Land South of Brackmills

Summary Proof of Evidence of
Philip Brashaw BSc (Hons) BLD CMLI
On behalf of the Appellant

Landscape and Visual Matters

PINS Ref: 2228866
LPA Ref: N/2013/0338

May 2015
Summary Proof of Evidence

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1.1. **Professional Qualifications and Experience**

1.1.1. My name is Philip Brashaw and I am an Associate at LDA Design. I have over 28 years experience as a Landscape Architect and I have a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Environmental Science from the University of East Anglia and a Bachelor degree in Landscape Design from the University of Manchester. I was elected as a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute in 1990. Full details of my qualifications and experience are provided in section 1.0 of my proof.

1.2. **Brief**

1.2.1. I was instructed by the Homes and Communities Agency as part of Parson Brinkerhoff's team to work on the landscape design and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the planning application, and more recently to prepare landscape evidence for this Appeal, including preparing an updated LVIA to reflect new guidance. I have been involved in the Appeal site for over 10 years, having previously worked on the design and promotion of a larger Strategic Development Area east of Wootton from about 2004 until 2009.

1.3. **Absence of sufficient information**

1.3.1. Reason for Refusal 2 is not an objection in principle, but states that the proposals are contrary to Policy "*In the absence of sufficient information to demonstrate appropriate mitigation for the impact of the development on the landscape, skyline and rural character of the area ...*". The Reason for Refusal does not state that the application is contrary to Policy or should be refused because of the harm that it would cause.

1.3.2. Prior to the publication of the Decision notice Northampton Borough Council had not stated that there was insufficient information with regards to demonstrating adequate mitigation for these potential impacts, and they did not ask for further information despite their specific powers to do so under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011. The first time that they requested any specific further information on these matters was in the Landscape Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) in April 2015.
1.3.3. I consider that sufficient information was submitted with the planning application to demonstrate appropriate mitigation and the Council’s Head of Planning found no deficiencies in the submitted information in drawing her conclusions and recommending approval.

1.4. **Acceptability of development on the Appeal site**

1.4.1. The Planning Inspector of the Core Strategy Examination concluded that the Appeal site and land to the east should be allocated for development comprising in the region of 1,300 dwellings.

1.4.2. The Council supported the proposed allocation of the Appeal site until it was proposed to extend it to the east, outside the Appeal site, and increase housing numbers from 1,000 (as the Appeal scheme) to in the region of 1,300, at which point they registered an objection. Their objection was based on transport grounds – not on landscape or visual grounds. Their real and primary concerns therefore related to the increase in the allocation outside of the Appeal site, and these concerns did not fundamentally relate to landscape or visual issues.

1.4.3. The Head of Planning supported the planning application for the Appeal scheme and the first time the Council did not support it was when the members voted to refuse it.

1.4.4. Concerns expressed in Council reports and minutes in relation to both the allocation and application focus on traffic issues with very limited discussion on landscape or visual matters.

1.4.5. The planning application is in outline with all matters reserved apart from access, and the character, appearance, scale, density and other relevant detail would be guided through a Design Code working jointly with Northampton Borough Council, and the detailed design would be determined at Reserved Matters stage. As agreed by the Head of Planning, any outstanding issues can be addressed post-determination.
1.5. **Issues**

1.5.1. Reason for Refusal 2 and matters of disagreement agreed in the Landscape Statement of Common Ground raise three issues which have their basis in design and landscape and visual impacts:

1) It would have an urbanising effect and be of a scale and density detrimental to the existing rural character of the surrounding area / the degree of effect on local landscape character.

2) It would result in the loss of land of significant amenity value / the proposed treatment and context of public footpath KN6 where it runs through the Appeal site.

3) The impact of the proposed development upon the skyline between Great Houghton and Hardingstone as seen from the Nene Valley.

1.5.2. My evidence addresses each of the above and confirms the acceptability of the proposals.

1.6. **Design**

1.6.1. The Application proposal has been designed sensitively and through an extensive process of consultation, and iterative assessment and design, to respond to its urban and rural context and complies with relevant policies including Policy E7 of the Local Plan (to the extent relevant) and N6 of the Core Strategy.

**Context and character, scale and density**

1.6.2. Northampton Borough Council considers that the proposed development would be of a "scale and density detrimental to the existing rural character of the surrounding area". However,

- the appeal site and land to the east is allocated for in the region of 1,300 dwellings;
- the Appeal proposals are at a density that is equal to the minimum density required by Policy H1 of the Core Strategy;
• stakeholders accepted the rationale for the approach to density; and
• Northampton Borough Council’s own Planning Officer was consulted on and agreed with the approach to building storey heights.

1.6.3. The proposed development responds sensitively to the location and setting of the site, and the existing character and density of the local area, and adopts a design led approach to determine density and scale in accordance with Policy H1 of the Core Strategy.

**Connectivity and Green Infrastructure**

1.6.4. Responding to good design principles, local guidance, and Policies BN1 and N6 of the Core Strategy, and also the report of the Inspector at the Core Strategy Examination, the Illustrative Masterplan has been structured around swathes of public open space, routes and Green Infrastructure which will provide access on land not currently accessible to the public, increasing the amenity value of the land. Proposals include:

• a Green Infrastructure spine incorporating PRoW KN6;
• a green corridor around the interface with the northern, eastern and part of the southern boundaries of the site providing Indicative Structural Green Space associated with SUE adjoining Brackmills Country Park shown on Figure 5 Inset 11 of the Core Strategy; and
• other Green Infrastructure links and public open spaces connecting to these areas and the wider communities and landscape.

1.6.5. These areas will also provide opportunities for increasing biodiversity on the Appeal site which currently has limited ecological value.

**Other matters relating to Policy N6 and design**

1.6.6. The proposed treatment of the western and south western boundaries of the Appeal site, where Indicative Structural Green Space is also illustrated on Figure 5 Inset 11 of the Core Strategy, provides an appropriate response to Policy N6 and the context of the site, arrived at and agreed through consultation.
1.6.7. I have prepared revised Framework Plans in Appendix 5 which illustrate that, with little adjustment, the layout shown on the submitted Framework Plans can accommodate access and connection requirements to potential development to the east, to provide an integrated scheme for the whole N6 allocation.

1.7. **Impacts and benefits**

1.7.1. As noted in my updated LVIA effects that are Major-Moderate or Major are considered to be significant, and that effects of Moderate significance or less are “of lesser concern”. (Quote from Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition para 3.35). It should also be noted that whilst an effect may be significant, that does not necessarily mean that such an impact would be unacceptable.

1.7.2. My LVIA identifies that the only significant and adverse effects arising from the appeal scheme would be local to the site as follows:

   - Part of landscape character area 12a Wollaston to Irchester within and close to the site;
   - Public Right of Way KN6 which runs through the site; and
   - Local roads outside the urban area within approximately 0.5km of the site (Newport Pagnell Road, The Green and Landimore Road).

1.7.3. The Appeal scheme would not cause significant effects on the skyline between Great Houghton and Hardingstone as seen from the Nene Valley, as I discuss below.

1.7.4. The changes in character and significance of effects have been assessed against the site in its existing condition as arable farmland. However, effects as described are inevitable effects in accordance with Policy N6 of the adopted Core Strategy.

1.7.5. The key effects that relate to disputed matters are as follows.

1) **Effects on landscape character**

1.7.6. The proposed development responds to its urban and landscape context to provide a well designed extension to Northampton that will, by the very nature of the
allocation for housing under Policy N6, have an urbanising effect on the character
Appeal site. The significant effects on landscape will be localised to the Appeal site
and its immediate context and, due to the enclosed and urban context and the
proposed design and landscape framework, effects will be contained and, in my
opinion, acceptable.

2) Effects on Public Right of Way KN6

1.7.7. Public footpath KN6 is the only existing amenity access within the site and it will be
retained and incorporated into the development within a new green spine,
providing an attractive and appropriate setting to the footpath in the context of the
site's allocation for development as proposed. Effects will be significant but, again,
this is inevitable in the context of the site's allocation. My visualisations of the
proposed treatment of the route in Appendix 6 illustrate that an attractive and
characterful green corridor is proposed including green space and access routes that
are well overlooked by houses, with variety of treatments along the public footpath.
This will have beneficial effects. However, due to the loss of longer and more open
views across fields effects are considered to be, on balance, adverse.

3) Effects on the skyline seen from the Nene Valley and Northampton to the
North

1.7.8. The proposed design addresses the skyline Policy E7 of the Local Plan and
supporting text to Policy N6 of the Core Strategy. Effects of the proposed
development on views of the skyline from the north would be limited and
acceptable. The proposal will continue the existing treed appearance of the
developed ‘ridge’ of high land which runs through neighbourhoods in Northampton
to the west, and through the site where it adjoins Hardingstone, seen above the large
scale buildings within Brackmills Industrial Estate, as illustrated by my
photomontages from Viewpoints 8, 9 and 10 in Appendix 6 of the Landscape
Statement of Common Ground.

1.7.9. Supporting text to Policy N6 of the Core Strategy also refers to potential impact on
views of the skyline when viewed from the east. These effects of the proposed
development would also be limited and acceptable, as illustrated by my
photomontages from Viewpoints 3, 6 and 15 in Appendix 6 of the Landscape Statement of Common Ground. If the land to the east and south east of the site that is also allocated as part of Policy N6 was developed, it is likely to screen the proposed development from the east beyond a short distance from the Appeal site boundary.

4) Effects on the Landscape Setting of Northampton

1.7.10. The role that the skyline between Great Houghton and Hardingstone (as seen from the Northampton and the Nene Valley to the north) plays in the setting to Northampton will not be harmed.

1.7.11. The Appeal site plays a limited role in the setting of Northampton where it adjoins the site at the neighbourhoods of Hardingstone and Wootton, because of the nature of the interface between the urban and rural area where houses back onto the site, and the Appeal proposals will create an improved and more positive rural / urban edge to Northampton than currently exists.

1.7.12. The effects on the landscape setting of Northampton will be, in my opinion, acceptable.

5) Benefits

1.7.13. Set against localised significant adverse effects would be significant benefits arising from the scheme. These include the provision of new housing to meet local demand, habitat enhancements and other matters which are summarised in Mr Tulley’s evidence. Landscape-related benefits arising from the scheme would include:

- new public open space and Green Infrastructure;
- new pedestrian routes and connections to Brackmills Country Park for the existing and new communities;
- substantial increase in the amenity value of the land; and
- an improved and more positive rural / urban edge to Northampton than currently exists on this edge to Northampton.
Policy N6 allocation

1.7.14. If the land to the east and south east of the site that is also allocated as part of Policy N6 was developed, some of the adverse landscape and visual effects of the Appeal proposals assessed in my LVIA would reduce, and the proposal would have no or very limited effects views or on character of the rural landscape to the east and south beyond the allocation boundary. The effects of this future development would be material to a separate and future decision on that development.

1.8. Conclusion

1.8.1. I am firmly of the opinion that, in landscape and visual terms, the site is a good location for the proposed development, being able to accommodate the proposals, creating an appropriate extension to Northampton. The proposal would be successfully integrated into the landscape and townscape framework. The site is allocated for development as proposed and was recommended for approval by the Council’s Head of Planning, based upon a thorough analysis of the material submitted.

1.8.2. Consequently, in my view, there is no reason within the scope of my evidence why planning permission should be refused.