

East Cambridgeshire District Council

Land South of Wilburton Road, Haddenham: Review of Landscape and Visual Effects

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1.0 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Alison Farmer Associates on behalf of East Cambridgeshire District Council in response to an outline housing application to the south of Wilburton Road, Haddenham, Cambridgeshire. The report provides a review of the landscape and visual impact assessment associated with the planning application. It focuses on key landscape/townscape issues which are likely to arise as a result of the proposed development in order to inform the Local Authority in their determination of the scheme.

This review has included reference to the following documents:

- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- Design and Access Statement (DAS)
- Proposed Site Plan
- Tree and Hedgerow Survey Report

This work has included desk study and a field assessment undertaken in May 2019. Failure to mention an aspect of the LVIA should not be assumed to be acceptance of it.

2.0 Planning Context

The LVIA sets out the relevant planning context and highlights the importance of the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance and their emphasis on good design as a key component of sustainable development. Such design should *'contribute positively to making places better for people'* and *'permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions'*.

The LVIA refers to Policy ENV1, and ENV2 (saved policies in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015). ENV1 states that development proposals should...*'create positive complementary relationships with existing development, and where possible enhance...the settlement edge and key views into and out of settlements'*. This policy makes specific reference to the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines. Policy ENV2 stresses the need for high quality design which enhances and complements local distinctiveness.

The East Cambridgeshire District Council Design Guide SPD (March 2012) is also referred to in the LVIA. Specific objectives of the SPD are highlighted including consideration of:

- important views
- development edges
- hedgerows and planting for screening
- local character in species choice, planting patterns and landform
- habitat enhancement
- environmentally based opportunities including off-site landscape improvements
- spaces for tree planting within a scheme
- historic character of locality
- management of landscaped areas
- night lighting pollution

3.0 Existing Character of Haddenham Urban Edge and Landscape Setting

Topography

Haddenham is a fen island settlement located on land which rises to c. 40m AOD and sits above the surrounding fen landscape at 5m AOD or lower.

Figure 6 of the LVIA shows the topography of the area. The historic core of Haddenham focuses on the slightly flatter, highest land of the island with linear development extending down the island slopes to the north and south along linear routes which lead onto the fen e.g. Station Road, Aldreth Road and Lode Way. Haddenham is one of a number of nucleated fen island villages. These villages are separated by open agricultural slopes which are visually prominent from the wider landscape and are connected by roads which run along the crest of the slope, affording elevated views out across the fen landscape.

The site lies on the southern slopes of the island on the eastern side of the village. It ranges from c. 36m AOD adjacent to Wilburton Road to c. 13m AOD on the southern boundary, reflecting a fall of 23m. The slopes are most steep in the middle portion of the site. Figure 2 of the Tree and Hedgerow Survey illustrates the contours on the site although they are not numbered. The site comprises two fields which are open in character and currently used for arable. There is a single storey barn between the two fields.

Village Form

The historic core of Haddenham Village focuses on relatively flat high land at the cross roads of the A1123 and A1421 and along the High Street giving rise to a strong north-south orientation. Over time development has extended along the lanes and down the island slopes onto lower land where routes connect to the Fens.

Historic maps dating to the 19th century show a pattern of small enclosures behind properties used for horticulture and orchards. The development of orchards reached its peak in the 1950's especially on the south facing slopes (including the site), although many have now been lost to development or converted to arable.

In the early part of the 20th Century the Haddenham Road to the east of the village comprised a 'dog leg' arrangement. This was altered in the 1950's with the construction of a new link road called New Road which connected the Haddenham Road with Hop Road to form the primary route into the village. This reconfiguration led to the creation of the junction with Wilburton Road to the north of the site.

In the latter half of the 20th century infill development occurred to the east of the High Street but continued the trend of development located on the higher relatively flat land e.g. Camping Close and Bell Gardens. Here housing is relatively low density and comprises predominately 1 or 1.5 storey properties. This has been followed by more recent development (1990's) on the south facing slopes at Orchard Way and Pear Tree Close, adjacent to the site. This latter development does not extend below the 25m contour. The edge of this development

comprises hedgerows and trees, but the roofscape within the development is evident in views from the south, due to the sloping topography.

Similarly, the open agricultural slopes between Haddenham and Wilburton are visually prominent when viewed from the south. These areas of open farmland form an important setting to the settlement reinforcing individual identity and are visually sensitive. Where development has occurred along the Wilburton Road it is perceived as isolated rural dwellings within a wider agricultural landscape.

Views and Gateways

Haddenham village was designated a Conservation Area in 1972 the boundary of which was extended following the Conservation Area Appraisal, published in 2008.

The Conservation Area Appraisal notes that there are no views out from the High Street to the landscape beyond (para 7.3.2) but that the view from the junction between Church Road and W End is important (page 10). Here relatively recent development at Great Mill View limits views to a narrow cone between properties. Wider open views at road junctions remain possible from the margins of the settlement such as the junction between Glebe Way and Hill Row or at the bend in the road at the junction with Wilburton Road immediately north of the site. In these locations the open views reinforce sense of place and signal departure from the village.

When approaching Haddenham from the east there are open elevated views south and southeast across the fen landscape. These views are punctuated by isolated cottages, trees and hedgerows which give rise to a rural transitional approach to the village. Prior to reaching the site the water tower becomes a key landmark, but little or no residential development is evident. In longer distance views the light coloured rural buildings on lower lying land west of Lode Way are evident.

On leaving Haddenham along New Road there are southerly views towards the site. Although the ground level is not visible it is evident that it slopes away affording open views across the wider Fen landscape. This is an area of open undeveloped land and signals departure from the village.

Overall, the above analysis indicates that the site is visually sensitive, forming a setting to the village, plays an important role in affording open elevated views across the Fen which reinforce sense of place and local identity, and performs a gateway function. These factors give the site a high susceptibility to development of the type proposed.

4.0 Review of LVIA

Proposed Development

The proposed development on land south of Wilburton Road is for up to 110 residential units. Whilst an outline application with all matters reserved, the LVIA has been based on a

Proposed Site Plan (Figure 7 in the LVIA). This indicates the extent of development and layout considered by the applicant to be acceptable on this site.

The proposed scheme comprises detached and semi-detached dwellings (2-3 beds) of a density to reflect the established pattern within Haddenham (Design and Access Statement para 4.2, 2nd bullet). Properties are likely to be 2 or 1.5 storeys in height. The development would be accessed off Wilburton/Haddenham Road via a new junction arrangement – although no details are provided in the LVIA or other documents. Along the southern boundary of the site is proposed a landscape buffer to include open space, trees and shrub planting and attenuation ponds, while to the north of the site around the junction it is proposed that there will be an area of open space. Planting is proposed at various intervals along contours within the site. No information is provided on lighting or signage.

The hedgerow along the northern boundary of the site would be removed along with the barn in the centre of the site and associated tree. Existing boundary planting would be retained and new perimeter tree and hedgerow planting proposed.

Issues in relation to the LVIA

A review of the LVIA has identified a number of issues as follows:

- The red line site boundary and masterplan does not accord with the statement and annotated photographs that property 18 Wilburton Road will be demolished (para 5.3.10) as part of this scheme.
- The scheme layout in Figure 7 of the LVIA does not accord with that in the DAS which is an older layout.
- The LVIA makes reference to the National Character Areas, and Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines but no reference is made of the East of England Typology which distinguishes between the Lowland Village Farmland and Planned Fen landscape types.
- No mapping of character areas or types is provided within the LVIA.
- The only reference to the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines is in relation to guidance note number 5 (page 75) which relates to planting and settlement edges.
- The LVIA explains that the proposed road layout is to follow the contours (para 4.1.2, 1st bullet), however Figure 7 clearly shows the main access road cutting across the site slopes at their steepest point.
- The LVIA provides no cross sections through the site to demonstrate how the housing will be accommodated and the extent to which the height of new housing will block views or indeed the extent to which the landscape buffer planting would be able to screen views of houses.
- Key viewpoints are illustrated on Figure 6 of the LVIA but long distance and near distance viewpoints do not appear to have been marked consistently.
- Viewpoint 18 is marked on Figure 6 but there is no description of the view or assessment of likely effects in the report or tables.

Effects of the Development as Proposed

The CLGs include generic guidance notes at the start of the document which highlight the following considerations when accommodating new development on the edge of settlements:

- existing views from roads, paths and public areas
- the creation and framing of new views
- offsite improvements
- views out and in
- footpath and corridor links
- penetration of woodland and green corridors into development
- visually diverse edges

The proposed site layout seeks to take account of these considerations through the creation of open space in the northern part of the site, a landscape buffer on the southern boundary and planting within the scheme. The LVIA acknowledges there would be a permanent change to the site as a result of the development but considers that the *'design, scale, layout and landscape of the proposed development respects the character of the surrounding landscape of the fen island and existing settlement edge'* (para 5.2.14 and 5.2.16). It states at para 5.2.18 that *'As planting matures proposals complement existing landscape and integrate'*. On this basis the assessment concludes that the scheme would give rise to Moderate Adverse landscape effects in Year 1 and Minor Adverse in Year 15 due to maturing vegetation. There are a number of observations which can be made in relation to this:

Gateway and Views

Paragraph 5.3.10 of the LVIA acknowledges the effects of the new access would be major adverse. Para 5.2.18 states that *'the open space areas at the site entrance.... will help maintain the rural approach to the village and its separation to Wilburton to the east' and 'provide opportunities to view the wider Fen landscape'*.

However, it is likely that single or two storey properties will block views to the wider Fen even if set back around the 32m contour. A narrow cone of view may be retained along the access road but open wide views down the slopes to the broad Fen would be substantially lost with views becoming interrupted and curtailed, not to mention urban in character.

Effectiveness of Mitigation Planting

The proposed site layout plan accommodates a number of mitigation proposals however the topography of the site and nature of the proposed development is likely to make the realisation of them problematic. This is because the height of proposed housing on the site slopes means the central part of the scheme is equally, if not more visible from the wider landscape, than the southern edge.

It is acknowledged that planting along the contours within the proposed development will help to mitigate the massing of development on the slopes, however the density of development is still likely to result in prominent roofscape and of the extension of development onto slopes which, in terms of settlement form, are not characteristically settled. The effectiveness of buffer planting on the southern boundary of the site at c. 13m AOD may mitigate housing on the lower slopes but would not mitigate housing on mid to upper slopes. Views from Lode Way towards existing housing on the slopes (viewpoint 2) illustrates this point. Similarly, the existing poplars to the south of the site are not included in the red line boundary and cannot be relied upon to screen development from viewpoints to the south such as Viewpoint 5.

The LVIA acknowledges that the proposed development would extend the settlement to the east of Haddenham and regards this as respecting the existing settlement pattern along the ridgeline of the fen island (para 5.2.17). However, as noted above, the historic form and traditional character of the village is development on the higher flatter land of the island, with development extending down the slopes where there are routes which connect with the Fens forming distinctive 'streets'. The proposed development would not give rise to this type of urban form and although the LVIA states that the proposed housing would be in keeping with that adjacent (Pear Tree Close), this housing is not typical of the village.

Visibility

The LVIA states in Section 2 that photographs have been taken with a focal length of 50mm to replicate the view from the human eye. It also states that to achieve a wider field of view a series of overlapping photographs were taken and joined together to form panoramic images. The general effect of this is to make elements of the landscape appear further away. Therefore, it is important that the images in the LVIA are used for illustrative purposes only.

The photographs within the LVIA are clearly annotated with the extent of the site labelled where appropriate. However, a review of the viewpoint assessment would suggest that effects have been underestimated. For example, an assessment of Viewpoint 18 is not provided in the LVIA. This is important as views from Haddenham Road on approaching the village are highly sensitive. Paragraph 6.0.11 concludes that the open views across the Fens are not compromised by buildings. However, it is likely that there would be some views to the proposed development from the Haddenham Road due to the elevation, angle of view and extent to which proposed development would extend down the slopes. Views towards the proposed development are likely to change perceptions of the scale and position of Haddenham and the approach to the village.

The assessment of effects for viewpoints 1a, 1b, and 1c appear inconsistent. The two former viewpoints are considered to give rise to a major adverse effect in Year 1 and major/moderate effect in Year 15, however for viewpoint 1c the effect is moderate adverse for Year 1 and minor adverse for Year 15. This is considered to be an underestimation. From viewpoint 1c the views are directly over the site (where currently there is no development), and are sequential. The proposed housing would be clearly visible, albeit set back from the road, and the views to the wider Fen landscape would be curtailed and urbanised.

The LVIA states in a number of places that the existing urban edge of Pear Tree Close is 'abrupt' and 'harsh'. However, consideration of viewpoint 2 illustrates that it is the tiering of roofscapes on the slopes which is most visually obvious when viewed from the south. Although the LVIA comments on the 'roofscape' being visible in Viewpoint 2, it goes on to assess the effects of the proposed development as minor adverse/negligible at Year 1 and negligible at Year 15. Given the effect of existing development on the slopes, and the increased extent of proposed development, the effects are considered to have been underestimated.

5.0 Conclusions

The LVIA concludes that the proposed development of the site can be well integrated into its surroundings (para 4.2.6). However, the above analysis indicates that the susceptibility of the site, to the type of development proposed, has not been sufficiently taken into account and that the overall landscape and visual effects have been underestimated. In particular it is noted that:

- the northern most elevated part of the site is important as a gateway and in providing rural elevated views to the Fens which reinforce sense of place.
- The mid slopes are the steepest and the most visually sensitive from the surrounding landscape and difficult to mitigate, forming open rural slopes that are a setting to the settlements and define their separate identity. Development on these slopes is not characteristic of Haddenham.
- Development on the lower slopes and away from historic linear routes that lead to the Fen, is uncharacteristic of the historical development of the village.

Based on existing information, it is considered that the proposed development will not be easily integrated and landscape effects would remain adverse in the longer term. However, the Local Planning Authority may wish to clarify some elements of the scheme prior to determination by requesting the following information:

- Cross sections of the site to demonstrate building heights and tiering of roofscapes and effectiveness of mitigation planting.
- Assessment of views from Haddenham Road.
- Details of the new access arrangement at the northern part of the site.