Summary Proof of Evidence

Land East of Hardingstone, Appeal
PINS Reference: APP/V2825/A/14/2228866

Date: 19/05/15
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Prepared by Sara Howe
Land to the East of Hardingstone
North of Newport Pagnell Road
Northampton

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Summary Proof of Evidence

Prepared by:

Sara Howe
CMLI

On behalf of:
Northampton Borough Council

Local Authority Reference: N/2013/0338

19th May 2015
Status: FINAL
Introduction

1.1 My name is Sara Howe. I am a Director of Influence Environmental Ltd (Chartered Landscape Architects, Urban Designers and Environmental Planners).

   - My evidence addresses matters relevant to the second Reason for Refusal, which concerns the landscape impact of the proposed development.

1.2 The applicable policies of the development plan are now Policy E7 of the Northampton Borough Local Plan (NBLP) and policies BN5 (the Historic Environment and Landscape) and N6 (Northampton South of Brackmills SUE) of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (WNJCS).

1.3 The relevant paragraphs of the National Planning Policy Framework are 17, 56-64 and 109.

Impact of the Proposed Development upon Landscape Character

1.4 Within the main body of my proof of evidence (PoE) I address the impact of the proposed development upon landscape character as follows:

   - I first summarise the existing relevant landscape character assessments which form a baseline;
   - I then set out the findings of the independent and detailed Landscape Sensitivity and Character Assessment (LSCA) which I carried out in relation to the appeal site;
   - I describe the proposed development in so far as is relevant to landscape considerations;
   - Finally, I assess the impact of the proposed development on the landscape character of the appeal site.

Existing Landscape Character Assessments

1.5 The regional, national and local landscape character areas are clearly set out in the LSCA in Appendix 1 of the main PoE.

1.6 The study area lies within National Character Area (NCA) 89: Northamptonshire Vales.

1.7 The landscape character area within which the appeal site falls is LCA 12a Limestone Valley Slopes – Wollaston to Irchester. The characteristics and key features of this landscape are detailed in Appendix 1.

1.8 The Northampton Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study describes the Study Area within which the appeal site falls as ‘an open rural landscape of high-medium sensitivity, where medium or large scale development would seem incongruous’. 
Landscape Sensitivity and Character Assessment

1.9 Following a review of the supporting material and the nature of the proposed development, in order to fully inform my PoE I considered it essential to carry out my own independent and detailed Landscape Sensitivity and Character Assessment (LSCA) for the appeal site. This led me to conclude that the appeal site contains three distinct Local Character Zones (LCZs). I refer to these as LCZ A, LCZ B and LCZ C.

1.10 The appeal site also features Public Right of Way KN6 (‘the footpath’) which runs northwest-southeast across LCZ A and along the boundary between LCZs A and B.

1.11 The findings of my LSCA combined with the baseline information lead me to determine that LCZ A has a Low to Medium sensitivity to development of the nature proposed, LCZ B a medium to high sensitivity and LCZ C a high sensitivity.

The Proposed Development

1.12 In support of the planning application a set of Proposed Layout Framework Plans (Framework Plans) have been submitted. These are supported by an Illustrative Masterplan (IMP) and a Design and Access Statement (DAS). Whilst the application is for outline planning permission (except for means of access), I understand that the Framework Plans set the cornerstones of the development proposals and will form the basis of any landscape conditions.

The Impact of the Proposed Development upon Landscape Character

1.13 In terms of the impact of the proposals upon landscape character, the three main consequences are (i) the impact of the proposed scheme upon the skyline as viewed from the north, (ii) the loss of the open nature of the footpath and (iii) the landscape character impact of the development proposed within LCZ C.

1.14 With regard to the impact upon the skyline as viewed from the north, Viewpoint 101 shows that the proposed development, across the extent of the appeal site, breaks the skyline to a greater or lesser degree. The greatest impact is from the development proposed within LCZ B, due to the breaks in Brackmills Country Park and the lack of substantial planting along the northern boundary of this LCZ. At year 15, the proposed development will still break the skyline, albeit to a much lesser degree2, even following the growth anticipated in Brackmills Wood and the proposed planting.

1.15 In my opinion inadequate consideration has been given to the value of the footpath in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), the Framework Plans and the DAS. Whilst it is proposed to retain the footpath along its existing route, the footpath will

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1 LSCG Dwg No 3943_PM_10_YR1 & YR15.
2 As discussed in detail in Section 4 of the PoE.
become, for the most part, an urbanised feature enclosed by built form (as shown in the DAS on page 84). Its character will therefore change from open and transitional, within a natural environment which allows views of the rural landscape to the south and east, to a closed, contained environment, sometimes alongside roads and built form and in close proximity to housing, which no longer experiences the open countryside.

1.16 The nature of the wider connection from Delapre Park to the wider countryside to the south will be changed: access to the countryside will be delayed and the “urbanisation” of the network will increase.

1.17 Finally, as presented in the Framework Plans, the IMP and the DAS, the appeal scheme will result in the complete loss of the openness and rural character of LCZ C and of the connecting views through to the wider countryside. In this respect, the scheme as presented is in my opinion of an unacceptable scale and density.

**Visual Impact of the Proposed Development**

1.18 I agree that, as stated on page 62 of the updated LVIA, ‘the extent of large scale visual effects, where the proposed development would form a major alteration to key elements, features, qualities and characteristics of the view such that the baseline will be fundamentally changed, would generally be limited to locations within or immediately adjacent to the site, where the proposals are clearly visible and occupy a wide extent of the view’. However, although large scale effects are generally experienced close to the appeal site, this does not reduce the need for the appeal scheme to respond to those impacts.

1.19 I have two concerns in relation to the visual impact of the proposed development. First, I disagree with the appellant’s judgement as to the visual impact of the appeal scheme from Viewpoint 10. Secondly, I consider that insufficient weight has been accorded to the visual impact of the proposed development upon "local" receptors, in the Framework Plans, the DAS and the IMP. My concerns in this second respect relate to Viewpoints 2, 11, 12, 13 and 15 and the receptors they represent.

1.20 As to Viewpoint 10, the skyline will be broken at Day 1 and the proposed development will be visible. Although by Year 15 it will be visible to a lesser extent, the sensitivity of this receptor and the policy protection afforded to it results in a moderate to slight effect which is a fundamental change to the landscape feature.

1.21 With regard to the ‘local’ receptors, I consider that the appellant has failed to recognise the significance of the effect of the proposals, particularly the urbanising effect on the footpath, the loss of interconnecting views and the encroachment of the settlement edge to the east.
Conclusions

1.22 I consider that the specific characteristics of the appeal site, particularly those of the eastern parcel (LCZ C), have not been established by the appellant in enough detail to successfully inform its proposals.

1.23 In my opinion the appeal scheme as presented in the Framework Plans would introduce an inappropriate scale, level, density and type of development onto LCZ B and LCZ C within the appeal site, which would result in an inappropriate and harmful urbanising effect.

1.24 The proposed development breaks the important skyline as viewed from the Nene Valley to the north as represented in Viewpoint 10. The original LVIA judged that the skyline would not be broken and therefore the proposals did not consider this impact fully, resulting in the proposed development being of an inappropriate scale and layout.

1.25 Although the footpath has been retained, its character - and therefore the experience of the user - is seriously impacted upon. The existing characteristics and views are replaced with a green corridor surrounded by built form and only punctuated with green spaces along the route. The local value of the footpath as an immediate connection from the edge of Hardingstone into the countryside has been compromised.

1.26 The appellant's failure to inform its proposals by an adequate appreciation of the characteristics of the appeal site has also resulted in a proposed scheme which inadequately acknowledges the strong rural character of the eastern parcel of the site and the importance of preserving the same. That parcel functions as a green boundary to the edge of Hardingstone and Wootton and although there is some evidence of development within views from the LCZ, the rural landscape is the dominant influence. The effect of the proposed development is the loss of the interconnecting views, the strongly rural character of the LCZ and the existing settlement edges of Hardingstone and Wootton.

1.27 I disagree with the conclusion in the paragraph 7.5 of the updated LVIA which states that 'the changes in character and significance of effects as described above are the inevitable effects of development in accordance with policy N6 of the adopted Core Strategy'. The level of change in character and the significance of effects could plainly be significantly reduced through a more appropriate design proposal.

1.28 Taking account of the above, it is my view that the proposals amount to an over development of the appeal site and are simply not appropriate in their context. The layout fails to pay adequate regard to its landscape setting by way of design response.

1.29 It follows that the proposed development also fails to satisfy the requirements of paragraphs 17, 109 and Section 7 of the NPPF, Policies N6 and BN5 of the WNJCS and Policy E7 of the NBLP.
1.30 I have taken account in writing my evidence that the planning application is for outline planning permission only. However, the IMP is the only suggestion provided by the Appellant as to how 1,000 houses could be brought forward on the appeal site in accordance with the Framework Plans. I consider that the development shown in the Framework Plans and the IMP would have an unacceptable impact on the landscape. A lesser amount of development could be acceptable on the appeal site, following the principles set out in Section 6 of the main PoE, but my professional opinion is that the appeal scheme would have such adverse landscape impacts that it should be refused.