

Summary to Landscape Proof of Evidence

**In Respect of: Land at Barkby Road, Queniborough,
Leicestershire**

On behalf of David Wilson Homes (East Midlands)

Date: 22 May 2023 | Pegasus Ref: P23-0196

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1. Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

- 1.1. I am instructed on behalf of David Wilson Homes East Midlands ('the Appellant') to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of this Inquiry relating to an application for outline planning permission, which was submitted to Charnwood Borough Council and validated on 22nd January 2021. The application proposed the following:

“Outline planning application for up to 150 dwellings, together with new open space, landscaping and drainage infrastructure, with all matters reserved except for access.”

- 1.2. My Landscape Proof of Evidence comprises this document together with separate appendices.
- 1.3. This evidence should be read in conjunction with the Planning Proof of Evidence prepared by Angela Brooks and other specialist statements, including trees and ecology.

Description of the Scheme

- 1.4. The site can be described as a proposed residential neighbourhood set within green infrastructure as a series of naturalistic green spaces. Within the development, the majority of the proposed dwellings would be two storeys. The proposal would deliver a high-quality scheme, both in terms of its built form and in terms of the green infrastructure that is proposed across much of the site.

Effect on Landscape Elements

- 1.5. The site comprises a number of landscape elements including topography, land cover, vegetation, trees and hedgerows. The majority of these individual elements would be retained and enhanced which would result in some beneficial effects with regard to landscape elements within the site. The scheme would inevitably result in the loss of some arable land, comprising two fields. There would be no change to landscape elements beyond the site, apart from the proposed off-site highway improvement works.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 1.6. With regard to landscape character, the site and its surroundings and Queniborough all fall within the **High Leicestershire NCA 93** and locally the **Wreake Valley landscape**. Limited off-site works are proposed in terms of highway improvements to enable this scheme to come forward. Apart from this limited change, the key characteristics that define the local landscape character beyond the site would remain physically unaffected (including experiential aspects), there would be no material change to the landscape character of the area beyond the site with the proposed scheme in place. The effect on landscape character beyond the site would be negligible.
- 1.7. The site is proposed to accommodate a residential neighbourhood which as a high-quality scheme, would reflect the local vernacular architecture and which would be in keeping with other residential areas associated with Queniborough. The proposal would result in a change to the character of the site, an inevitable consequence of accommodating housing on a

greenfield site and thus resulting in a moderate (adverse) degree of effect, as it relates to the site itself and would be limited and highly localised.

- 1.8. Much of the site would form substantial green infrastructure, which would bring about a degree of change in character terms from the arable fields. The whole green infrastructure would be more in keeping with the area with its new grassland areas together with tree-belts, pond and improved recreational opportunities. Such change to the character of the site would bring about a degree of change and enhancement, which would be beneficial in nature.

Effects on Visual Amenity

- 1.9. In terms of how the proposed scheme would have a bearing upon general visual amenity, I would note the following main observations. The potential to observe the scheme in terms of the visual envelope would be mainly restricted to the immediate environs of the site and contained within the local landscape. As such, the proposed housing would have a limited visual envelope. Where observed, the proposed scheme would be generally framed and screened by built form and vegetation such that it would be difficult to distinguish it from Queniborough, once in place.
- 1.10. Where observed, it would also always be seen in the context of adjacent industrial and residential development. This means that the proposed scheme would not visually extend the visual envelope of Queniborough as it relates to the wider landscape but rather it would fall within the existing visual envelope associated with the wider environs of Queniborough. The degree of effect would be quite limited and local to the environs of Queniborough. The scheme would also not materially impinge in visual terms upon the existing visual relationship between the Queniborough and Syston settlement further to the south, an aspect that the Council seeks to protect.
- 1.11. As for the nature of effect with regard to visual amenity, I adopt a precautionary approach and assume that the nature of effect would be adverse in overall terms even though the landscape design itself would be attractive and beneficial.
- 1.12. The proposal would result in some physical loss of arable land. The proposals would result in a change to the landscape at a very localised site level and would have a limited effect on the landscape character of the site and would not cause material harm. Once the green infrastructure is established and has the opportunity to mature, the proposals would have a more positive screening effect with regard to the site and as appreciated visually within the local environs. The proposed development would have some limited and highly localised visual adverse effects.

Area of Local Separation (ALS) affecting its purpose and integrity

- 1.13. With regard to the concern with respect to loss of Area of Local Separation, the proposal would technically extend and encroach into the ALS. However, what I consider needs to be borne in mind is how the various parcels of land within the ALS are actually performing in their role to maintain separation between the two settlements. I would use the grades strong, moderate and limited as a three point scale. The site area, which would accommodate the proposed housing dwellings I consider has only a 'limited' role in realising the function of the separation policy. So whilst there would be some physical loss, the **actual** and **perceived sense of separation** would not materially change with the proposed scheme in place.

- 1.14. The actual physical distance in terms of the gap between Queniborough and Syston is defined by the southernmost points of Queniborough and the northernmost point of Syston. This narrowest gap along Melton Road would remain unchanged and as such, there would be no narrowing of this gap in physical terms. The Reason for Refusal states that coalescence would occur. I consider that this would not be the case here and I see no evidence to substantiate this actual proposition.

Actual gap of open undeveloped land between villages

- 1.15. The actual gap of open undeveloped land is shown on the plan, and it is clear in this diagram as well as on the ground that the actual gap at its narrowest point is formed by the southernmost point of Queniborough and the northernmost point of Syston and that this is most readily appreciated by travelling along the Melton Road, either as a pedestrian or road user. With the proposed scheme in place, there would be no reduction in this narrowest actual gap. The proposal would not, even with encroaching into the ALS reduce this actual distance between the two settlements which would appear as open undeveloped land.

Perceived gap of open undeveloped land between villages

- 1.16. The gap can be appreciated by members of the public passing through the local villages and surrounding countryside. The two means by which members of the public can appreciate and have a perception of the gap is by passing through the area and appreciating the area from locations that are publicly accessible, which are generally public highways, rights of way and other publicly accessible areas such as the cemetery for instance. Having examined the gap from the local public highways and rights of way and other public locations, it is apparent that the area proposed to accommodate the appeal scheme, this particular part of the ALS performs a limited role in maintaining the perceived sense of separation between Queniborough and Syston and as such, would not materially change the perceived sense of separation between these two settlements.
- 1.17. The ALS immediately either side of Melton Road, plays a far more significant strong role in the perception of the separation of the two settlements, than the appeal site land does. I consider that, in terms of the ALS purpose, the appeal site has a 'limited' role owing to its physical and visual containment significantly curtailing visibility of part of the site.
- 1.18. In respect of the physical distance of separation, a proportion of the appeal site is proposed as open space, particularly along the southern boundary with the landscape corridor extending to approximately 15m in width. The proposed development (housing area) would reduce part of the ALS (at its widest) i.e. that is from the southern edge of Queniborough to the southern edge of the proposed dwellings, however this would not reduce the shortest physical distance between the settlements.
- 1.19. At present the Area of Local Separation between Queniborough and Syston is extensive in an arc around the settlement. It covers all of the land around Melton Road to the west and Barkby Road to the east excluding the recently constructed burial ground. The eastern boundary of the ALS is the Barkby Road itself. The ALS is at its narrowest in the vicinity of Melton Road. Further to the west of this highway the ALS widens and extends as far west as the railway line orientated north-south. The site is therefore located in the ALS where it is at its widest extending over several fields.
- 1.20. I note that there are a number of housing allocations in the locality. One of which lies to the east of Syston with another to the north of Syston, whilst a third area is identified on the north

side of Queniborough. The proposed scheme would still maintain clear separation between the two settlements, even in the context of other planning permissions and allocations in the locality. Reference is made in the reason for refusal to the proposal having a harmful effect cumulatively with other development (presumably in the locality). The Officer's Report does not identify any cumulative harm with other development in the locality. The local allocations do however form the baseline in terms of what the Council considers acceptable and as such any harm resulting from these proposals must be considered acceptable. I cannot identify any material harm with regard to the proposal in combination with other development in the locality as the sense of separation and gap would continue to prevail with the scheme in place as would the separate identities of Queniborough.

Effect on the character of the countryside

- 1.21. The proposed residential scheme would change the character of the site from two arable fields to a residential neighbourhood with green spaces. However, what is proposed in this regard would be in keeping in character and consistent with other nearby residential neighbourhoods of Queniborough. Development of this greenfield site would involve the loss of a limited area which is currently countryside. An integral part of the scheme is to provide areas of naturalistic landscape as green infrastructure. This area would be managed as a series of spaces with various grassland areas punctuated with standard trees and shrubbery. The detailed design of which can be agreed through Reserved Matters. This overall change to the character of the site I consider to be adverse in character terms with the proposed dwellings. There would be, in my opinion, no material harmful effect on the character of the countryside beyond the site and the remaining ALS, given the Wreake Valley. The limited and moderate harm would be highly localised to the immediate environs of the site.

Significant harmful impact to the separate identities of the villages

- 1.22. The character of the two settlements define their separate identities. In terms of Queniborough I would note the following. The southern part of Queniborough associated with Melton Road reveals a commercial and industrial character with various large buildings. Further north along Melton Road, residential properties of various styles form and size front onto this highway. The southern part of Queniborough is also defined by residential areas. These areas are characterised by residential roads with roadside pavements, street lighting and street furniture. The housing is primarily composed of terraced units, semi-detached and detached properties. There are also some single storey and 1 ½ storey dwellings whilst most are 2 storey. Most of the residential roads are flanked by pavements. Immediately to the east of the site also forming the southern part of Queniborough is a recently constructed neighbourhood which is primarily characterised by a variety of two storey dwellings also constructed of brick and painted rendered elevations. The predominant building material is a light coloured red brick with roofs constructed of clay and concrete tiles. See appendix 5 which shows a number of characteristic street scenes.
- 1.23. In terms of Syston I would note the following. The northern part of Syston reflects a relatively recently constructed residential neighbourhood, also constructed by David Wilson Homes. The houses are predominantly two storeys reflecting red brick and painted render for much of the properties which face onto a combination of residential roads and green urban spaces. The residential roads are flanked with pavements. The older houses also are generally constructed of red brick and render, reflecting a range of architectural styles with some terraced units, semi-detached and detached properties characterising the area. See appendix 6 which includes a series of photographs that illustrate the street scenes. The



separate identities of these settlements as perceived would remain unchanged with the proposed scheme in place.

- 1.24. The actual physical minimum distances that separates the two villages would remain and both settlements would continue to be framed within the context of a rural landscape. I consider there would be no change to the separate identities of the villages.

Prevent Coalescence of merging of villages

- 1.25. Countryside separates Queniborough from Syston and as such, prevents any coalescence and the merging of the two villages. The perceived and actual gap between the two villages would not materially change with the proposed scheme in place. Furthermore, the proposal would not bring about any physical coalescence of the villages and would maintain the purpose and integrity of the gap.

Conclusion

- 1.26. The reason for refusal alleges harm in combination with other development upon the countryside and the ALS which in turn would impact on the identity of both Queniborough and the individual identity of Syston and as such cause coalescence between these two settlements nor maintain their separate identities. The Officer's report makes no mention of any identified harm in combination with other development which is surprising if this were deemed to be so significant to be raised in a reason for refusal. There is no evidence to substantiate impact on the individual identity of Syston with the scheme in place. The physical distance between the two settlements at their closest point would remain unchanged along the Melton Road with countryside between the two which would prevail unchanged with the scheme in place. There is no evidence to support the proposition that the two settlements would coalesce with the proposed scheme.

For the reasons stated above it is my view that on landscape and visual grounds there are no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed residential scheme on land adjacent to Barkby Road. Therefore, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold the scheme and allow the grant of planning permission so far as landscape and visual issues are concerned as this relates to the ALS.



Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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