exposure areas on the landscape and significant visual resources than a viewing point within the immediate and intermediate exposure areas. Likewise, a viewing point within an Immediate Exposure Area of a tall residential flat building located within a neighbourhood of similar development with no significant visual features might be deemed to have a low visual impact. Consequently, the potential for visual impact is not necessarily determined by the location of a viewing point within the visual catchment and the respective exposure areas.

As part of the field assessment, the visual exposure of the development site and the resultant development was documented by visiting a number of viewing locations and making observations. The visual exposure from the private domain was determined by making observations from the surrounding road network. **Appendix A** contains photographic plates representing the visual exposure and the viewing locations assessed are shown on **Figure 4**.

The visual catchment of the proposed development site is relatively small at 1.035km<sup>2</sup>. This limited size is due to the nature of the topography and vegetation cover in the area. Features of the visual catchment noted in Figure 2 include:

- To the west and south west – the visual catchment extends across the flood plain to Gullivers Lane and Louth Park. This is the largest area of the visual catchment.
- From the south through to the south east, east and north east the development site has limited visual exposure as it is enclosed by large areas of native vegetation and forested areas.
- To the north the visible catchment is also limited to the existing residential properties primarily along the southern side of Wilton Drive.



**Figure 4:** Photograph locations and directions – refer to Appendix A

The only public places within the visual catchment are Wilton Drive, Mount Vincent Road, Gullivers Lane and the local streets of Louth Park. Views into the development site are limited to the following public places:

- In front of Lot 8 on Wilton Drive otherwise the development site is obscured by existing dwellings or bushland areas (See photo's 1 – 7).

- A small 'window' at a low point on Mount Vincent Road, however given the nature of the road side environment and speed, and that the development will only extend into the distant exposure area of the viewing plane and it is unlikely to be discernible (refer to photo 15).
- Gullivers Lane Louth Park where the development will appear as an extension to the existing Rathluba Estate (refer to photo's 12 & 13).
- The site is not visible from local streets within Louth Park with the exception of the rare glimpse between houses. Certainly no view lines.

Based on the above observations the following conclusions can be drawn:

- **Immediate Exposure Areas** – The only public place which has an immediate Exposure is Wilton Drive in front of Lot 8 where the development will connect with the adjoining residential neighbourhood and local road network. The residential properties that immediately adjoin the development site located along the southern side of Wilton Drive will also be within the Immediate Exposure Area.
- **Intermediate Exposure Areas** – There are no public places or private residences within the intermediate exposure area of the development site.
- **Distant Exposure Areas** – Gullivers Lane, future dwellings to be located on the north eastern fringe of Louth Park located on Gullivers Lane and the viewing point on Mount Vincent Road are all viewing points within the Distant Exposure Area.

Consequently, the only significant view into the development site from a public place is Gullivers Lane with very limited viewing opportunities along Wilton Drive and arguably negligible views from Mount Vincent Road.

The development site is also within the Immediate Exposure Area of properties located along Wilton Drive that adjoin the development site. These properties are located at a higher elevation than the development site, so it will be highly visible from these properties. To a lesser extent the development site will also be within the viewing plane of residential properties located around the north eastern and eastern edges of Louth Park and these are within the Distant Exposure Area.

There are views outward from the subject site that feature the same elements mentioned above, and very distant views toward the rural areas surrounding Wallis Creek towards Gillieston Heights, from which the development proposed would be of no significant visibility due to its residential scale and distance.

The visual catchment is therefore relatively limited at a local level, and the scenic resources are limited to the watercourses and floodplains of Wallis Creek and the surrounding forested areas.

Within this visual catchment the development site will appear as a natural extension to the existing residential area of Rathluba Estate and because it is located at a lower elevation and no significant clearing of forested vegetation is required, it will not impact on existing scenic resources such as the ridgeline and forested areas located on the eastern section of the property.

## 4. Visual Effects Analysis

### 4.1 Potential visual exposure of the proposed development

The development proposed will make no significant difference to the extent of the visual catchment of the development site; that is to say, the size and heights of the buildings within the retirement village will not increase the area of the visual catchment over which it will be seen. This is because the area beyond the visual catchment detailed in section 3 consists of forested areas (to the south, east and round to the north east) where there is no direct view line into the development site, and to the west there are extensive areas of rural land around the floodplain of Wallis Creek where there are no public places.

### 4.2 Viewing sequence

#### Fixed viewing positions

These are the locations from which there are views for a longer period of time from fixed positions. These are considered to be of particular importance because people can have the opportunity to concentrate on the view and notice the change and activities in detail. There are no public domain fixed locations within the visual catchment such as a park or community facility.

There are fixed views from residential properties to the north along Wilton Drive where the development will be within the Immediate Exposure Area, and on the north eastern edge of Louth Park on Gullivers Lane.

The retirement village will have an impact on the visual outlook of the properties backing onto the development site which front Wilton Drive with the foreground view changing completely from an outlook over a rural paddock historically used for grazing, to an outlook over a residential development. The dwellings are also elevated on this site, so the view will be of rooves, which is a negative, but the elevated position will allow these properties to retain their distant views over the floodplain within the Intermediate and Distant Exposure Areas including the forested areas to the south.



**Figure 4 – Photomontage** from Gullivers Lane looking due east across the rural foreground to the site of the retirement village. Note – the photomontage does not include internal landscaping and in particular trees which would further soften the look.



## **Sequence of views**

Sequences of views are important because the viewer can construct a three-dimensional understanding of the development if it is significantly exposed to view, particularly over substantial distances. Wilton Drive provides limited opportunity for short duration, sequential views from the public domain limited to the frontage of Lot 8. The only other road where a sequence view is possible is Gullivers Lane and due to distance the view will appear nothing more than as an extension to the existing Rathluba residential estate.

## **View compositions**

The foreground views of the development site will be significantly transformed as it currently contains no development and will be occupied by a medium density style residential development. All of the views that are potentially affected have a similar composition because of the simple underlying physical landscape structure. The relatively gentle undulating slopes of the development site will present the proposed development to view from the existing residential properties located along the southern side of Wilton Drive that are within the Immediate Exposure Area.

The proposal is designed to limit the amount of visibility of the entire development from any given viewing place, by means of the underlying layout, separation of development into groups and areas of different character, the landscape planning and design, the width of and vegetated nature of the buffers between the site and viewers and by controlling the variety of view experiences. As noted above, there is a significant separation between the western edge of the development site and Gullivers Lane that are exposed to sequential views so that the development will appear as a natural extension of the Rathluba residential estate in those sequences.

Both screening and visual separation are provided from Mount Vincent Road to the east and south as the existing native vegetation bands along roads provide significant screening that effectively will block any view.

## **4.3 Potential change in the intrinsic character of the subject site and the surroundings**

Change in the intrinsic character of the site is a description of the extent and nature of visual changes when considered in relation to the site's present character before the intended development is constructed.

There would be a marked change in the intrinsic visual character of the site due to the construction of the proposed development. This is because the site has been a vacant rural grazing landscape and a significant part of it would be occupied by buildings. The proposed development would, however, retain the natural and cultural features of the site such as all the remnant forest along the eastern section of the site and the existing watercourses. The visual resources on the immediately surrounding rural lands would not be affected.

There would not be any significant negative change to the intrinsic visual character of the wider surroundings of the site; that is, the development will have no significant impact on the resources of landscape of a similar character that is extremely widespread in the locality. A change to the visual character of a site can be positive, neutral or negative and does not directly lead to visual impacts. The more important question to be investigated is the compatibility of the proposed development

with the visual character of the site and the surroundings. This has been considered at Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of this Report.

#### 4.4 Potential effect on intrinsic scenic quality

The intrinsic scenic quality of the site is judged to be low on a scale from low to high as explained in Section 3.3 of the Report. In general, it is considered that the proposed development will not have a significant negative effect on the existing intrinsic scenic quality of the locality, which will remain low to moderate. It is also considered that the proposed development will not have a significant effect on the moderate scenic quality of its surrounding setting, given the highly restricted visual catchment and the situation of the subject land being on the edge of existing urban land.

#### 4.5 Visual sensitivity

Sensitivity relates to the number of viewers who would be likely to see the proposed development and their likely expectations for visual quality. It is usually considered that a visual impact on a sensitive location in the public domain is considered more important than one of similar quality on a less sensitive site or seen from a private viewing place.

##### 4.4.1 View place sensitivity

View place sensitivity means a measure of the public interest in the view and relates to the distance of the viewer from the site, the part of the total extent and composition of the view which the development would occupy and the likely expectations for visual quality of the viewer. It is conventionally considered that a visual impact on a sensitive location in the public domain is more important than one of similar quality on a less sensitive site or seen from a private viewing place.

The measure of the relative sensitivity of a viewing place is rated using a scale from low to high. The description of the associated sensitivity of the viewing places is described in Table 4.1 below by Dr Lamb.

The main sensitivity is in the public domain in the restricted visual catchment mentioned above. The predominant issue in this regard is the extent to which the development can be compatible with the rural/urban interface. However, the demands of this compatibility are skewed in favour of the rural, given that without the SEPP the development would not be permissible. In this location there is what would be described as a 'hard' rural/urban interface where on one side there is a traditional residential estate, and on the other side broad acre rural land. Consequently, it is important that this hard interface character be retained and that's what is proposed by the development.

It is assessed in this case that there are no significant public domain locations at close distance to the development site that provide foreground views of the proposed development other than a small section of Wilton Drive immediately adjacent to Lot 8.

##### 4.4.2 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity relates to private domain views. Overall there is moderate exposure of the development to private views with sixteen (16) residential properties located within the Immediate

Exposure Area on the southern side of Wilton Drive. The viewer sensitivity is assessed to be moderate to high as the views of the proposed development are immediate views and this impact is tempered by the fact that the development will not screen intermediate and distant views as the residential properties along Wilton Drive are generally located at a higher elevation and will view over the development.

#### 4.5 Residential amenity effects

The development is proposed to be located immediately adjacent to sixteen (16) residential properties located along the southern side of Wilton Drive. There will be potential for privacy impacts on these properties given the immediate adjoining nature of the development site with these residential properties. It otherwise proposes significant setbacks from the bounding rural roads and adjoining rural properties. The proposed development will not have any significant visual privacy and overlooking effects on adjacent rural properties.

**Table 2:** Sensitivity Rating Table (Dr Richard Lamb)

| Factor  | Low   | Medium  | High   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>View Place Sensitivity<br/>(Public Domain Locations)</b> | Public domain viewing places such as reserves, waterway and roads at great distance providing highly distant views. The development often forms a very small part of the expansive to panoramic view, situated in the backdrop or horizon to the view. Overall shape, line and silhouette of buildings/development and details are not discernible. | Views from roads, recreation areas and waterways where the development forms part of the view at a medium range distance providing the immediate setting behind the foreground and closer than the background. Detail is less prominent. The form, shape, character and overall colours and textures of buildings, forms and shapes of street walls, their width and character is a middle ground feature and not very prominent. Spatial relationships between individual buildings are clearly evident. | Close distance range views from roads, recreation areas and waterways with development forming a significant part of the view close to the viewer. High levels of details are visible, such as fine details of buildings, their style, age, materials, surfaces, features and textures, etc. In the foreground, the spatial relationships between buildings are not discernible due to narrower cone view available to the viewer. |
| <b>Viewer Sensitivity<br/>(Private Domain Locations)</b>    | Residences providing distant views of the proposed development in which   | Residences located at medium range from the proposed development site with  | Residences located at close distances from the site with foreground views of   |

|  |                              |   |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|
|  | details are not discernible. | middle ground views of the development in which the details are not very prominent. | the development in which form and scale of parts of development that are visible are prominent. |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|

#### 4.6 Overall potential visual effects

Based on the analysis above at sections 4.1 to 4.5, it is considered that the overall potential visual effects of the proposed development range from low from viewing points to the north east in an arc through to the south and west, too high in respect to the adjoining residential properties on Wilton Drive.



## 5. Visual Impacts Assessment

The previous chapter of this report analysed the extent of the visual effects of the proposal on its visual catchment. The extent of the visual effects is the baseline assessment against which to judge the visual impacts. The visual effects analysis represents the objective facts and the potential consequences of the construction of the proposal.

Whether or not a visual effect is an impact of potential significance is not directly proportional to the extent of the visual effect. For example, a high visual effect can be quite acceptable, whereas a small one can be unacceptable in some circumstances. As a result, it is necessary to give a weighting to the assessed levels of effects to arrive at an assessment of the impact.

Using the methodology developed by Dr Lamb, this chapter assesses how significant these potential effects are and if they result in visual impacts of any significance. Due to the nature of the proposal and its surrounding visual context, it is considered that the impacts would be significant if it would lead to unreasonable and unacceptable impacts on the criterion:

- a) its physical absorption capacity,
- b) compatibility with the character of the site and
- c) compatibility with the surrounding context.

As explained in the methodology at Section 1.3, a high level of physical absorption capacity and compatibility means low visual impact.

### 5.1 Physical absorption capacity

Physical Absorption Capacity (PAC) means the extent to which the existing or future visual environment can reduce or eliminate the perception of the visibility of the proposed development. PAC includes the ability of existing elements of the landscape to physically hide, screen or disguise the proposal. It also includes the extent to which the colours, material and finishes of buildings, the scale and bulk allows them to blend with or reduce contrast with others of the same or closely similar kinds to the extent that they cannot easily be distinguished as new features of the environment.

Prominence is also an attribute with relevance to PAC. It is assumed in this assessment that higher PAC can only occur where there is low to moderate prominence of the proposal in the scene.

Low to moderate prominence means:

- **Low** - The proposal has either no visual effect on the landscape or the proposal is evident but is subordinate to other elements in the scene by virtue of its small scale, screening by intervening elements, or difficulty of being identified.
- **Moderate** - The proposal is either evident or identifiable in the scene, but is less prominent, makes a smaller contribution to the overall scene, or does not contrast substantially with other elements or is a substantial element, but is equivalent in prominence to other elements and landscape alterations in the scene.

The subject site and its visual catchment provides low to moderate physical absorption capacity to accommodate the proposed development. While there is some variation in topography to the north

east through to the south of the development site that screens it from views (ie the forested areas), there isn't any topographic variation for views from the west leaving the site largely exposed. There is also no vegetation screening on site (other than in the eastern section of the subject land as mentioned above), and these are illustrated in the photo's in Appendix A.

The above assessment is in respect to the site itself. In terms of the proposed retirement village in the landscape it is considered that there is a moderate level of physical absorption capacity given that it will appear as an extension of the existing urban form (ie Rathluba Estate) and is located at a low elevation below existing residential development and the natural ridgeline to the east which Mount Vincent Road 'roughly' follows. The PAC will also be greatly assisted by the retention of the forested areas on the eastern part of the site which will provide a significant backdrop softening the appearance of the development.

## 5.2 Compatibility with the character of the Site

Compatibility with the existing character of the site is a measure of how the proposed development responds to the natural and built features such as vegetation, topography, scenic features and existing developments within the site as well as its potential impact on the visibility of those features from external viewing locations. It is also an assessment of how the proposed development takes into consideration the future retention, management and conservation of such natural features. In assessing this, it is also taken into consideration whether the proposed development is a permissible use for the site.

The proposed development is responsive to the existing visual character of the subject land in that it proposes to retain the remnant forest character along the eastern section of the property. The proposed landscape scheme including the vegetated buffers and individual private landscapes would further assist in providing a vegetated setting for the proposed development. The level of landscape planting and rehabilitation proposed will increase the compatibility of the development with the higher scenic quality attributes provided by the significant vegetation stand on the eastern side of the property. The internal road layouts and the locations of the building footprints are responsive to the underlying topography of the subject site.

It is determined that the proposed development is as compatible with the character of the subject site as would be any other permissible uses of similar densities and intensities. The compatibility is rated as moderate even with no mitigation of visual impacts considered. It is also noted that the Director General of Planning and Environment has issued a Site Compatibility Certificate for a seniors living development for the subject site.

It is recommended that landscaping of the western elevation of the development site occur to further soften the density of the development as viewed from Gullivers Lane. This should be in the form of a number of small clusters of advanced Eucalypts with lower level shrubs with the intent not to screen the development but rather break up the urban edge as viewed from the west.

It is also noted that the character of the area is dominated by a hard rural/urban fringe often with colourbond fencing that presents as a solid feature that is out of character by way of colour and form with the adjoining rural landscape. The development proposes that dwellings front onto the adjoining rural landscape with a road ringing the development. This means that from external points viewing into the site will not be onto colourbond fences and rear of properties, but rather a landscaped urban form addressing the adjoining rural landscape with the ring road as a buffer area

that will be landscaped as mention above. This will mitigate any impact on the landscape character of the area compared to the residential properties currently backing onto this area along Wilton Drive.

Therefore, the proposed retirement village is consistent with similar adjoining residential development in the locality and is therefore consistent with the visual character of the area. Based on the above the compatibility of the proposed retirement village is rated as moderate even with no mitigation of visual impacts considered (ie landscaping).

### **5.3 Compatibility with the character of the surrounding Context**

Visual compatibility of the proposed retirement village with the surrounding rural environment is an assessment considered over its total visual catchment. Compatibility is different from change. While change is objective, the measure of visual compatibility is intended to evaluate the extent to which the change conforms with or acceptably fits into the future visual context of the site and its surroundings. Compatibility also means that the development responds appropriately to the desired future character determined by strategic planning instruments or policies and guidelines.

The proposed development is considered to have high compatibility with the character of the surrounding locality. The main reason for this is as outlined in the final paragraph at 5.2 above – the fact it is consistent with other forms of development in the locality and that it will ‘sit in’ the site at a lower elevation than most surrounding development and appearing as a single storey development consistent with other residential development to which it will appear as a natural extension.

Another reason for this is that its visibility is largely confined to only a small number of private domain locations and to a small public domain catchment. Also, the proposal is consistent with the emerging and desired future character of the locality as it has been identified as a future urban release area and appropriate for the location of the subject site adjacent to an urban fringe.

### **5.4 Overall visual impacts**

The overall visual impacts of the proposed development on its visual catchment, taking into account the weightings of each of the criteria above in 5.1-5.3 are assessed to be of low significance. The final step of the method of assessment is to determine whether a low extent of impact makes the development acceptable or unacceptable. The way in which this was determined is explained in Chapter 6.0, below.

## 6. Significance of visual impacts

### 6.1 Summary of strategies to mitigate residual visual impacts

The proposed retirement village is compatible with the abstract qualities of the surrounding landscape, i.e. the dominance of space over form, arrangement of elements in relation to each other, dominance of horizontal over vertical elements, the simplicity of forms and presence of repeated elements. This can then be reinforced through the appropriate use of colours, materials and details in the proposed design. As noted above the development would benefit from appropriate landscaping on the western and southern edges of the development site with clusters of Eucalypts and lower level shrubs to break up and soften the appearance of the development on the adjoining rural landscape. This would certainly be a much improved outcome compared to the existing rural/urban interface with Rathluba Estate where the view is into the rears of properties and colourbond fencing.

The general principles that have been incorporated in the design of the development are such that it respects and corresponds to the underlying natural, rural and built context in which it would be located.

The following is a summary of the strategies that have been incorporated within the design of the proposed development to eliminate significant visual impacts on the visual catchment:

- a) Appropriate setbacks, buffer zones and landscape treatments recommended.
- b) One vehicular entry points and low visibility of internal road network.
- c) Building and roof forms of contemporary style but rural and traditional nature for higher compatibility with the built forms within the surrounding locality.
- d) A mix of strategically located attached and semi-detached houses.
- e) An appropriate landscape scheme to further enhance the visual and vegetated character of the site, provide screening to parts of the proposed development and maintain the amenity with the neighbours.
- f) The siting of the development at a low elevation above the flood plain.
- g) The concentration of institutional style structures (community facilities) in the area with the lowest visual exposure.

### 6.2 Summary and significance of residual visual impacts

The predominant visual impact of the proposal is reflected in the assessment of the extent of effect on the intrinsic character of the site at 4.4 above, and compatibility with the existing site character at 5.2. The site will be transformed from rural to residential use. The extent of the impacts assessed on these criteria is a reflection of that transformation, rather than the significance of the impacts of the development that is proposed.

Moderate visual impacts are typical levels for a site transformed from one form to another, whether it is from rural to residential, or from low to high density, for example. As such, moderate impacts of the residual effects of the proposal (ie, those features that cannot be mitigated totally) are not intrinsically unacceptable.

For an average viewer, the expectation of a site on the fringe of urban East Maitland is that it could undergo the same kind of change, as adjacent land has. A potential detached dwelling development

on the site would have a similar effect on the present view compositions from the visual catchment but would be unlikely to feature the extent of landscape design that is proposed.

The detailed assessment above shows that the proposed retirement village will be acceptable on visual grounds. In addition, there are no unreasonable visual and related amenity impacts of the proposal. As a result of the overall design concept and strategies to further reduce visual impacts relating to modest landscaping around the north west and south west elevations, appropriate scale, character and height of the dwellings, there is an adequate standard of protection and enhancement of the components of the visual setting and visual resources of the site.

SEPP (HSPD) is an instrument that fosters change to urban forms, in essence by providing for the possibility of higher building densities and different building forms in a variety of zones that can support housing for older people and those with disabilities.

There is an expectation that the built form, density, character and appearance of SEPP (HSPD) developments will not conform literally to the character of the immediate setting within which the development is proposed and as such residual visual impacts will occur and are acceptable in that context. This is a factor in reducing the weight to be given to the predictable features of this form of development on rural land.

There are a number of Land and Environment Court of NSW judgments concerning applications for Seniors Living in land zoned rural, which acknowledge the contrasts that the SEPP will cause to existing character, but note that this difference by itself is not a valid reason for refusal of an application. As a result, although the proposed development will transform the site, the fact that it is not of the same character as land adjacent to it is an observation, rather than an impact of significance.

The development retains the significant natural and cultural features of the site. In our opinion, this further reduces the weight to be given to the level of change that is proposed to the existing character of the subject site.

My detailed assessment above shows that notwithstanding the change in character that will occur, the development is acceptable on visual grounds.

In addition, in the context of the development being a seniors living development for which there is an existing Compatibility Certificate, there are no unreasonable visual and related amenity impacts of the proposal. As a result of the overall design concept and strategies to further reduce visual impacts, such as the strategic locations of the components of the proposal, appropriate scale, character and height of the individual components, appropriate landscaping, there is an adequate standard of protection and enhancement of the components of the visual setting and visual resources of the site.

For viewing locations within the visual catchment in both public and private domains, the main effect would be a change in the foreground views of parts of the subject site. This effect would not be accompanied by any other significant amenity effects and impacts such as view blocking or negative effect on scenic quality or visual character.

It is considered that the measures taken as part of the proposal assist in mitigating any potential unreasonable visual impacts of the proposal, that there are only localised medium visual impacts on some of the close range locations which are considered to be acceptable and that there are no significant residual visual impacts.



Taken together, I am of the opinion that the visual impacts of the proposal are not significant and that it is supportable on those grounds.

Lower scenic preferences are commonly associated with built landscapes and there may be opinions expressed that the proposed development is unattractive and a detriment to the existing visual character. At a different level, there is also evidence that people like seeing built forms of high architectural and aesthetic qualities in compatible and well landscaped surroundings. Thus, there may be divergent and subjective opinions as to the merits of the proposed development. I have tried to assess the potential visual impacts as objectively as possible and have arrived at the result that they are acceptable.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the detailed assessment presented in this report, it is concluded that there are no unacceptable visual, streetscape or related amenity effects from the proposed development.

There would be a change in the foreground view from the close range private (residential properties on the southern side of Wilton Drive) and public domain locations (Wilton Drive in front of Lot 8) within the visual catchment. However, this is not considered to be a significant impact consequence as the proposed development would appear to have a high compatibility with character of the locality and it would not result in any significant amenity impacts.

The retirement village will respond positively to the low density rural and residential character of the surroundings of the site and the architecture, articulation, form, materials, colours and landscaping recommended are considered to be appropriate for the proposed development within the context in which it would be located.

The proposal is consistent with the character of the immediate and wider visual context of the site and is assessed to be consistent with the provisions of SEPP (HSPD) on the factors of compatibility with the site, streetscape, surrounding built and natural character, surrounding developments, built forms, scale, visual and related amenity.

## 8. Recommendations

1. That the area between the site boundary on the southern and western sides be landscaped by planting clusters of 3 – 5 eucalyptus trees endemic to the area every 15m.
2. That the area between the tree clusters nominated above be selectively planted with native shrubs endemic to the area.
3. That the rear boundary of the development site interfacing with the residential properties on Wilton Drive be landscaped with eucalyptus trees with a mature height of 3m – 5m and spaced every 10m.
4. Building materials should blend as much as possible with the landscape, i.e. timber, sandstone coloured brick, corrugated iron roofing, gravel ground surfaces. Materials of a recessive colour such as earthy browns and natural timber colours are appropriate.
5. Wall colours should reflect the Hunter Valley environment:
  - earthy tones
  - neutral colours
  - natural finishes
  - patina effect.
6. Roof materials should be one or more of the following types:
  - galvanised iron
  - Colorbond metal roof sheets in Woodland Grey, Ironstone, Bushland, Jasper or Windspray
  - copper tray roofing (natural), not zincalume
  - battened zinc tray
  - flat profile shingle concrete tiles
  - slate.
7. No closed fencing around the rural interface being the southern, eastern and western boundaries of the development site.
8. Eaves are required and should have a minimum overhang of 600mm.
9. Gutters and down pipes are to be finished to match the dwelling or to provide appropriate colour accents.
10. No use of colourbond fencing.

**APPENDIX A**  
**PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES**



**Photo 1** – Looking South west from Wilton Drive across Lot 8; note adjoining residential development in the foreground and forested areas to the south and Louth Park in the right hand side of the picture.



**Photo 2** – Looking south west from adjacent to the above photo; note limited visual catchment.





**Photo 3** – Looking due west along Wilton Drive. Development site not visible. Note typical residential estate presentation to street.



**Photo 4** – Residential properties located opposite Lot 8 on Wilton Drive





**Photo 5**— Residential property located adjacent to Lot 8 on the southern side of Wilton Drive.



**Photo 6** – As above.





**Photo 7** – taken in front of the dwelling located on the western side of Lot 8 looking east across Lot 8 from Wilton Drive.



**Photo 8** – taken on lot 8 looking across rear of adjoining property to west to the south west; development site in foreground just beyond rear fence of properties and Louth Park in distance.





**Photo 9** – taken from south western corner of Lot 8; development site in foreground extending to above low point delineated by water grasses in middle of photo; note Louth Park and forested areas.



**Photo 10** – Looking due south from same position in photo 9. Note limited visual catchment.





**Photo 11** – Driving easterly direction along Wilton Drive, a typical viewing; note the development site is not within view as it is obscured by the residential properties along the southern side of Wilton Drive.



**Photo 12** – taken from Gullivers Lane looking due East; the development site is located in the centre of the photo.





**Photo 13** – taken further north along Gullivers Lane looking due east at Rathluba Estate; development site will be noticeable to the right of the existing housing and will present as an extension of this existing residential area.



**Photo 14** – taken from new residential lots at southern end of Gullivers Lane; development site notated and will present as an extension to the existing residential area.



**Photo 15** – Taken from Mount Vincent Road. This is the only vantage point from where the development site can be viewed noting it is approximately a 50m window in an 80km/hr zone directly at right angles to the window. Again, would only present as an extension of the urban area slightly closer to the road from the current 750m to 530m.

# **APPENDIX B**

## **PHOTOMONTAGES**

