



LAND OFF LECONFIELD ROAD, NANPANTAN,  
LOUGHBOROUGH

LPA ref. P/20/2199/2

PINS ref: APP/X2410/W/22/3304644

Proof of Evidence of

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Prepared for Charnwood Borough Council

February 2023

**Heatons**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Qualifications and Experience**

1.1.1 I am Simon James Higson, Director at Felstone Consulting Limited (Felstone), a Practice Registered with the Landscape Institute.

1.1.2 I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and Chartered Horticulturist with over 20 years of professional experience. I have a BA (Hons) degree in landscape architecture from Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education (1998) and MA in landscape architecture from Leeds Metropolitan University (2000).

1.1.3 Whilst working in landscape practice I have provided landscape planning, assessment and design advice in relation to a wide range of project work. I have previously acted both as landscape expert witness and supported other landscape expert witnesses in their preparation of evidence.

1.1.4 I was instructed by Heatons (on behalf of Charnwood Borough Council) in February 2023 to act as landscape expert witness for the appeal.

1.1.5 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this appeal in this proof of evidence is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of the Landscape Institute.

1.1.6 I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

### **1.2 Scope of Evidence**

1.2.1 My scope of evidence focuses on the effect of the proposed development on landscape character, views and visual amenity.

1.2.2 This is in response to the first Reason for Refusal set out in the decision notice of 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 and the Appellant's Statement of Case.

1.2.3 The proposed development is an outline planning application for residential development with associated infrastructure for up to 30 dwellings, including detail of associated point of access. All other matters (landscaping, scale, layout and appearance) are reserved. However, the Appellant has provided illustrative material, and I have taken this into account.

1.2.4 This document is my proof of evidence and sets out the landscape-related planning context, my assessment of landscape effects and visual effects and my consideration of matters in dispute (in so far as they relate to landscape character and appearance).

### **1.3 Methodology**

1.3.1 I have carried out my own summary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (**CD 5.2.7**) and the methodology set out in Appendix 1 of the LVIA included with the planning application, produced by Golby and Luck (G+LLVIA) (**CD 1.10**), with the exception of considerations relating to landscape value (where I have used Technical Guidance Note 02/21 (**CD 5.2.15**), which was published after G+LLVIA was produced).

1.3.2 My re-assessment of the LVIA is incorporated into Appendix 1 of this proof of evidence. Full core document references are also included within Appendix 1.

## 2 LANDSCAPE-RELATED PLANNING CONTEXT

- 2.1.1 Section 2 of my Appendix 1 sets out my detailed review of the landscape-related planning context for the Appeal Site.
- 2.1.2 I have noted that the Appeal Site is within the settlement limits of Loughborough as defined by saved Policy ST/2.
- 2.1.3 The Appeal Site was previously designated as Open Space of Special Character (referenced as ‘Burleigh Farm’) under Policy EV/18 in the 2004 Local Plan. This designation also covered other areas of greenspace in the Borough, including both Queens Park and Southfields. However, this is not a saved policy and there is no new open space designation currently in place within the Borough.
- 2.1.4 Policy CS11 in the Council’s Core Strategy aims to support and protect the character of the landscape and countryside by *“requiring new developments to protect landscape character and to reinforce sense of place and local distinctiveness by taking account of relevant local Landscape Character Assessments”*.
- 2.1.5 The Appeal Site is within the Charnwood Forest Regional Park in the Council’s Core Strategy, which states that *“The plans we have with our partners for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park recognise the unique natural and cultural heritage features of Charnwood Forest as an essential part of our growing communities, now and in the future.”*
- 2.1.6 The Council submitted the Local Plan 2021-2037 for Examination in December 2021. Policies Map 1 shows that the Appeal Site was not allocated for housing, was defined as an area of Countryside (Policy C1) and outside of the settlement limits.
- 2.1.7 I have also reviewed paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which seeks to enhance the natural and local environment by *inter alia* a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 2.1.8 The proposed development would be considered ‘Major Development’ using the thresholds set out in the NPPF.
- 2.1.9 Part of Burleigh Wood is designated Ancient Woodland. The designation boundary is adjacent to the western boundary of the Appeal site. Ancient Woodland is defined as

irreplaceable habitat and an area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD within the NPPF. Whilst I am not giving evidence on the effect on ecology, I note that the landscape of the Appeal Site has a connection to Burleigh Wood.

2.1.10 Burleigh Farmhouse, a Grade II Listed Building is close to the south-western boundary of the Appeal site and is considered a designated 'Heritage Asset' under the provisions of the NPPF. Whilst I am not giving evidence on the effect on designated heritage assets, I note that the landscape of the Appeal Site has a connection to the Burleigh Farmhouse.

2.1.11 The Appeal Site is close to an area of 'valued landscape' south of Nanpantan Road (as identified in Appeal Ref: APP/X2410/W/15/3028159 and APP/X2410/W/15/3028161 (CD 7.4). The Appeal Site has several factors which elevate its landscape value, including ecological and physiographical interest, sense of time depth, distinctiveness and scenic qualities as well as being part of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park green infrastructure asset. However, in comparison to the land south of Nanpantan Road, the role of the Appeal Site in the wider landscape is more localised. Overall, I have concluded that the Appeal Site is not a 'valued landscape' for the purposes of NPPF 174, sub-paragraph 'a'.

2.1.12 I discuss the intrinsic character and beauty of the Appeal Site under matters in dispute in Section 4 below.

### 3 ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

- 3.1.1 The Appeal Site is located within Natural England – National Character Area Profile 73 Charnwood (NCA 73) (CD 5.2.13), which describes how: *“Charnwood is a unique landscape, marked out by its geology and upland qualities, which contrast with the surrounding gentle lowlands. It is formed by a mosaic of heathland, farmland, parkland and woodland.”*
- 3.1.2 Charnwood Borough Council’s The Borough of Charnwood Landscape Character Assessment 2012 (CD 5.2.6) identifies the Appeal Site as located within the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area, described as *“the most distinct and has the strongest landscape character of the areas in the Borough”*.
- 3.1.3 Charnwood Borough Council’s Landscape Character Assessment for the Charnwood Forest Regional Park 2019 is the most recent local publication (CD 5.2.8). This report identified eleven individual character areas, with the Appeal Site located within Charnwood Forest Area 7: Loughborough/Shepshed Mixed Farmland, *“A lower lying, predominantly open, arable landscape with some small pockets of pasture and small blocks of ancient woodland. The character area lies between central upland areas to the south and the wider lowland to the north. This area is heavily influenced by settlement from the urban edges of Shepshed and Loughborough.”* The boundary to Charnwood Forest Area 1: Bradgate, Beacon Hill and Outwoods Heathland and Forest follows along Nanpantan Road to the south of the Appeal Site.
- 3.1.4 Charnwood Borough Council’s Charnwood Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of SHLAA Sites 2019 (CD 5.2.4) identified the Appeal Site as PSH447 and with a low-moderate landscape sensitivity *“as it is more closely associated with existing development and screened from the wider landscape by existing woodland.”*
- 3.1.5 The Local Setting of the Appeal Site includes a small grassland field, on a rising, rolling slope and forming a transition to Burleigh Wood (including designated Ancient Woodland) to the west. There are long-distance views to the east, possible from the hilly, elevated ground. The built form of the edge of Loughborough (from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) are located to the northern, eastern and southern Appeal Site boundaries with Burleigh Farmhouse (Grade II Listed Building, dating back to 17th Century) in the south-western corner. The 1884 OS map is the first to show the site in any detail and it remains largely unchanged to the present day. The Appeal Site is consistent with the published character area descriptions for Charnwood Forest.

3.1.6 My re-assessment of landscape effects is set out in Section 3 of my Appendix 1. I have concluded that the proposals would have a minor adverse effect on the Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area 7: Loughborough/Shepshed Mixed Farmland and a minor-minimal adverse effect on Charnwood Forest Landscape Character Area 1: Bradgate, Beacon Hill and Outwoods Heathland and Forest. These would not be significant.

3.1.7 However, the effects upon the Local Setting of the Appeal Site would be major-moderate and adverse, due to the following;

- loss of key characteristic elements - small scale grassland field, on rolling landform, acting as transitional buffer to woodland edge and Ancient Woodland and a Tudor Farmhouse (replaced with built development, associated landscaping and other infrastructure);
- loss of aesthetic and perceptual aspects - openness and simplicity, green colour (replaced with increased enclosure and complexity, vertical and horizontal forms, a wider range of colours);
- loss of valued attributes - long-distance views and undeveloped skyline (building facades and rooftops extending over the higher ground and obscuring views); and
- the proposed development would erode the pastoral aspects of landscape character and would not be well integrated – the further expansion of built form onto these rising slopes would be out of keeping with the existing pattern.

3.1.8 My assessment is summarised in the second column of Table SH-P1 below, with the gradings in G+LLVIA for Year 0 and Year 15 in the third and fourth columns. Whilst I agree with the G+LLVIA Year 0 effects, I do not agree that these effects would reduce by Year 15.

3.1.9 I recognise that the development proposals are outline, nevertheless, the parameter plan would result in the permanent loss of elements and aesthetic and perceptual aspects that are key to the specific characteristics of the Local Setting of the Appeal Site. The proposed offsets around the edges of the development would not be adequate to mitigate harm to the existing woodland edge / transitional character of this small site.



3.1.10 Overall, I consider the effects upon the Local Setting of the Appeal Site to be significant.

**Table SH-P1 – Overall Landscape Effect Summary**

Landscape Receptor	S Higson’s Landscape Effect (Year 0 and Year 15)	G+LLVIA Landscape Effect (Year 0)	G+LLVIA Landscape Effect (Year 15)
Charnwood Forest Area 7: Loughborough/Shepshed Mixed Farmland	Minor and Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minimal Adverse
Charnwood Forest Area 1: Bradgate, Beacon Hill and Outwoods Heathland and Forest	Minor-Minimal and Adverse	Minor-Minimal adverse	Minimal Adverse
The Local Setting of the Appeal Site (including the Appeal site, the edge of Loughborough, Burleigh Farmhouse and Burleigh Wood)	<b>Major-Moderate and Adverse</b>	<b>Major-Moderate Adverse</b>	Moderate Adverse

## 4 ASSESSMENT OF VISUAL EFFECTS

4.1.1 The visual envelope of the Appeal Site is relatively localised, being primarily associated with Leconfield Road, Tynedale Road, Montague Drive and Compton Close, as well as properties on the north side of Nanpantan Road and part of the footpath through Burleigh Wood. However, the addition of 2 storey dwellings (c6m high) onto the highest part of the Appeal Site would increase the extent of visibility, with visual effects to more distant vantage points along the wider public right of way network to the south, east and west and potentially from private upper storey views and roads within parts of Loughborough, further to the east.

4.1.2 The G+LLVIA identified 13 representative viewpoints. I have identified 3 additional micro-siting locations during my fieldwork to show the wider context of views within and around the Appeal Site and in particular the relationship between key elements, as follows:

- Burleigh Farmhouse (which has a direct view onto the Appeal Site from its northern facade);
- Burleigh Wood (which has a different character where the existing residential development is close to and encloses the woodland edge, in comparison to where the grassland within the Appeal site allows for filtered longer distance views and open undeveloped skyline);
- the built form edge of Loughborough (which is set down much lower on the eastern boundary of the Appeal Site, in comparison to the southern and western boundary of the Appeal site); and
- the elevated, hilly and rolling topography of the Appeal Site itself, with long-distance views.

4.1.3 My re-assessment is set out in Section 4 of my Appendix 1 and is summarised in the second column of Table SH-P2 below, with the gradings in G+LLVIA for Year 0 and Year 15 in the third and fourth columns.

4.1.4 I have concluded major/moderate adverse visual effects for local residents at properties with direct views onto the Appeal Site and general users of Leconfield Road and Montague Drive towards the edge of the Appeal Site. This is also as identified in G+LLVIA. Overall, I consider these to be significant.

- 4.1.5 I have considered the potential influence of landscaping treatments, however the long-term effects (Year 15) are not anticipated to reduce the overriding loss of an open grassland field and introduction of new built elements, obscuring the visual connectedness to woodland and open skylines. Even where new planting might soften and filter the built development, this would still be at odds with the existing visual character and alter the appreciation of local views.
- 4.1.6 Moderate adverse effects are identified for other local residents within and around Leconfield Road, Tynedale Road, Montague Drive and Compton Close and for recreational visitors to Burleigh Wood, as they pass by the Appeal site along the trodden path. This is slightly higher than identified in G+LLVIA and I do not agree that these effects would reduce by Year 15. Nevertheless, I do consider these to be just below the threshold of significant.
- 4.1.7 Potential visual effects from the edge of Burleigh Wood (Viewpoint 7) increase to Major adverse and although these would be significant, are off the route of the existing trodden path.
- 4.1.8 I have identified moderate-minor adverse effects for road users more generally within and around other parts of Leconfield Road, Tynedale Road, Montague Drive and Compton Close and minor adverse effects for recreational users of the wider public right of way network, including to the south, east and west of the Appeal site. This is broadly in accordance with the effects identified in G+LLVIA.

**Table SH-P2 – Overall Visual Effects – Summary for Individual Viewpoints**

	S. Higson’s Visual Effect	G+LLVIA Visual Effect (Year 0)	G+LLVIA Visual Effect (Year 15)
G+LLVIA VP 1 Leconfield Road looking west	<b>Major-Moderate and Adverse (residential and road users)</b>	<b>Major-Moderate Adverse</b>	<b>Major-Moderate Adverse</b>
G+LLVIA VP 2 Leconfield Road at the junction with the cycleway connection to Nanpantan Road looking west	Moderate and Adverse (residential and road users)	Moderate-minor Adverse	Minor Adverse
G+LLVIA VP 3 Tynedale Road at the No.3 bus stop looking west	Moderate and Adverse (residential)	Moderate-Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse

	Moderate/minor (general road users)		
G+LLVIA VP 4 junction of Montague Drive and Guildford Way looking south-west.	Moderate and Adverse (residential)  Moderate/minor (general road users)	Moderate-Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse
G+LLVIA VP 5 Montague Drive looking south-west	<b>Major/moderate and Adverse (residential and road users)</b>	<b>Major/Moderate Adverse</b>	<b>Major/Moderate Adverse</b>
G+LLVIA VP 6 Compton Close looking south-west	Moderate and Adverse (residential and road users)	Moderate Adverse	Moderate-Minor Adverse
G+LLVIA VP 7 western site boundary at the edge of Burleigh Wood	<b>Major and Adverse (recreational)</b>	<b>Major-Moderate Adverse</b>	<b>Major-Moderate Adverse</b>
G+LLVIA VP 8 the trodden path within Burleigh Wood looking south-east	Moderate and Adverse (recreational)	Moderate Adverse	Minor Adverse
G+LLVIA VP 9 from public footpath K62 looking north-east	No change	No change	No change
G+LLVIA VP 10 from byway K58 looking west	Minor and Adverse (recreational)	Minimal adverse	Minimal adverse
G+LLVIA VP 11 from public footpath K58 looking north-west	No Change	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
G+LLVIA VP 12 from public footpath K58	Minor and Adverse (recreational)	Minor adverse	Minor adverse
G+LLVIA VP 13 from public footpath K58	Minor and Adverse (recreational)	-	-

## 5 MATTERS IN DISPUTE

- 5.1.1 Section 5 of my Appendix 1 sets out my detailed review of the matters in dispute (in so far as they relate to landscape character and views).
- 5.1.2 With reference to Policy CS11, I conclude that the proposals would not protect landscape character or reinforce a sense of place and local distinctiveness to this part of Charnwood Forest.
- 5.1.3 The Local Setting of the Appeal Site forms part of the unique Charnwood Forest landscape, which extends right up to the built form of Loughborough and forms part of an attractive backdrop to several residential streets.
- 5.1.4 The small grassland field has a landscape connection to Burleigh Wood (including Ancient Woodland) and Burleigh Farmhouse (Listed Building) and is largely unchanged since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Individually, these elements are characteristic of the Charnwood Forest mosaic of farmland and woodland, with the natural transition from grassland to woodland reinforcing this strong landscape character association.
- 5.1.5 However, it is the combination of these land cover elements, with the rolling elevated landform and long-distance views, defines this distinctive character and contrasts with the built form of the settlement and the lower-lying Soar Valley.
- 5.1.6 The proposed development would change an open field, on a rising slope, to mainly housing, constituting an expansion of the built edge of Loughborough into countryside which would be at odds with the existing settlement pattern (reducing the existing buffer and edge to Ancient Woodland and a designated Heritage Asset), and affecting part of a recognised Green Infrastructure asset (Charnwood Forest Regional Park).
- 5.1.7 The harm would be perceived within the immediate vicinity of the site, but including recreational visitors to Burleigh Wood, as well as local residents and general road users (vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians).
- 5.1.8 With reference to National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 174 'b', I conclude that the proposals would not enhance the natural and local environment and would cause permanent and significant harm to the intrinsic character and beauty of the site.
- 5.1.9 The published description of Charnwood Forest in the Council's Core Strategy under paragraph 7.18 describes how "*Charnwood Forest is an important landscape for the*

*region. It is an area of particular beauty, characterised by extensive woodlands set in a hilly and open landscape”.*

5.1.10 The Local Setting of the Appeal site is consistent with this description – a hilly, open and pastoral edge to woodland, giving rise to a particular beauty. Whilst it may be immediately adjacent to the existing built form of settlement, the proposed development would not contribute positively to this intrinsic character or beauty.





# Heatons

Planning Environment Design

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