



Land to the North of Possingham Farmhouse, Ashford Road, Great Chart, Kent.

PINS Reference APP/E2205/W/3345454, LPA Reference 22/00571/AS

LANDSCAPE MATTERS : PROOF OF EVIDENCE Executive Summary



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QUALITY ASSURANCE

Author	Checked	Approved
NT/JB/KK	NT	NT
01	10 Sept 2024	Final Issue

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Appeal Site is located to the south of Chilmington Green, to the north of Possingham Farm (a Grade II listed building), to the east of the busy Ashford Road, (A28), and to the west of the Public Right of Way (Byway AW245). The site is comprised of large open agricultural fields subdivided by short hedgerows, and is lightly wooded to the southern boundary, with a more established hedging running north to south along the byway. The boundary with the A28 is mostly hedged with isolated trees in places, (see Figure 1).

1.2 Reason for Refusal 1 states:

“The development would constitute an overly dense and urban form of development that would visually encroach on the countryside and harm the landscape character of the area. The density of the development would fail to accord with the character of the permitted adjacent Chilmington Green development and would consequently harm the setting of that development. The density of the development would also result in a failure to provide a good standard of public amenity for future residents of the development.”

1.3 Matters in Dispute, as noted in the Statement of Common Ground, include Landscape and Visual impact, specifically,

- Whether the proposed indicative layout fails to accommodate a sufficient landscape buffer to be in accordance with Policy HOU5 of the LP.
- Whether the layout is too dense and whether it respects the pattern of development in the area.
- Whether the development would lack public open space and accord with the 'garden community' ambitions of the approved Chilmington Green development in the vicinity of the site.

Landscape Character / Sensitivity

1.4 The relevant study in respect of local landscape character is the Ashford Local Development Framework, Landscape Character study, (Studio Engleback, November 2005), which notes the condition of the landscape as being of a “unified pattern of elements of vast open fields with ditches – an intensively farmed landscape which has undergone substantial hedgerow loss and removal of wildlife habitats and corridors”. The site topography is generally flat or lightly rolling with drainage ditches and associated hedgerows to some boundaries and traversing the site in two locations.

1.5 At a more detailed scale, certain District Landscape Types were considered in the study to be sufficiently distinctive in character to be separately described and assessed. These New District Landscape Types categorise the site as lying within ‘BF5a Chilmington Open Arable with Remnants’

1.6 The Studio Engleback study notes the district level landscape quality as “Ordinary” and of medium-low landscape sensitivity. On this basis, the capacity of the site to accept the type of development envisaged should be considered as high, and due to the nature of the site, and its location adjacent to Chilmington Green, effects on landscape character would be localised and largely confined to the site extents, with the change from extensive agriculture to residential development. The submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal, (LVIA), concludes that:

a) the new development would be sensitive to the emerging built environment and resulting landscape character, representing a natural extension to the Chilmington Green masterplan.

b) existing landscape features to the boundary are retained and enhanced wherever possible, as well as

c) new landscape and ecological features are implemented so that site biodiversity is increased and exchange between the site and other habitats in the site’s surroundings is improved. This principle is particular pertinent in respect of the current denuded and degraded nature of the existing hedgerow structure which would be significantly improved by the proposals.

Visibility

1.7 The Appeal Site is primarily visible from the Public Right of Way AW245 which borders the site to the East and from the Ashford Road, A28 which borders the site to the west. A number of viewpoints have been assessed in the LVIA and from these, selected views have been modelled as a series of photomontages. These indicate the existing conditions, the view with proposed and existing built form, (both on the site and that under construction/anticipated within the wider Chilmington Green masterplan area), and finally, the view indicating the “in operation” condition with mitigating vegetation after approximately 15 years growth. The selected viewpoint montages are included at Appendix 04, Figures 7-21.

Conclusion

- 1.8 For the following reasons I consider that with sensitive detailed design, the outline proposals for the landscape buffers containing and defining the components of the Appeal Scheme would meet the criteria set down in **Policy HOU5 - Residential Windfall Development in the Countryside** and would provide an appropriately sized and designed landscape buffer to the A28 and countryside to the south and west.
- The varying width of the buffer zones surrounding development parcels provides opportunities for a range of landscape typologies which can be tailored to suit different functions including screening, view framing and enhancement, definition of routes and waymarking, creation of wildlife corridors and covers and containment of public open space and amenity areas.
 - The outline buffer proposals follow the general softworks design tenets as implemented in the first phases of Chilmington Green. These were developed and agreed with the Landscape and Tree officers at the time, to include native structural screening along with more formal hedgerow planting, and also areas of parkland which include more ornamental tree varieties set in grassed areas with bulb planting and wildflower swathes. Since the outline submission, further work assessing the biodiversity of the site and potential enhancement for wildlife promotion has been undertaken by Corylus Ecology. The BNG report submitted to Ashford Borough Council recommends wider establishment of scrub areas in association with the woodland and hedgerow buffers. This is reflected in the provided sections and indicated on the revised Landscape Parameter Plan, (Figure 03, D0410_001 Open Space Plan)
- 1.9 In terms of the acceptability of the proposed density of the scheme, the rationale provide by Clague Architects provides justification of the density profiles and how these relate to the adjacent Chilmington Green development parcels. This is supported by the Figure Ground Diagram and Overall Density Plan. By following the design principals set out in the Chilmington Green Design Code, the Appeal Scheme will create a natural and sustainable extension to the approved masterplan whilst enhancing the local landscape character and potential for biodiversity gain.
- 1.10 In the light of the above, I consider that the structural and buffer landscape strategy of the Appeal Scheme and the manner in which it addresses the issues of impact on local landscape character and views, would create adequate containment, screening and softening of the proposed urban form and density and would provide visual and ecological benefits while presenting a limited and localised effect on landscape character and visual amenity. I consider that Reason for Refusal 1 does not justify a refusal of planning permission in this appeal. Instead, I consider that the appeal proposals, whilst resulting in a change in the local landscape character of the site from agricultural to primarily residential use, will not result in substantial harm to the wider landscape character and views from local receptors.