

TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE

File Ref: 27440/A5

Date: 13 December 2021

To: Countryside Properties

From: Barton Willmore

RE: LAND NORTH OF BALSAM ROAD, LINTON LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE

Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Technical Advice Note responds to the Greater Cambridge Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA). It is not intended to comprise a full Landscape and Visual Appraisal.
- 1.2 Barton Willmore LLP was commissioned in March 2019 by Countryside Properties (UK) Ltd to undertake a Baseline Landscape and Visual Appraisal Statement (LVA) and appraisal of the opportunities and constraints to development on land north of Balsam Road, Linton (referred to as 'the Site') within the administrative boundary of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) for residential development (the 'Proposed Development') to be submitted as part of the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan Call for Sites process.
- 1.3 The LVA formed part of the Call for Sites Consultation Statement as prepared by Strutt and Parker, on behalf of Countryside Properties, which also included a Sketch Masterplan that was informed by the findings of the baseline LVA at that time.
- 1.4 In September 2021 Greater Cambridge Shared Planning published the Greater Cambridge HELAA, which lists and maps sites within Greater Cambridge that may have potential for residential and economic development. The HELAA excludes the Site from allocation primarily on the basis of landscape issues, notably that the Proposed Development would have substantial and unacceptable landscape and visual impacts that would not be sufficiently mitigated by the proposed landscape treatments.

- 1.5 However, the decisions regarding which sites will be proposed for allocation will be made in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan (and neighbourhood plans), adoption of which is anticipated no earlier than 2023. In any event, all planning applications will continue to be determined against the development plan and other relevant material considerations.
- 1.6 On 28 October 2021 we undertook another Site visit, following which we revised the Opportunities and Constraints Plan. A set of updated Site Appraisal and Context Photographs were also taken. Key photographs are referenced below where appropriate, and included on a separate photographic sheet appended to this document.

Greater Cambridge HELAA 2021

- 1.7 Regarding issues of landscape relating to the Site, the Greater Cambridge HELAA states:

"National Character

NCA 87 East Anglian Chalk - This site and surroundings is a good example of the landscape type with open, undulating topography and hilltop woodlands prominent.

Local character is defined as Chalklands and is a good example.

Landscape Character Assessment (2021) Landscape Character Area - 7c Linton Chalk Hills

The site forms part of several very large, open, arable fields on the lower slopes of Rivey Hill, rising from Balsham Road to the ancient woodland and iconic listed water tower on the hilltop. It is a part of an important landscape space as a visual entrance, setting and backdrop to Linton, and represents one of the best examples of Chalkland landscape in the area. The site is prominent from views over the site to Linton from Barlow Road [sic?], views from Rivey Hill back over the site to the village, and from many other viewpoints.

Development would have substantial and unacceptable landscape and visual impacts. A landscape assessment has been provided, suggesting north facing green corridors to view features on Rivey Hill and sensitive landscape treatments to the landscape; however these proposals will do very little to ? mitigate the harm to the landscape. The existing urban edge and entrance along Balsham Road is hash [sic] and a poor example of development and integration with the rural landscape."

Response to HELAA

NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk

- 1.8 At a national level, the Site lies within National Character Area (NCA) 87: East Anglian Chalk. Key characteristics relevant to the Site and study area include:

"The rolling downland, mostly in arable production, has sparse tree cover but distinctive beech belts along long, straight roads. Certain high points have small beech copses or 'hanger', which are prominent and characteristic features in the open landscape."

- 1.9 We accept the factual statement that the Site and its surroundings are a good example of the landscape type as identified for NCA 87, since the Site is open and its topography is undulating, and the nearby hilltop (Rivey Hill) features a prominent woodland (Rivey Wood).
- 1.10 We accept that the Chalkland landscape of which the Site is a part, is a key characteristic of the landscape as identified within NCA 87, and that this Chalkland continues as a theme into the local Landscape Character Area. However, the NCA comprises over 100,00ha, and the Site, at just over 18ha, is a very small proportion of that.

Landscape Character Area – 7C Linton Chalk Hills

- 1.11 At a local level, the Site lies within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 7C: Linton Chalk Hills, as identified by the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment published in February 2021. Key characteristics relevant to the Site and study area include:

- ***"Simple rural landscape with large, rectilinear arable fields organised in an irregular pattern;***
- ***Sparsely scattered small woodland blocks, including ancient woodland; [and]***
- ***Open character with long views across the Granta River Valley."***

- 1.12 The published assessment mentions Rivey Wood specifically, and identifies Rivey Hill Water Tower as ***"a prominent feature on the horizon above Linton from the southern section of the LCA."***
- 1.13 We accept the factual statement that the Site forms part of ***"several very large, open, arable fields on the lower slopes of Rivey Hill"***, rising from Balsham Road to the ancient woodland and iconic listed water tower on the hilltop.
- 1.14 We also accept in part that the Site is a ***"part of an important landscape space"*** as a visual entrance, setting and backdrop to Linton, although it is understood that in this context, setting

and backdrop essentially refer to the same concept. However, in our opinion it is the more elevated part of the Site that is part of the important landscape space, relating as it does to the slopes of Rivey Hill. The lower parts of the Site, towards the south, do not form part of the important landscape space, since they are less visually connected to the more elevated slopes of Rivey Hill, and have a stronger connection with the adjacent settlement edge. With regard to the visual entrance to the settlement, the HELAA does concede that there is room for improvement of the arrangement of built form at this entrance:

“The existing urban edge and entrance along Balsham Road is hash [sic] and a poor example of development and integration with the rural landscape.”

- 1.15 We are unable to confirm whether the HELAA is justified in its assertion that the Site represents one of the best examples of Chalkland landscape in the area, as this assertion is of a kind that does not lend itself readily to verification or negation and therefore it would be useful for the LPA to confirm as part of their evidence base how they have arrived at this conclusion. We do accept that the northern part of the Site, insofar as it forms the lower slopes of Rivey Hill, is part of a landscape feature that has a strong, identifiable character and is visually distinctive within its local landscape context. However, we contend that the southern part of the Site has the capacity to accommodate a level of development that would not result in substantial adverse effects on the landscape feature of which it is a part (Rivey Hill), particularly in conjunction with a considered green infrastructure Strategy and because, as noted above, the southern edge of the Site is immediately adjacent to the existing built form of the settlement.
- 1.16 We accept that the Site is prominent in views from Rivey Hill towards the village, although this is true for parts of Rivey Hill that are not publicly accessible (i.e. the field adjacent both to the listed tower and to the Site). Nevertheless, publicly accessible portions of Rivey Hill (in particular the bridleway PRow 146/20, often sunken and bordered by mature hedgerows) have only glimpsed and partial views of the Site itself, heavily filtered by the field boundary vegetation that runs between the bridleway and the adjacent open landscape that includes the Site.
- 1.17 We accept that the northern part of the Site is prominent in views from other viewpoints, particularly those within the elevated landscape to the south of Linton – i.e. on the Icknield Way long distance footpath PRow 146/31 and 22_1 (**Site Context Photograph 6**) as well as other short distance local footpaths including PRow 22_2 on the northern slopes of Haw’s Hill (**Site Context Photograph 7**). No views of the Site were identified from the stretches of the Icknield Way to the north of Linton (PRow 146/20 and 146/21), due to intervening vegetation and undulating topography.

- 1.18 We are unable to confirm whether the HELAA is justified in its assertion that the Site is prominent from views over the site to Linton from Barlow Road (we believe the HELAA meant to refer to *Bartlow* Road as we could find no Barlow Road within the study area). However, we can confirm that no views of the Site were identified from Bartlow Road which runs broadly north-west/south-east approximately 420m to the south of the Site. Bartlow Road also lies approximately 5m lower than the lowest part of the Site (55m AOD), and the intervening vegetation and built form of the settlement precludes views of the Site from this road.
- 1.19 The HELAA commented on our previous Opportunities and Constraints Plan, suggesting that the landscape mitigation proposed would not sufficiently minimise the harm caused by the development. We have therefore drawn up a revised Opportunities and Constraints Plan, which demonstrates proposed development contained within the southern half of the Site, with the northern, more elevated parts of the Site kept open. Having reviewed the settlement morphology, the area of proposed built form is now concentrated against the existing settlement edge and Balsham Road, thereby extending the village in such a way as to achieve a rational settlement boundary profile by aligning the northern boundary of the Proposed Development with the existing northern boundary of the village (to the west of the Site).
- 1.20 This revised location for the Proposed Development is focussed on those areas of the Site (towards the south) which are least visible from the surrounding landscape. Whilst these areas are visible from Balsham Road and from the residences along the adjacent settlement edge, they are screened by intervening vegetation and built form in views from publicly accessible and sensitive locations to the south and south-west, including on the Icknield Way south-west of Linton and on Haw's Hill between Linton and Hadstock. From these locations, medium to long distance views are available of only the northern parts of the Site, and as such these areas are proposed as open green space, in order to protect the character of the rolling Chalkland, as well as views of Rivey Hill Water Tower as a prominent feature on the horizon above Linton, as identified in the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment.
- 1.21 The northern area of proposed open green space also wraps around the western and south-western parts of the Site, providing an open buffer adjacent to the footpath to the west and the residences along Tower View. This also addresses the HELAA's assertion regarding the harshness of the existing urban edge and provides an opportunity to integrate the settlement more sympathetically with the rural landscape. **Site Appraisal Photograph F** is taken from Balsham Road adjacent to residences on the settlement boundary and represents the location of the existing limits of the development. The aim of integrating the settlement with the rural landscape is also furthered by the inclusion of lower density housing towards the northern parts of the area proposed for development, forming an outward-facing, transitional and porous settlement edge.

1.22 Structural vegetation is proposed along the western extents of the southern boundary, in order to provide an additional buffer between the Proposed Development and the existing residences on Tower View, as well as along the eastern boundary, in order to reinforce and strengthen this existing field boundary. Belts of structural vegetation running broadly east/west more centrally within the Site similarly follow the existing contours, in order to soften the Proposed Development and allow the provision of compartmentalised development areas to be successfully integrated within the surrounding rural landscape. Green links that run broadly north/south between Balsham Road and the proposed open space to the north are designed to preserve views towards Rivey Hill Water Tower, as well as providing further permeability and connectivity for public access. New footpaths are proposed throughout the Site to improve public access to recreation within the local landscape. Structural planting is introduced along the south-eastern boundary, which allows green connections with the tree belt on the south side of the road to provide biodiversity benefits as well as to provide an improved and enhanced entrance/gateway to the settlement.

Summary

1.23 The Greater Cambridge HELAA excludes the Site from allocation primarily on the basis of landscape issues, arguing that it is a good example of the landscape character identified in NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk. We accept this assertion only insofar as it is a key characteristic at a national level. The proportion of the landscape that would be affected by the proposals is very small in this context. The HELAA also puts forward arguments based on local landscape character evidence (the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment), though we could not comment on its assertion regarding the Site's status as one of the best examples of Chalkland landscape in the area. Additionally, its assertion regarding the Site's prominence in views from 'Barlow' Road (likely *Bartlow* Road) appeared to us to be incorrect, since we were unable to identify any views of the Site from Bartlow Road.

1.24 We accept the HELAA's factual description of the landscape of which the Site is a part, and in part the HELAA's assertion that the Site is a part of an important landscape space as a visual entrance and setting to Linton. However, we contend that the lower parts of the Site, particularly those which are strongly related to the existing settlement edge, are less important to the entrance/gateway experience and setting to Linton and can accommodate development in combination with a well-considered green infrastructure strategy. The HELAA acknowledges that the existing settlement edge is harsh and integrates poorly with the landscape. In addition the visual appraisal demonstrates that whilst the northern parts of the Site are prominent in views from other viewpoints (notably the Icknield Way to the south of Linton, and Haw's Hill between Linton and Hadstock), the southern parts of the Site are not visible at all in these medium to long distance views from these sensitive locations.

1.25 We have revised our Opportunities and Constraints Plan in response to the HELAA's concerns that the previous plan did not propose landscape mitigation that would sufficiently minimise the harm caused by the development. Based on the above points, the rationale for the new plan results in built form concentrated against the existing settlement edge towards the south of the Site, which focusses development on the areas of the Site which are least visible from the surrounding landscape and provides a more coherent settlement boundary. Lower density housing is proposed on the outer edges of the Proposed Development, in order to integrate the settlement more successfully within its landscape context. Open green space is now proposed throughout the northern, western and south-western parts of the Site, to retain the openness of the Site as seen from residences on Tower View and the sensitive locations to the south of Linton, and structural vegetation is proposed strategically along the existing contours in order to soften and integrate the proposed built form where it is visible. The proposals provide a more naturalistic edge to the development area, and greater opportunities for pedestrian permeability. The compartmentalised parcels of development areas are set within a robust green infrastructure network which follows the natural topographical features and respond to the existing settlement morphology, mitigating the visual effects of the development.