

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Section 78 Appeal

## **Summary Proof of Evidence on Landscape and Visual Matters**

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on behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

**January 2025**

**Appellant:** Bloor Homes (NW) Ltd

**Appeal Site:** Land to east of Froghall Road, Cheadle

**LPA Reference:** SMD/2021/0610

**PINS Reference:** **APP/B3438/W/24/3351035**

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## I.0 Summary Proof

I.1 My evidence is in relation to landscape and visual matters as primarily contained in Reason for Refusal No.2 (RfR2) which addresses the character and appearance effects that would be brought about by the proposals to build housing on land to the east of Froghall Road, Cheadle.

I.2 In Section 1, I explain my professional credentials as an experienced Chartered Landscape Architect with over 30 years' experience of working on projects where landscape character and visual impacts are critical.

I.3 Section 2 sets down the scope of my evidence and explains in broad terms the approach that I have adopted to compile this Proof. It also reviews the landscape harms referenced in RFR2 and summarises it across two points:

### **Landscape effects** as contained in RfR2:

- Does not respect or respond to key characteristics of this landscape character type;
- The proposed roundabout will necessitate the loss of the whole frontage hedge;
- No existing landscape feature defining the northern boundary; and
- Overall the proposal will not respect or enhance local landscape character

### **Visual effects** experienced from:

- from Froghall Road to the west;
- from the south, in particular from Hammersley Hayes Road (also the route of Public Footpath Cheadle 40);
- in longer views from Public Footpaths Cheadle 38 and 39;
- Encroach into the landscape setting of this isolated farmhouse; and
- Result in a prominent visual intrusion into the countryside.

### **Policy conflict** cited with:

- Policy DC3 of the adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan; and
- and the NPPF – Taken to include Chapter 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

I.4 Section 3 summarises the principal details of the proposals concentrating on the external realm and mitigation proposals associated with this Outline Planning application. The summary box at the end of the section confirms the following points:

- The Site comprise one whole and one part improved pasture fields currently used for dairy farming.
- There is existing housing to south side of the Site and part way up the west side of the Site.
- Three large, mature trees set between the fields and are attractive open field trees.
- A main access is proposed off Froghall Road with a new roundabout.
- There would be hedge loss to the Froghall Road corridor to create visibility splays.
- POS is primarily positioned to the south east of the Site.
- Landscape buffer planting is proposed to the east to provide separation with the Broad Haye Farm (Grade II Listed).
- Landscape buffer planting is also indicated to the north of the proposals to set the northern edge of the housing behind.

I.5 Section 4 conducts a review of the application stage landscape consultation response prepared by Derbyshire Landscape and Placemaking (DLP) on behalf of SMDC and how the Case Officer reported on it in their Committee Report. The summary box at the end of the Section confirms that:

- I agree with the majority of the observations made by DLP who raised an objection on character and appearance grounds as part of their response.
- The points of disagreement relate to my assessment of more notable adverse visual effects for users of FP40 as it passes the Site and for road users near the entrance on Froghall Lane.
- DLP express their concern about the relationship between the proposed development and Broad Haye Farm and how the latter's character as an isolated farm property would be diminished.
- DLP conclude with the phrase that they were 'not confident that the development would not result in any unacceptable long-term landscape and visual effects and have concerns regarding expansion of the existing settlement into the countryside.'

1.6 With regards to the reporting of the DLP comments to the Planning Committee Section 4 concludes that;

- I believe the Planning Officer reports the DLP consultation fully and fairly.
- That the Officer recognises the landscape and visual harm that would occur.
- In the planning balance exercise that the officer conducts she attaches ‘Significant’ weight to the landscape and visual harm that has been identified.
- The result of the overall balance was to recommend approval for the proposals as she considered the landscape harm would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposals.

1.7 Section 5 considers the landscape baseline for the Site and identifies it is a pair of rural, pastoral field set within a wider rural landscape context with housing set to its south side and part way up Froghall Road. It establishes the landscape baseline to judge effects against and defines the landscape sensitivity and magnitude of effects for the individual landscape elements that when combined form the overall landscape character for the Site and its contextual area.

1.8 As it is a particularly lengthy section the summary box at the end contains the 23 numbered points as a synopsis of its findings.

1.9 Rather than repeating them in this section the principal findings of the landscape effects on the Site and its contextual area are given for the completion stage and then after Year 15 when the landscape mitigation has established and started to ameliorate adverse landscape effects;

- Judgements on landscape susceptibility and value are combined to arrive at a **Medium sensitivity** rating for the Site’s landscape and its context.
- The section then reviews the magnitude of change on the individual landscape elements during the construction and at completion concluding that the overall magnitude of landscape change is **Large**.
- The resulting significance of landscape effect is **Major/Moderate, Adverse** for the at completion stages.
- The identifiable landscape mitigation measures are reviewed and listed at §5.52.
- RLC Table 9 conducts an assessment of the magnitude of change at Year 15 on the Site’s individual landscape elements with the mitigation established.

- The resulting magnitude of landscape change to the overall Site and contextual area at Year 15 is assessed as **Medium/Large**.
- The resulting significance of landscape effect with the mitigation in place at Year 15 is assessed as **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent**.

I.10 These assessments of effects accord with the judgements given in the LSoCG.

I.11 Section 6 addresses visual effects. It initially identifies the visual receptor groups that would experience visual change as a result of the proposed development and then focuses on the five receptor groups where there is a disagreement between the landscape witnesses, these are:

- Receptor Group A – Residents of Froghall Road and Hammersley Hayes Road adjacent to Site;
- Receptor Group C – Footpath FP40 users close to the south and east sides of the Site;
- Receptor Group G – Footpath FP38 and FP39 users to south east of Site on the opposite side of the valley;
- Receptor Group H – Froghall Road users near to the Site’s main entrance and western flank; and
- Receptor Group I – Froghall Road users north of the Site.

I.12 The use of annotated panoramic viewpoint photography from these locations is made to explain the visual effects each of these groups would experience at completion and at Year 15.

I.13 The final part of Section 6 addresses the issue of whether the proposals would lead to a prominent visual intrusion into the countryside. It does this by identifying a number of factors that influence whether a development is an intrusion or not and then addressing each factor in turn. It does conclude that the proposals would form a prominent visual intrusion into the countryside to the north of Cheadle.

I.14 The Section 6 summary box is repeated below to confirm all its findings.

- It starts by considering which visual receptor groups would experience change to their views.
- By reference to the Landscape Statement of Common Ground it is able to narrow the discussion to five visual receptor groups.

- By use of panoramic photography of representative viewpoints analysis of the visual changes each of the five groups would experience is presented.
- They confirm that I consider there would be a greater visual effects experienced by all of these receptor groups at Year 15 even with established mitigation proposals.
- Through the use of a series of questions regarding intrusive development into the rural landscape I find that the proposals do lead to a prominent visual intrusion into the countryside.
- It further concludes that the mitigation proposals as indicated on the Parameters Masterplan would not be successful at preventing the prominent sense of intrusion into the countryside to the north of Cheadle.

I.15 There is some disagreement between the landscape witnesses as to the level of visual effects for these affected receptors. However there is commonality that they both consider all receptor groups who are able to see the proposals will experience an adverse visual effect.

I.16 Section 7 considers the single planning policy – DC3 cited within RFR2 and then other policies identified within the LSoCG that are pertinent to landscape and visual effects. The applicable policies of the recently updated NPPF are also considered. The section summary box is repeated below across the next two points.

I.17 That the proposals are in conflict with sub-points 1,2 & 3 of Policy **DC3 – Landscape and Settlement Setting** as stated in RfR2. With regards to the other policies with a landscape or visual dimension this section found.

- **C3 – Green Infrastructure** - that there is both conflict and compliance with the six strands of the policy.
- **NE4 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows** - Subject to any detailed design proposals the development appears to have the ability to comply with this Policy when taken as a whole.
- **SSI0 – Other Rural Areas Strategy** – that the adverse effects to landscape character is applicable to Sub-point 3 – Bullet 1 but the overall policy needs to be judged as a whole by a Planner.
- **SSI 1 – Churnet Valley Strategy** – The Site is within the Churnet Valley Masterplan area and the consideration of effects on landscape character is paramount. The policy

also requires complimentary and sensitive highway improvements which is of concern regarding the potential effects of the main access roundabout.

- **C4 – Local Green Space** - The proposals would not affect the landscape character or function of the Cecilly Brook Corridor as the nearest LGS and there is compliance with this policy.

I.18 With regards to the NPPF2024 policies the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Paragraph 135 c) - Sympathetic to local character** – the proposals are not sympathetic to local character. There is apparent conflict with this part of the Framework;
- **Paragraph 187 b) – Intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside** is applicable and there is apparent conflict with this part of the Framework as the intrinsic character and natural beauty of the Site and its context is not retained.

I.19 Section 8 provides my conclusions split into comments on landscape effects and visual effects before giving a final summary. These are reproduced below.

#### **Landscape effects**

- I.20 That building up the local landscape ridge which forms the west side of the Cecilly Brook valley expands Cheadle away from its current lower valley positions where it appears more appropriate in the landscape.
- I.21 That the proposals will present a new 'blunt end' of development towards the top of the local ridge and extend the sense of built form away from the settlement gateway which currently stands at the end of the Froghall Road ribbon of houses.
- I.22 Froghall Road will experience a notable, adverse change in its character with the formation of the new entrance roundabout, removal of roadside hedgerow and trees and setting urban form to its eastern side for an additional 150m.
- I.23 The proposals would reduce the rural open space to Broad Haye Farm that provides an agricultural setting to the Grade II Listed building and that the remaining offset will not appear as large an area of functioning farmland as the current series of fields. With Broad Haye Farm losing its sense of separation and being tied closer to the urban edge of Cheadle it reduces the sense of time depth that it provides to the local landscape compared to when it is experienced with a fully rural context.



- I.24 The three Category A trees (T4 to T6) that stand as mature hedgerow standards between the two Site fields will be effectively removed from contributing to the wider landscape even though they are not identified to be felled. Their enclosure within the proposed built form will remove them as a local landmark and their scale and form will only be appreciable from within the new development.
- I.25 It is accurate to state that more trees can be planted than are felled, or even that currently exist in total around the Site fields. However this does not address the fact that tree planting as proposed in the northern and eastern tree belts is uncharacteristic to this more open part of the Ancient Slopes and Valley Farmlands. The planting as indicated will exacerbate the loss of openness from the landscape.
- I.26 I conclude that the level of landscape effects with the mitigation in place at Year 15 is of **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** significance and that the proposed landscape mitigation measures would not be effective at assimilating the proposals with the adjacent rural landscape.

### **Visual effects**

- I.27 The landscape changes described above will form a clear and prominent intrusion into the rural landscape to the north of Cheadle and would be clearly evident from a number of public locations as well as the residential properties that fringe the Site to the south and west. Working in a west to east direction the public locations that will experience the greatest visual change are described below.
- I.28 Road users on Froghall Road will experience at close hand the new housing and changed road layout. The houses and northern tree belt restrict the scenic open views to the east that currently exist from the higher part of Froghall Road.
- I.29 Road users on Hammersley Hall Road and particularly the users of Footpath FP40 that follows the road and then the rural track to Broad Haye Farm will have their view of the open field system to the north replaced with the built form of the development reducing the rural quality of their view and sense of entering into the countryside.
- I.30 Finally the view from the east side of the Cecilly Brook valley that is taken from Footpaths FP38, FP39 and FP48 as well as Cherry Lane have the benefit of distance. This allows sight of the development within its wider context and these viewpoints will clearly see its encroachment up the local ridge and away from Cheadle's settlement edge. This view of the Appeal proposals rising up the valley side would still occur with the allocated site CHI 32 built out. The narrowing

of the gap between settlement edge and Broad Haye Farm would also be evident with the farm not appearing as isolated or within a recognisable pasture setting to its southern side.

- I.31 I conclude that the proposed mitigation measures do not address these adverse visual effects as they neither screen the proposals, or set the proposed development within a planted framework that appears appropriate to and characteristic of the immediate setting.

### **Final summary**

- I.32 For all the reasons explored above I conclude that SMDC were correct to identify conflict with Local Plan Policy DC3 – Landscape and Settlement Setting and the NPPF as stated in RfR2. I conclude that overall the proposal will not respect or enhance local landscape character and would be seen, experienced and judged as prominent intrusion into the pastoral landscape to the north of Cheadle..
- I.33 I consider there to be notable adverse effects to both the character and appearance of the Site and its surrounding landscape context from this development. The proposals will appear incongruous within this open, rural landscape, adversely affecting views from public locations local to and distant from the Site.

## **The following appendices are bound in a separate Landscape Appendix Report.**

- A – Ryder Landscape Consultants' LVIA/LVA Methodology
- B – Published Landscape Character Information
- C – TGN 2/21 –Table I – Valued Landscape Assessment
- D – Single Plate Illustrative Photography