

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 Wokingham Borough Council.

July 2025

Appellant: Mactaggart and Mickel Strategic Land

Appeal Site: Land to east of Lodge Road, Hurst

LPA Reference: 242067

PINS Reference: APP/X0360/W/25/3364304





I.0 Conclusions and Summary Proof

I.1 My evidence is in relation to landscape and visual matters as primarily contained in Reason for Refusal 3 (RfR 3) which address the character and appearance effects that would be brought about by the proposals to build 99 residential units on land to the east of Lodge Road set between the two rural settlements of Hurst and Whistley Green.

I.2 **Section 1** is a brief introduction to the Proof and me as a Chartered Landscape Architect.

I.3 **Section 2** maps out the scope of the Proof, the methodology used to prepare it and identifies the landscape and visual effects this evidence seeks to examine further.

I.4 **Section 3** provides a summary of the proposed development with the following summary points at the end of the section:

- The Site comprises a single, large improved pasture field that provides the majority of the open, rural separation between Hurst and Whistley Green;
- The proposals require a long access road taken from the west side of the Site running in curvilinear fashion before splitting to serve two separate housing blocks on Site;
- The northern housing block is set towards the north end of Tape Lane with its east side abutting Tape Lane which is Hurst's current largely open, western settlement edge;
- The southern housing block is located adjacent to Tape Lane Allotments and part of the Martineau Lane development;
- An area of grassed open space called the Common is set between the two housing blocks;
- The majority of existing trees and hedgerows are retained by the proposals and veteran trees given buffer space whilst new tree planting is also proposed;
- Cycleways and footpaths are proposed through and around the periphery of the built form;
- SuDS attenuation basins are shown associated with each housing block, along with roadside swales; and
- A community orchard is proposed at the Site entrance and a play area within the Common near the southern housing block.

I.5 Section 4 reviews the applicable landscape orientated planning policy and two previous Appeals at and near the Site – these are referred to as the 200 unit scheme and the 5 unit scheme for ease. It reviews the policies cited in RfR3 and reports on the decision notices from Inspector Wildsmith from March 2023 who considered the 200 unit scheme¹ and Inspector Major who dismissed the 5 unit Appeal² in January 2020.

I.6 Paragraphs 60 and 61 is where Inspector Wildsmith draws his landscape and visual points together and reaches his overall conclusions on character and appearance harm that would be brought about by the 200 unit scheme. They are:

- He considered it, *'self-evident that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site,'*
- This would, *'inevitably have an adverse impact on the visual experience of users of Tape Lane and Lodge Road by bringing a more developed feel to the whole area.'*
- He considered, *'Because of the scale of the proposed development and the fact that its impact would be experienced from many different locations', whilst acknowledging , 'albeit within fairly close proximity to the site itself,'*
- He explained that he shared, *'the view of my colleague Inspector who determined an earlier appeal at Lodge Road, that the harm caused in landscape character and visual terms should be categorised as being at the upper end of the moderate scale.'*
- Footnote 21 set within this paragraph references Appeal APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 that was held by Inspector Major in January 2020 considering the erection of 5 dwellings and garages with creation of a new vehicular access and pedestrian access to Lodge Road and footway provision. This Appeal decision is touched upon briefly below.
- In Paragraph 61 he reiterates his conclusions, *'that the appeal proposal would have a moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale, on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site and surrounding area'; and*
- The proposals, *'would fail to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green as set out in the C2 LCA landscape strategy.'*

¹ Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/22/3309202, March 2023 (CD 7.1)

² Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 January 2020 (CD 7.7)

1.7 The conclusions from Inspector Wildsmith reiterate similar ones reached by Inspector Major when he refused consent for a smaller 5 unit scheme in a vegetated paddock to the east of Lodge Road. Inspector Major draws his character and appearance points together in Paragraph 28 of his decision notice (CD 7.7) making the following specific points and conclusions on the scale of the harm:

- *The net result of the proposal would be that there would be a harmful impact to both the character and appearance of the area.*
- *The development would not respect the transition between the built up area and the countryside.*
- *The fact that an area of open land would be retained to the north of Badgers Bottom [Poole House] is not sufficient to ameliorate this harm.*
- *The harm would be at the upper end of the moderate scale.*

1.8 **Section 5** is where I consider existing landscape and other character appraisal information. Six characterisation documents are initially identified with this list narrowed down to three sources of pertinent information, they are:

- Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (WLCA), 2019 (CD 8.9) and specifically Landscape Character Area (LCA) C2 that the Site is located within;
- Historic Environment Topic Paper - Appendix C: Areas of Special Character pro-forma assessments (CD 8.11) reviewing matters related to the Village Centre (Hurst) AoSC that lies approximately 50m to the north of the Site broadly following the A321 – Broadwater Lane group of properties; and
- A Design for Hurst Incorporating The Parish Design Statement 2005 as updated in 2009 (CD 8.12) to confirm what landscape characteristics are considered important by the local community.

1.9 Of these documents it is the WLCA that provides the most landscape information with lists of key characteristics and valuable landscape attributes many of which apply to the Site and its contextual area. It goes on to set a landscape strategy for LCA C2 to '*conserve and enhance it's quiet, rural and agricultural landscape*'. Key issues affecting LCA C2 are summarised as are the landscape guidelines which includes as Bullet 9 the following statement which makes specific reference to the Appeal Site and its protection as a sensitive area of open land.

- **Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres**, to protect the individual identity of settlements, and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.

- I.10 **Section 6** is my review of the landscape consultation comments provided by WBC's Landscape Officer Ms Brigitte Crafer (CD 8.3). I consider the comments she made fair and reasonable and agree with them. She recommended refusal considering that the landscape effects are at the upper end of the Moderate, Adverse scale.
- I.11 Mr Croucher reported the comments from Ms Crafer accurately in his Delegated Officers Report and the topics covered were carried forward to act as the base of WBC SoC Section 6 titled '*Main Issue 2: Harm to the character and appearance of the landscape and countryside*'. (CD 2.2).
- I.12 **Section 7** is where I consider the landscape baseline for the Site and contextual areas around it. I adopt the same six landscape receptors identified in the application LVIA (CD 8.1) and add a further six contextual areas to allow me to understand the landscape effects on the areas around the Site that it is associated and judged with.
- I.13 To judge the landscape effects a LVIA methodology is adopted and the sensitivity of each landscape receptor is determined (see RLC Table 3), before considering the magnitude of landscape effects at Year 0 at the point of completion and at Year 15 with the mitigation planting established and the scheme developing some maturity. (see RLC Table 4). The final stage in this three step process is combining the judgements of landscape sensitivity with magnitude of change to arrive at an end assessment of the significance of landscape effects (see RLC Table 5) for each receptor,
- I.14 The larger landscape effects of Moderate, Adverse or greater at Year 15 occur to the following seven receptors:
- Landcover – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
 - Tree Resource – Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
 - Site Character – Major/Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
 - Whistley Green and Northern Fields - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
 - Tape Lane - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent
 - Tape Lane Allotments - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent

- Lodge Road - Moderate, Adverse and Permanent

I.15 Minor, Adverse and permanent effects occur to the following four landscape receptors:

- Topography on Site – Minor, Adverse and Permanent;
- LCA C2 Hurst River Terrace - Minor, Adverse and Permanent
- A321 Broadwater Lane - Minor, Adverse and Permanent
- Martineau Lane and Barber Close - Minor, Adverse and Permanent

I.16 One Minor, Beneficial and permanent effect has been identified for the Site's hedgerows through additional planting and improved management.

I.17 In weighing up all of the above and amalgamating them into a single combined conclusion of landscape effects then **Moderate, Adverse and Permanent** impact appears a fair and reasonable summary.

I.18 **Section 8** considers visual effects, it is supported by a series of annotated panoramic representative viewpoint photographs held in my Appendix E. Section 8's summary explains;

- There are no promoted viewpoints, protected views or designed vistas at the Site or in its vicinity.
- It confirms that the visual receptors around the Site generally have a Medium visual sensitivity.
- The users of the Loddon Permissive Path have a Medium/High sensitivity but as the views from this route are largely wooded the visual effects are minor.
- Users of Tape Lane would experience the greatest visual change in both views along the lane and from it looking north west across the Site towards the wooded horizon at Lodge Road. This is judged as a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent visual effect after 15 years.
- The Tape Lane cul-de-sac would have its current rural focus replaced with the eastern flank of the northern housing block. This is also a Moderate, Adverse and Permanent change.
- The Tape Lane allotment holders would have their last open views from to the north replaced by the flank of the southern housing block.

- The users of Lodge Lane have been split into two groups south and north – the south end would have a partly filtered view of the southern housing block set away from the road whilst the north end users would have clear sight of the uncharacteristic Site entrance which would remain in contrast to the rural character of Lodge Road. Both these visual effects have been judged as Moderate, Adverse and Permanent.

I.19 There have been no beneficial visual effects identified to offset these identified adverse ones.

I.20 **Section 9** is where all the above evidence and considerations are drawn together to consider if there is conflict or compliance with the planning policies cited in RfR3. Not all the listed planning policies are considered with the section concentrating on CPII, TB2I and CC03. The summary to Section 9 is presented below:

- That CPII seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements through the presumption against development.
- CPII provides seven exemptions to this presumption and the proposals do not fall within any of the listed categories.
- The proposals do not assist to retain the separate identities of Hurst and Whistley Green and reduce the sense of separation between the settlements and conflict is found with CPII.
- TB2I is the principle policy for consideration of landscape character effects.
- Detailed review of the key issues and guidelines for LCA C2 (which is the area in which the Site is located) helps to demonstrate that there is harm to the existing landscape character of the Site and parts of its contextual landscape.
- Conflict is found with both parts of the TB2I policy.
- CC03 addresses matters associated with Green Infrastructure, trees and landscaping.
- It is found that the proposals comply with matters of access and habitat diversification but are conflict in terms of harm to the GI network through the loss of countryside and lack of successful integration.
- Overall I consider there to be more conflict than compliance with the CC03 strands when the policy is read as a whole.

I.21 With regards to the NPPF 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; and
- **Paragraph 187 b) – Intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside** is applicable and there is apparent discord with this part of the Framework as the intrinsic character and natural beauty of the Site is not retained.

I.22 In returning to the landscape and visual harms included in RfRs 3 and as summarised in Main Issue 2 from the WBC SoC (CD 2.2) I draw the following final conclusions on landscape and visual effects.

Landscape effects

- I.23 There will be a clear urbanisation of this piece of countryside through the provision of two large housing blocks, associated infrastructure such as roads and the public open space provided will appear subservient and part of the development that led to its generation. This leads to clear policy conflict with MDD TB21 – Landscape Character.
- I.24 The adverse change to the character of the open, rural field and reduction in its sense openness will remove the current countryside setting to the west side of Hurst, The proposals will have a harmful impact on the character of the village of Hurst by the suburbanisation of its rural fringe and insertion of contemporary built form into the sensitive open space between settlements.
- I.25 The one minor benefit to hedgerows on Site does not offset these more significant adverse effects.

Visual effects

- I.26 There are a series of adverse visual effects from around the edge of the Site where people would be able to plainly see the development as they go about their daily lives in the village or drive past it. The proposed mitigation strategy would not successfully address this visual change and the proposals would not integrate into the local scene remaining in contrast to the rural landscape and the neighbouring settlements.

Final conclusion

- I.27 For all the reasons explored above my evidence indicates that the WBC Planning Officer was correct in identifying that notable landscape and visual harm would occur and should be taken fully into account as negative factors in the planning balance.

The following appendices are bound in a separate Appendix Report.

- A – Ryder Landscape Consultants' LVIA/LVA Methodology
- B – Character Assessment Information
- C – TGN 2/21 –Table I – Valued Landscape Assessment
- D – Supporting Figures
- E – Panoramic Photography of Representative Viewpoints
- F – Single Plate Illustrative Photography