

Summary Proof of Evidence

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Of

UBU Landscape Architects

Site: **Land to North of Chiswell Green Lane,
Chiswell Green, St Albans**

On behalf of Appellant:
Mr S Collins, Headlands Way Limited

Appeal Reference Numbers:
APP/B1930/W/22/3312277

Planning Application Reference numbers:
5/2021/3194/LSM

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Summary Proof of Evidence covers matters relating to landscape character and design. It has been prepared on behalf of Mr S Collins and in relation to the decision of St Albans City & District Council (“SADC”), pursuant to Application No. 5/2021/3194 made on Mr Collins’ behalf, to refuse outline planning permission for the residential development of his site to the north of Chiswell Green Lane, Chiswell Green.
- 1.2. The appeal against the above refusal of permission has been co-joined with another appeal against the refusal of a second outline planning application, submitted to SADC by a different party, for the residential development of a nearby site to the south of Chiswell Green Lane, Chiswell Green.
- 1.3. My Proof of Evidence primarily focuses on the reasons for refusal for the site to the north of Chiswell Green, but will also consider potential cumulative effects of the combined sites where appropriate.
- 1.4. The application for the northern site was registered as a valid application (Application No. 5/2021/3194) in November 2021, and was refused by resolution of the SADC Planning Committee on 17th October 2022, followed by the issue of a Decision Notice on 25th October 2022.
- 1.5. The Appeal Application was refused with two issues relating to landscape. In respect of the suggested reasons for refusal set out in St Albans District Council’s Decision Notice, I have considered the following matters:
 - Impact on the openness on the Green Belt;
 - Harm to landscape character and appearance.
- 1.6. The evidence which I provide for this appeal has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

- 1.7. I have been instructed by the Appellant, as a landscape consultant to UBU Design, to consider the proposals before this Inquiry and provide my expert opinion on its potential landscape and visual effects; and the potential mitigation and benefits that the Appeal Scheme offers as part of the proposals.
- 1.8. I am the founder Director of PGLA Landscape Architects and am experienced in all aspects relating to Landscape Architecture, specialising in Landscape and Visual issues related to planning applications. Since 2018, I have provided a consultancy service to UBU Design, focusing on projects that require specialist input on landscape and visual matters. This has included numerous residential schemes of various scales, as well as major solar farm projects nationwide.
- 1.9. I hold a BA (Hons) degree in Landscape Design and the Post Graduate qualification, Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA). I have been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) since 2000.
- 1.10. I have been involved in the Appeal application from the early stages. providing landscape design inputs for the masterplan, and I am the author of the LVIA for the Appeal Scheme (CD 4.17) that was submitted as part of the outline planning application. I have reviewed and stand by the preparation and findings of that work in preparing this Proof, and that work which should be read together with this Proof.
- 1.11. I have visited the site on two occasions, including the winter months of 2023 when visibility of the site is at its highest, and have offered advice on the landscape strategy for the design of the Indicative Site Layout.
- 1.12. The site is approximately 14.2 hectares in size. It is comprised of a large agricultural barn, stables with surrounding paddocks, and fields. It is located on the western side of Chiswell Green. It currently has vehicular access at two points along Chiswell Green Lane. However, access into the proposed development site is proposed further east on Chiswell Green Lane, at the south-eastern point of the site.
- 1.13. The southern boundary is defined by a densely vegetated road Chiswell Green Lane. Most of the eastern boundary is separated from the existing residential

settlement fronting onto the Croft and Cherry Hill by two relatively narrow paddocks which are defined by a dense evergreen hedge on the proposed development side in the west.

- 1.14. Public footpath St Stephens FP082 adjoins the eastern boundary in the south-eastern corner of the site. The northern boundary is heavily vegetated with an established evergreen coniferous hedge that separates the site from public footpath St Stephen 80.
- 1.15. The western boundary is adjacent to public footpath St Stephen 21 which travels the entire length of the perimeter in a north to south direction. The boundary line is delineated by a chain link fence. However, there is a substantial belt of native planting on the Appeal Site side which is approaching maturity and provides a screen of the site.
- 1.16. The topography is generally flat to gently undulating across the whole site and the topographical survey demonstrates a gentle fall in a south westerly direction from contour 105m AOD to 97m AOD.
- 1.17. The site lies within the National Area (NCA): 111 Northern Thames Basin and Hertfordshire County Council identifies the site as part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 10: St Stephens Plateau, in its "Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment" (2000/2005) (CD 8.13).
- 1.18. The key characteristics of the National and Local Character Areas demonstrate that the overall character area contains a range of landscape features that are of varying value from rural elements to settlements. The sensitivity to change for the type of proposed development within the Landscape Character Area is deemed to be **Medium**.
- 1.19. The baseline visual Assessment of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 4.17) identified potential recreational receptors including the following public routes, which run in the vicinity of the site:

- Public Footpaths and Bridleways surrounding the site, including Footpaths St Stephens 21, 80, 81, 82, 28, 39 and 12.
 - National Cycle Route 6.
- 1.20. There are also a number of other promoted routes within the study area as illustrated on Figure 1C of the LVIA (CD 4.17). However, the field survey demonstrated that there were no views of the site from these routes due to existing vegetation and landform or the distance was too great to distinguish the site. These potential receptors were therefore scoped out of the assessment.
- 1.21. The Gardens of the Rose is located to the south of the site and, while it is currently closed, it was considered as part of the assessment.
- 1.22. Residential properties and other buildings in view of the site were considered, including those on the western settlement edge of Chiswell Green. The nearest dwellings to the proposed development are located on Cherry Hill and The Croft directly to the east of the site. There are also a number of properties and farmsteads to the south, east and north of the site.
- 1.23. Due to landform and the presence of hedgerows and/or trees on the field boundaries, it is anticipated that any potential views would be **Negligible**. In particular, investigations revealed that views from these dwellings are virtually screened by intervening layers of vegetation.
- 1.24. Transport receptors include those using major and minor roads in close to the site. In this case the only roads in close proximity to the site are Chiswell Green Lane, Cherry Hill, The Croft, Ragged Hall Lane and Furzebushes Lane. Major routes such as the M1, M25 and North Orbital Road were also considered. However, due to roadside embankments and intervening vegetation it is unlikely that the site will be visible. It will also be viewed in context of the existing settlement edge and views will be fleeting, filtered and therefore **Negligible**.
- 1.25. There are a number of listed buildings and scheduled monuments within the study area, these are demonstrated in Figure 4 of the LVIA (CD 4.17). The field survey demonstrated that due to landform, vegetation and the surrounding built

environment, the proposed development will **Not Be Visible** to the majority of cultural receptors.

- 1.26. The overall landscape strategy for the Appeal Site has been informed by the findings and summary within the LVIA (CD4.17), specifically in Section 6 which discusses the potential for embedded mitigation within the design proposals and is summarised below with my additional comment.
- 1.27. The Appeal Application was refused with two issues relating to landscape. In respect of the suggested reasons for refusal set out in St Albans District Council's Decision Notice, I have considered the following matters:
- Impact on the openness on the Green Belt;
 - Harm to landscape character and appearance.
- 1.28. I acknowledge that there will be an inevitable effect on the spatial consideration of openness as this will obviously be physically reduced in volume with the introduction of a residential development of up to 330 new homes. However, in terms of the potential effects on the visual amenity, the reduction of the current openness will only be apparent at a localised level to the majority of the visual receptors and will not cause detrimental impact on the wider openness of the Green Belt.
- 1.29. I do not consider that the proposed development will create an unacceptable degree of harm to the landscape character and appearance which cannot be satisfactorily and acceptably reduced and/or offset with appropriate landscape mitigation.
- 1.30. Overall, the Appeal Schemes provides an appropriate and high-quality landscape led design solution in line with good practice.
- 1.31. For the reasons explained in this Proof of Evidence and the LVIA, it is my professional opinion that there is no justification for refusing the proposed development on the landscape grounds set out in the first Reason for Refusal as stated in Decision Notice dated 25th October 2022.