

Land at Little Bushey Lane, Bushey:
Summary Proof of Evidence on
Landscape, Visual and Green Belt Matters
of Patrick H. Clark BA, MA Lsc. Arch., CMLI

Application Reference: 22/1071/OUT

Appeal Reference: APP/N1920/W/23/3314268

Prepared on behalf of Redrow Homes Limited

April 2023

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1.0 SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

- 1.1 The Appeal Site lies on the eastern edge of Bushey and, like much of the settlement, is arrayed on a spur of higher ground between valleys extending north-west from a more elevated south-west – north-east ridgeline. Little Bushey Lane follows this landform which comprises the south-western flanks of the valley of the Bushey Heath Drain which flows north from Bushey Heath. This spur of landform has been a focus for development throughout the twentieth and into the twenty first century, including extensive housing either side of Bushey Heath Lane to both the south and north of the Appeal Site. Within the Appeal Site, the landscape is given further definition by a small side valley extending south-west – north-east, including a field drain which meets the Bushey Heath Drain on the north-eastern edge of the Appeal Site.
- 1.2 The major road corridors of the M1 motorway and A41 pass immediately to the north-east of the Appeal Site, the M1 following the valley of the Bushey Heath Drain. These routes have introduced a notable infrastructural influence in the vicinity, accentuated by two routes of cables supported by pylons. Vegetation in the form of woodland blocks and belts accentuates the topographic containment of the valley of the Bushey Heath Drain in the vicinity of the Appeal Site.
- 1.3 The Appeal Site is not subject to any designation for landscape quality or character at any level in the hierarchy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework; and it is agreed between the parties that the Appeal Site is not a Valued Landscape in the terms of NPPF paragraph 174a. The Appeal Site lies within the Green Belt. The designated routes of PROW 033 and 040 extend across the Appeal Site from Little Bushey Lane.
- 1.4 Published character assessments highlight the fragmentation, disruption and lack of coherence in the vicinity of the Appeal Site, caused by the M1/A41 corridor, the pylon routes and built development (described as having 'stark' edges in places); the decline and removal of hedgerows to be replaced by fencing; and the increasing impact of horse grazing. Published character guidance focuses on landscape restoration, including increasing wooded cover; hedgerow retention and restoration and enhancement of the network of linkages they provide; and the enhancement of riparian habitats.
- 1.5 The Council's Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2020) notes that there is potential for development at the Appeal Site subject to a sensitive siting and design approach, including reflecting the grain of the landscape, retaining long views and enhancing opportunities to access and enjoy the landscape; and that the Appeal Site lies in relatively less sensitive areas of the Borough for this type of housing. The Council's Landscape Appraisal for the Appeal Site (2020), concludes that:

'The analysis ... indicates that this site has the potential to accommodate some residential housing and smaller flats if new development is carefully integrated using vegetation that is in character with the locality so that the rural character of the wider landscape character area is retained, public access is retained with opportunities for countryside experience and long views from elevated areas, existing vegetation is retained (especially mature trees), the on-site water course and its floodplain is preserved and enhanced, and any development responds to the valley landform.'

- 1.6 I noted that the Proposed Development responds positively to all of these points.
- 1.7 Policy themes of relevance include in relation to locally-characteristic design approach; green infrastructure provision, including ready access from where people live; and Green Belt. I note that the Council's landscape and Green Belt evidence base supported a draft allocation (now part of a 'set aside' draft local plan) for removal of the Appeal Site from the Green Belt for residential development.
- 1.8 The Appeal Site includes three horse pasture fields bounded by a combination of substantial native hedgerow with hedgerow trees, and lengths of fencing where the vegetation has been lost/removed (including in two areas along Little Bushey Lane) reflecting deterioration in landscape condition noted in published character assessments. There are a series of layers of landscape and infrastructure between the Appeal Site Vicinity and the wider landscape to the north-east, in addition to the physical structure of the roadways themselves and the traffic movements associated with them. These layers include:
- hedgerows on the north-eastern boundary of the Appeal Site;
 - embankment planting along both sides of the M1;
 - substantial hedgerows with trees/tree belts along both sides of the A41;
 - two pylon routes;
 - Hilfield Reservoir and associated woodland; and
 - elevated wooded landform in the vicinity of Hilfield Castle to the east.
- 1.9 To the south, further containment of the Appeal Site Vicinity is provided by the elevated landform of the Bushey Heath – Elstree ridgeline where storage of materials and vehicles and sports facilities are present.
- 1.10 As a result of the containment by landform, built development and vegetation, the Appeal Site is only seen in near distance views and where it is seen, it is in the context of the existing development edge, as well as infrastructure passing through and adjoining the Appeal Site.

- 1.11 The Proposed Development parameters (primary mitigation) respond to the landform pattern within the Appeal Site, echoing the pattern of development in Bushey by being set back from watercourses onto higher ground, both to the west of the wider valley of the Bushey Heath Drain; and to the north-west and south-east of the central side-valley drain landform. The use of existing landform, watercourses and vegetation to structure the layout creates a pattern of interlocking of the urban area with the wider landscape setting, including physical, visual and perceptual links through the built development.
- 1.12 The varying types of structural landscape shown in the illustrative proposals (secondary mitigation) would not only aid the physical, visual and perceptual integration of the built development but would also notably enhance the sense of place of the Bushey Heath Drain corridor, through introduction of ponds and swales, a variety of wildflower types, reedbeds and additional tree and woodland/meadow planting. The route of PROW 040 has potential to be incorporated along a further green corridor with a distinct identity of linking a series of green spaces; and providing close and legible physical and visual links to the wider green and blue infrastructure, both along the principal route east-west, as well as along side-routes to the north-east.
- 1.13 In terms of effects on landscape features, I consider there would be beneficial effects on the majority of landscape features within the Appeal Site, notably vegetation and watercourses; and that the replacement of just over half of the open grassland fields by built development would partly be mitigated by the introduction of structural diversity of the remaining land, such that residual effects would be limited.
- 1.14 As agreed in the LSoCG (**CD D9**), visual effects would be localised to include near distance views from PROW within and adjoining the Appeal Site; from residential properties adjoining the Appeal Site (albeit the Officers' Report to Committee notes that these effects are '***not a material planning consideration***'); and from Little Bushey Lane. These effects would be mitigated by the proposed structural planting, which would:
- reinstate substantial hedgerow cover with canopy trees along Little Bushey Lane, with the exception of the entrance, where an entrance green with canopy trees would provide softening of the proposed built form;
 - reinstate and reinforce vegetation along the other boundaries of the Appeal Site, including the edges of residential built development; and
 - provide robustly landscaped corridors extending through the Proposed Development, notably in the form of a series of open spaces along the route of PROW 040, as well as tree planting along this route.

- 1.15 Accounting for these approaches, the residual visual effects, on near-distance views only, would not be of more than moderate significance.
- 1.16 Landscape character effects would be localised owing to the degree of containment by topography, infrastructure vegetation and built form. Accordingly, it is agreed in the LSoCG **(CD D9)** that the Proposed Development would result in effects on landscape character being contained within the area broadly to the south-west of the road corridors of the M1/A41. The Proposed Development would form a logical but sensitive extension of built development in Bushey, coherent with both the wider settlement pattern in relation to topography and with existing influences of development; and physically, visually and perceptually contained from the wider landscape to the north-east. Effects would be limited by the context of extensive development influences; the deteriorated landscape structure of the Appeal Site; and the sensitive design response to the landform and vegetation framework. I consider that by year 15, residual adverse effects on the Appeal Site Vicinity would be of minor significance and on the wider landscape character areas from published assessment, of neutral significance, including accounting for beneficial changes in the landscape such as enhancement of the Bushey Heath Drain riparian corridor.
- 1.17 The Council's Green Belt evidence base, prepared by ARUP, identified that the Appeal Site (which lies within a parcel described as 'semi-urban' in character) should be considered for removal from the Green Belt and underpinned the draft allocation of the Appeal Site by the Council. I note that as a result of the Proposed Development there would be no harm to Green Belt purpose 1 (checking sprawl of large built up areas), very limited harm to purpose 2 (preventing merging of towns), limited harm to purpose 3 (safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) and no harm to purpose 4 (preserving the setting of historic towns). There would inevitably be harm to the openness of that part of the Appeal Site to be replaced by built development, including visual openness for near distance receptors and for users of the PROW within the Appeal Site.
- 1.18 As a result of the sensitive design approach, including integrating physical and/or visual corridors to the structural landscape setting, along and either side of the corridor of PROW 040, which would also comprise a series of open spaces, I conclude that this harm would be localised in extent and would be partly mitigated. I furthermore note the potential for benefits arising from the enhanced access to and quality of land remaining within the Green Belt.
- 1.19 I also note that in 2016, LDA Design prepared a Green Belt review of the Appeal Site, appended to the submitted Planning Statement, which concluded that removal from the Green Belt would be justifiable.

1.20 I therefore conclude that in relation to the Council's reasons for refusal, harm to the openness of the Green Belt would be localised in extent and partly mitigated by a sensitive design approach and only experienced as a visual aspect from localised viewpoints. I consider that harm to the character of the landscape and in views would also be limited and localised. I also note that the landscape structure, notably the substantial open space at the eastern end of PROW 040, will provide a positive setting for development and will provide a considerable range of benefits. As a result, I consider that the Proposed Development would be accommodated acceptably in landscape and visual terms and in relation to the function of the Green Belt. I note that this is also the conclusion reached by the Council when draft allocating the Appeal Site, based on its evidence on both Green Belt and Landscape, prepared by consultant landscape practices.