

CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL –CONSERVATION & LANDSCAPE

APPLICATION NUMBER: P/20/2380/2

LOCATION Barkby Road, Queniborough

PROPOSAL: Outline application for up to 150 dwellings, together with new open space, landscaping and drainage infrastructure, with all matters reserved except for access

DATE: 7 November 2022 updated of previous comments of 14.12.21

FROM: Nola O'Donnell Senior Landscape Officer
TO: Mark Pickrell Principal Planning Officer

OPINION SUMMARY - ADVERSE EFFECTS

1. EROSION OF AREA OF LOCAL SEPARATION – SPATIAL LOSS OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE BETWEEN THE SETTLEMENTS OF QUENIBOROUGH AND SYSTON

THE PROPOSAL WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY AND DEMONSTRABLY CAUSE HARM TO THE SEPARATE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE SETTLEMENTS OF QUENIBOROUGH AND SYSTON.

2. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL EFFECTS –HARM CAPABLE OF DESIGN MITIGATION- SUBMITTED DETAILS ARE INSUFFICIENT

3. TREES IN HIGHWAY VERGE- ARBORICULTURAL AND LANDSCAPE HARM- CAPABLE OF DESIGN MITIGATION- SUBMITTED DOCUMENTS ARE ACCEPTABLE

COMMENT/REASON:

I refer to my previous comments dated 14 December 2021. Additional comments are integrated to them

P/18/0309/2

P/20/2380/2



The degree of difference of this scheme to the refused application P/18/0309/2 is negligible. Indeed, this application is supported by the same unaltered unrevised LVA,

landscape Note GL06731105 2018 and Design and Access Statement of the previous application.

1. Area of Local Separation

The site is agricultural land outside the settlement boundary of Queniborough in open countryside and within the designated Area of Local Separation between Queniborough and Syston.

It should be noted that the site is not one of the Councils allocations for housing in either the adopted or emerging local plans.

Syston and Queniborough are separated by open rural landscape which has been either in commercial tree production, pasture or open arable cultivation. By typology and definition rural character and land use is not urban and vice versa. There have been a number of developments consented through planning appeal which have eroded the ALS. This proposal needs to be seen in light of these previous developments and in relation to the Councils housing allocation which lies to the south as cumulative.

Development within ALS - the nature of 'open and undeveloped character'?

Policy CS 11 seeks to protect the predominantly open and undeveloped character of ALS (Also covered by EV3) though allows for some degree of development on the basis such development "*clearly maintains the separation between the built – up areas of these settlements.*" ALS are therefore by character and definition rural and agricultural. (I note that the Cossington Road development was won on appeal allowing a development within an ALS. It would seem that in that case the inspector interpreted the meaning of the policy to consider urban park as open undeveloped character.) Urban parks however are not the absence of built form nor are they 'open and undeveloped' nor are they rural agricultural. They are, in of themselves, a form of development presenting an assemblance of predominantly contrived landscape features as a designed landscape which function as green infrastructure within settlements. It is essential to understand that a landscape design delivered executed as part of an urban extension is a constructed development. It is not 'open undeveloped land'.

The existing spatial gap between Syston and Queniborough is limited being small in scale therefore of greater importance for the purpose of maintaining separation. The zone of the ALS to the west is considered weak placing greater importance on the remained zone to the east, that is, west of Barkby road. The two previous developments gave rise to cumulative effect. It follows that the cumulative effect would be intensified by this proposal. My opinion is that this would significantly compromise the integrity of the ALS and should be resisted. Often the reductive process of evaluating effects and impacts on an ALS is seen in terms of existing minimum spatial measurement between two opposing settlement edges or perception. Often too much emphasis is placed on the narrowest measurement between built form of both settlements to the detriment of the expanse there may be generally. Arguments that focus on 'proving' the narrowest point is not reduced miss the point of how important the expanse which is open and rural. The impacts which need to be addressed are successive cumulative erosion of the quantity and quality of an ALS, cumulative loss of rural open countryside, cumulative alteration to the character and cumulative visual adverse impact of augmented urban edge. (The

other argument I've noticed is to equate rural built form with urban. Again this false equivalence should be rebuffed.) On the issue is visibility and visual effects often the views from key routes such as road and PROW. In my opinion the experiential aspect of moving along either type or routes are important for the sense of separation.

In summary, the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. There would be sizable physical and perceptual reduction in the ALS. The perceptual reduction would be pronounced for the Barkby road and PROW for significant stretch of the routes through the ALS zone. The development would not 'maintain' the degree of separation but would rather erode it by reducing the extent of the ALS, the physical distance between settlement edges increasing the sense of merging of the settlements. The experience passing along the routes or through the ALS on foot would be that one is within a green infrastructure landscape within a unified conurbation.

Some observations:

1. At macro level spatial examination the effective separation between Syston and Queniborough is at a critical stage being a minor spatial gap of two fields. If this site and the allocation site are developed arguably coalescence will be achieved.
2. At a greater subregional level aerial imagery reads as though the urban massing of Leicester City is disproportionately expanding in a N:S axis with the greater expansion seen northwards towards Queniborough.

The proposal does not respond positively to small scale opportunities within defined limits [of the settlement] (Policies CT1, CT4 Core Strategy CS11, and to less extent policy CS1 Other Settlements); This is acknowledged in LVA para 2.8 "*The sites is set beyond the defined limits to development in the open countryside*".

The LVA recognises in para 2.8 that the site "*is designated as an Area of Local separation (ALS) that extends between Syston and Queniborough*" and that this is "*a functional planning designation that seeks to maintain in this location the separate character and identities of Queniborough and Syston.*"

The CS11 policy requirements for development within an area of separation are:

- Clearly maintain separation between built up areas of settlements;
- Maintain the separate identities of settlements
- protect predominately undeveloped character, and
- mitigate impact of tranquillity

The purpose of designating areas of separation can be broken down in terms of physical separation, which is quantitative and perceptual separation, which is qualitative.

The LVA acknowledges in para 7.6 that the proposal "*will result in loss of open land within the ALS*". The proposal would reduce the physical separation by expanding the substantive built edge of Queniborough toward Syston as well as reducing the physical distance between them. This is a critical effect. While the proposal would not result in joining together the edges, the gap would no longer be substantial or

clear enough to avoid ambiguity on where one settlement ends and the other begins. This is demonstrably a physical spatial loss.

The effect of the loss of space on the function of the ALS needs to be considered, as does the quality of the space that remains. In principle, separation predominantly would require land between the two settlements to be substantively, evidently and qualitatively "open countryside". The characteristics of the residual ALS objectively should be typical of countryside with one or more of its current functions retained, not residual or a remnant of its former use nor derelict or appearing as urbanised paddocks.

The pre-eminent quality of open countryside is that it is predominantly undeveloped. This is normally perceived as agricultural, or natural with minimal widely dispersed rural enterprises and would include country parks. Built form within this context would mainly have an agricultural function e.g. sheds or silos with dwellings appearing as isolated or clustered not substantially aggregated. Other criteria are tranquillity and ecological richness. When land ceases to have a clear agricultural or natural function it may be perceived as 'periurban' and may become redundant or even derelict and open to substantial pressure to be absorbed into the settlement through urban development.

In evaluating the spatial physical and qualitative effects of the proposal I am not convinced that the settlements would be and would continue to be readily distinguished from each other, but that would be considerable blurring. This can be deduced two ways as one travels along the connecting roads and paths

(1) In the near distance as one would travel from Syston to Queniborough along Melton road the experience of undeveloped space would not be reduced in the foreground but would be noticed in the distance as one would glance to the east. The gap would be significantly reduced for walkers along the PROW accompanied with a significant reduction in the experience of rural undeveloped land.

Again along Barkby road from Syston one would be aware of undeveloped land in the near distance. As one would leave Queniborough the experiences would be altered to present built form on the west of the road and this would foreshorten the distance between both settlements. The revised edge of the settlement means that the visual experience would give rise to a heightened awareness of the presence of Syston to the southwest and the two could be interpreted as merged.

(2) As one views the settlements from a common vantage at the current settlement edge there is a clear sense of distinction between the settlements looking westward. This would be significantly diminished by the proposal and would not discern any appreciable gap such that the settlements would appear to blend giving rise to perceptual coalescence. The reason is because the proposal would reduce the opportunities for seeing distinctive rural and undeveloped land between the settlements.

The effects on the separation would result in harm by cumulatively advancing and consolidating the settlement edge of Queniborough toward Syston such that it would be difficult to distinguish where one settlement ends and another begins from key public

vantages. Therefore, the proposal could not be said to “*reinforce sense of place and local distinctiveness*”; nor would it maintain the existing degree of separation and thereby the separate identities of Queniborough and Syston would be substantially diminished. Rather it would significantly contribute toward effective coalescence by reducing the physical gap to such an extent that it would give rise to perceptual coalescence resulting in the loss of vital characteristics of the ALS.

The issue here relates to the defined character of ALS which is open and undeveloped. The effect of the proposal would be loss of undeveloped rural countryside. The impact of this effect is negative resulting in harm to the landscape character and should be seen in terms of how the proposal in combination with previous consents by appeal and the allocation for Syston would give rise to significant cumulative impact. The residual rural fields would become more dominated by new advancing urban edges and arguably experienced as vestigial fields within a greater urban environment rather than open countryside separating two settlements.

Therefore, in my opinion the resultant residual gap would not be of a quality that would continue to meet the requirements of policy.

2. Landscape Character

The character of the site is that of arable agricultural land and provides a rural undeveloped setting for the settlement of Queniborough. This is experienced directly by users of PROW as a rural escape between the settlements of Syston and Queniborough.

The Site was assessed as PSH316 in the LUC Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites March 2019 as part of a collective assessment covering five potential allocation sites for Queniborough in Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA sites March 2019. The group of sites was rated as having an overall moderate landscape sensitivity to 2-3 storey residential housing. It specifically notes that the site played a positive role on maintaining the separation and identity of the two settlements and that it retained a rural characteristic despite close association with the existing settlement, (an important cross reference to my first point above.) Key landscape qualities sensitive to change were “*rural character of river valley landscape, agricultural land forming the settlement edges; the linear settlement patterns of Queniborough and view toward the historic core of Queniborough*”. Opportunities noted for mitigation or landscape enhancement relevant to the site would be to “*increase tree cover at settlement edges to enhance the well wooded character of Queniborough village.*”

In terms of landscape condition, it can be said to have been returned from horticultural use as a tree nursery to a medium landscape condition of arable and pastoral use as it reflects and is more typical for the ALS-j and the Wreake Valley LCA and less distinct (as it was) from the surrounding countryside. The site is demonstrably rural so it can be said the landscape character fulfils the requirement in CS11 as ‘open and undeveloped’ with a sense of tranquillity which is greater than the urban or industrial area adjacent or nearby to it. Both the quality and the condition of the site has been enhanced by the removal of the tree nursery function and returning to its current arable and pastoral use.

The existing edge of Queniborough is exposed without the benefit of an effective tree belt or strong hedgerow. The proposed illustrative plan shows a potential for a softened screening green edge to the settlement. The effect would contribute toward mitigating

the effect of built form. If the proposal were to be augmented with a much more substantial tree belt to the southern edge the new and advanced edge of the settlement would be softened and in time become screened. However, landscape enhancements are not capable of mitigating the impact of erosion of the ALS whose rural function would remain diminished. Any proposed tree belt is more likely to be interpreted as urbanised green infrastructure within a wider conurbation rather than as open countryside therefore would not in my opinion compensate for the impact on the Area of Separation.

All housing developments on rural land inevitably alter the landscape character. The proposal clearly would do so for this site. The conceptual plan indicates a possible layout yielding two built zones separated by a sequence of landscape open spaces aligned on a NE:SW axis along the existing PROW axis. The southern edge is shown enclosed by a landscape buffer comprised mostly of a tree belt which wraps around the edge along Barkby Road. This would provide a softening effect to the edge of the settlement and would in part fulfil the guidance set out in the LUC Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites March 2019 to “*increase tree cover at the settlement edges to enhance the well wooded character of Queniborough village*”. The proposal in regard to the PROW would positively address CS12 by providing a green corridor which would enhance and protect the existing route.

The harm may be mitigated to a degree by screening with tree planting and provision of amenity green space but the illustrative landscape plant does not in my opinion afford sufficient depth of tree belt to achieve mitigation.

3. Visual effects

The proposed development would obscure the visual expanse of open countryside between the two settlements. This is supported by LVA 6.11 which states regarding View 2 “*the built-form will become more prominent, and there will be a foreshortening of the settlement edge but this will not extend into the fields that define the foreground of this view.*” This is similar for views 5 and 6 (LVA6.14). The LVA in para 6.11 acknowledges that the magnitude of change for view 1 would remain high in the long term despite efforts to mitigate. The LVA further concedes that for views 3 and 4 “*the development will be dominant at this boundary mainly due to the proximity of receptors, resulting in a high magnitude of change, leading to an adverse visual effect of **major-moderate significance**.*”

It further acknowledges that the *illustrative* long term boundary planting would be “*unlikely to reduce the overall visual effect*” of major – moderate significance. The LVA reports that even after mitigation in the long term the adverse effects for View 5 and 6 would be moderate significance therefore not reduced sufficiently. Views for which visual effects are reported as reduced to minor include Views 7, 8 9, and 10 and minimal for view 11.

Therefore, the visual effects of the proposal as illustrated would lead to visual impact harm and contribute to perceptual coalescence by interrupting the visual setting for Queniborough.

TREES

The proposed highway improvements to the cross road junction of Rearsby Road and

Queniborough Road would slice through the existing verges which form the root supporting environment of trees protected by Borough of Charnwood Tree Preservation Order (Land at Rearsby Road/Queniborough Road, Queniborough) 2015, Group G1. Species include sycamore, pine, lime, horse chestnut, maple, robinia and whitebeam. The quality and nature of the tree lined verge needs to be preserved as an essential landscape feature of the main crossroad of the village. Loss of trees at this junction would be highly noticeable disrupting the cadence of trees on The Ringway verge trees are iconic along Rearsby Road and Queniborough Road.

I note that the issue of the protected trees on the Ringway at the Barkby Road-Queniborough junction has been dealt with by the locum tree officer 30 September 2022 by email. I concur with her opinion and that of the LHA Arboricultural & Forestry Team that the FPCR Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement, August 2022 *“should be a named document in any consent given and therefore its contents made a condition of any consent”*.

In design terms replacement tree species, if not like for like, ideally should be similar large high canopy deciduous species with broad crown form to maintain the integrity of this significant landscape feature of Queniborough. While the trees are covered by the above mentioned CBC TPO they are assets owned by LCC.

The adverse effect of their removal post-completion would be significant. Any losses could be mitigated by replacement planting which would reduce the adverse effect in the long term e.g. from approx. year 20 onwards. Early significant adverse effect could be further mitigated were semi mature specimens to be used for replacement tree planting. In such a scenario I would suggest fewer trees could be replanted to allow for good distinct canopy formation.

Agreement would be required with LCC on suitable course of action and if any trees are lost, their CAVAT value is likely to be payable by the developer as well as replacement planting.



The proposed junction realignment is likely to require the reduction in levels to that of the existing carriageway. This would substantially impact RPAs of several trees.



The proposed realigned footpath would likely impact trees such as the pine on this side as it would require the reduction in levels.