Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

FACT SHEETS & GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

Number 6

GOOD PRACTICE NOTE

COLOUR AND INTEGRATING DEVELOPMENTS INTO THE LANDSCAPE

The National Planning Policy Framework stresses the importance of good design, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, reinforcing local distinctiveness, and giving the highest status of protection to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. One aspect of successfully integrating development is the appropriate choice of colours, and the NPPF refers to infrastructure being sympathetically designed and camouflaged.

Learning from the natural world:

Tree planting is a frequently used technique to help integrate developments into the countryside. Not only do trees provide a living screen but they also provide varying degrees of lighter and darker colours, and the contrasts between direct sunlight and shade. However, tree planning is not always practical or appropriate, and choosing a good location and using colours that minimise visual intrusion and aid integration with the rural scene often achieve faster integration. When considering colours to help camouflage structures it is helpful to look at, and learn from, the natural world.

Many animals, such as rabbits, hares, and deer, all use white tails as alarm signs as white stands out as an easily seen, and relatively uncommon colour in the natural world. White should, therefore, be used with considerable caution on developments that do, or may, stand out.

Frequently mammals and fish have darker backs and lighter bellies. The effect is that the sunshine (or moonlight) highlighting a dark back and putting the light belly in shadow creates a blend of colours that merges with the most backgrounds. However, the opposite arrangement with a light back and a dark belly would provide a highly contrasting light coloured top to the animal and a very dark underside which would be clearly visible in most situations. One thing we can learn from this is that light coloured roofs are more obvious than dark ones.

Texture:

In the natural world there are rarely extensive areas of smooth surfaces; the calm water of a lake is probably the single exception. Many natural surfaces are varied in their texture which creates highlights and shaded patches. It is noticeable that buildings with variations in the texture of their surfaces, whether it is of the very fine scale of the actual surface itself or associated with panels, pillars, or corrugations, create a variation in light and shadow which more readily replicates the variety of the natural world and hence integration with it.

Avoiding shine and reflection:

With the exception of water and ice, camouflage and integration in the natural world avoid shiny reflective finishes. The shiny flash of the side of a fish acts as a warning to others and is intended to attract attention. The message from that is that we should avoid shiny and reflective surfaces unless we wish to attract attention to them. This gives us a very clear indication that we should use **matt finish materials** and **matt paints** when seeking to integrate developments into the natural environment. Different situations may exist within urban environments.

Avoiding white and black:

There do seem to be some misconceptions that tall lamp posts or wind turbines, being elevated in the sky, should be coloured white. The sky is very rarely white, only so when cumulus clouds are directly illuminated by the sun. White posts, columns, and turbines are very obvious in most weather conditions, and particularly so in direct sunlight. It is noticeable that grey lamp columns integrate better and are less obvious than those that are either white or black. When illuminated from behind the grey still appears dark but softer than black. Whilst there may be a place for black lighting columns in urban situations where specific character or a design effect is being sought, in edge of town and rural situations a grey or grey/green shade integrates much more readily with the landscape.

On buildings the gable end is the tallest, and often the largest, area of walling. White or a light colour in direct sunlight on the gable can make the building appear much larger than it really is and hence more intrusive in the scene than it might otherwise be. Orientation away from direct sunlight, as well as colour, can help integration in this sort of situation.

Agricultural buildings:

It is noticeable that large buildings, such as agricultural grain stores, are most obvious in the landscape when located on a high point, or breaking the skyline, have bare concrete sides, fibre cement sheeting on the roof, and with shiny metal doors. Those that are least obvious in the landscape are located away from high points, with a backdrop of woodland, and with sides that are coloured a matt green. Similarly a dark roof, such as moorland green, or a

roof covered in photovoltaic panels, integrates much more readily than the light coloured fibre cement sheet roofs. A bund with shrub or tree planting helps further integrate such large buildings into the landscape. A pillar and panel effect can produce variation in light and shade on the side of the building, effectively breaking up the size of the coloured areas, in contrast to some forms of industrial buildings with smooth sides that, even when painted a matt and muted colour, present an expanse of a single colour.

Choosing appropriate colours:

One of the joys of the English countryside is the seasonal change and it is not really feasible to consider all the changes of colours through the seasons when seeking to integrate a development into the landscape. Those seasonal changes do, however, indicate that there is scope for variety and flexibility within the palette of colours used. Different landscapes will also have different tones and intensities of colour. For example, browns and russets tend to be more typical of sandy or heathy areas whereas lighter tones could be more appropriate in chalk downland areas. Nevertheless, the nature of the British climate means there are various shades of green in the landscape for significant periods of the year.

There are many colour charts but too much choice can sometimes make a seemingly small matter too complicated. In addition, the names of colours differ between manufacturers so it is simpler to use standard British Standard numbers. The **BS 4800 paint chart** is an abbreviated version of the somewhat **larger BS 5252 colour chart**. Many of the light colours will, in direct sunlight, appear almost white and therefore not achieve the integration sought. Similarly, a lot of the darker, more intense, colours will, when not in direct light, appear effectively as black which, as an extreme, is unlikely to aid integration in the natural scene.

Choosing from the colour charts, in areas where the sky is a significant element, or in waterside situations, a **squirrel or battleship grey** is often quite successful (**18 B 21**). In more verdant locations **moorland green** is a useful colour for walls and roofs (**12 B 21**), and where a variation in colour is felt to be appropriate then the lighter 12 B 17 (willow) or the darker 12 B 25 (spruce) may be useful. Many of the ‘unnatural’ greens that are popular for internal decorating (in the parts of the colour charts numbered 14 * **) are less useful in the more natural external environment as they are rarely found in the natural countryside.

Thinking again of animal colourations that aid camouflage in the countryside many animals have coats that are shades of grey, faded brown, or even russet, and such colours could be considered. However, the size of a development, and hence the external appearance of it, is a key factor when considering colours to aid integration with the scene.

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