Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford

Summary Proof of Evidence – Effects on Landscape Character and Appearance

Appeal by Hallam Land Management Limited

LPA Reference: 3/24/0966/OUT

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WWA LANDSCAPE

Robert Browne Summary Proof of Evidence

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1 Introduction

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1.1.1 This evidence has been compiled by Robert Browne, Director at Wynne-Williams Associates, a firm of Chartered Landscape Architects, registered with the Landscape Institute.

1.1.2 I hold a BSc (Honours) degree in Geography, an MA in Landscape Architecture, and I am also a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I have 10 years' experience in both planning and design projects across the commercial, residential, education, and care sectors. I specialise in landscape planning work and regularly produce landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIAs), townscape and visual impact assessments (TVIAs), landscape character assessments (LCAs), site appraisals including Green Belt Assessments, and provide expert evidence for planning appeals on behalf of both appellants and Local Authorities. My work covers a range of scales varying from sites including a single proposed dwelling to advising on the effects of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

1.1.3 I understand my duty to the Inquiry and have complied with and will continue to comply with that duty. The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry is true. My evidence has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance and code of practice of the Landscape Institute. I confirm that the opinions given are my true and professional opinions.

1.2 Appeal Context

1.2.1 The appeal is against refusal of planning permission for an "Outline planning application for development of up to 600 dwellings (C3), elderly accommodation (C3), Mixed Use Local Centre (including flexible use E, F and Sui Generis), First School, informal and formal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from the A507 and pedestrian bridge over the A10, with all matters reserved except access", on Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford. Planning permission was refused for four reasons, with this evidence relating to Reason 2 only.

1.2.2 I was appointed by East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) in June 2026 to prepare evidence for this Inquiry. I have reviewed the relevant application documents and applicable

policy documents, and I have made multiple site visits to appraise the appeal site and its environs in terms of landscape character and visual impact. My evidence provides my professional opinion on the potential effects of the appeal scheme on the existing landscape character and appearance. My methodology adheres to guidance set out in GLVIA3 and Landscape Institute TGN 02-21.

1.2.3 I have established the planning context for the appeal by identifying the relevant national and local planning policies.

2 Summary of My Opinion

2.1 Landscape Susceptibility and Sensitivity to Change

2.1.1 I have considered the relevant baseline landscape character studies at national, district and local levels, together with observations made during my site visits. The appeal site lies within the Cherry Green Arable Plateau (LCA 141) and displays many of the characteristics identified within the published landscape character assessments. It forms part of an extensive agricultural landscape which contributes to the rural setting of Buntingford and the transition between the settlement and the surrounding countryside.

2.1.2 Using Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02-21, I have assessed the landscape value of the site and its surroundings. Although the site is not subject to any national landscape designation and does not constitute a valued landscape for the purposes of NPPF Paragraph 187(a), it possesses a range of characteristics that contribute positively to landscape value, including its scenic qualities, recreational role, functional contribution to settlement separation and strong relationship with the wider countryside. I assess the character of the site and immediate surroundings to hold medium landscape value.

2.1.3 The appeal site retains a pronounced rural character notwithstanding its proximity to Buntingford Business Park and the A10. Agricultural land use, varied topography, established vegetation and the limited influence of surrounding development give the site a high susceptibility to the form of development proposed. The site also performs an important function in maintaining the distinction between Buntingford and the countryside to the west.

2.1.4 Combining value and susceptibility, I assess the site itself, the Cherry Green Arable Plateau and the adjacent landscape character areas to be of high landscape sensitivity. There is substantial agreement between the parties regarding these sensitivity assessments.

2.2 Magnitude and Level of Landscape Change

2.2.1 I have considered the magnitude and significance of landscape change arising from the appeal proposals. The scheme would result in the loss of a substantial area of open agricultural land and it would be replaced with up to 600 dwellings, a school, a local centre, roads, hardstanding, drainage infrastructure and other associated urban features. This would fundamentally alter the character of the site and its immediate surroundings.

2.2.2 The proposals would introduce a pronounced urbanising influence into an area currently experienced as predominantly rural countryside. In addition to the built development itself, associated infrastructure, lighting, traffic, domestic activity and engineering works would contribute to a significant change in landscape character. Given the topographical variation across the site, substantial earthworks would also be required to facilitate development.

2.2.3 The greatest landscape effects would occur within the site itself and on the character experienced from the Public Rights of Way crossing the site. I assess major adverse landscape effects on the character of the site and its immediate surroundings during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15. I also assess major adverse effects on the character and experience of Footpaths 40 and 41 throughout the assessment period.

2.2.4 Within the wider landscape context, I assess moderate adverse effects on the Cherry Green Arable Plateau (LCA 141) and minor adverse effects on the Ardeley/Cottered Settled Plateau (LCA 140) and High Rib Valley (LCA 142). These effects would remain evident at Year 15 and, in my opinion, are not reduced to negligible or beneficial levels by the proposed mitigation as asserted within the Appellant's LVIA.

2.2.5 The landscape effects of the development would be permanent and irreversible. Whilst additional planting would provide beneficial effects for the quantity of some individual landscape elements such as trees, hedgerows and water features, this would not offset the wider harm to landscape character.

2.3 Magnitude and Level of Visual Change

2.3.1 When considering visual effects, there is considerable agreement between my assessment and the Appellant's LVIA regarding the principal visual receptors and likely pattern of visibility. I generally agree with the identified visual envelope and the principal receptor groups. However, I consider the visual value and visual sensitivity of many receptors, particularly footpath users and nearby residents, to be greater than that identified within the LVIA.

2.3.2 The greatest visual effects would be experienced by users of Public Rights of Way within and immediately adjacent to the site. I assess major adverse visual effects during construction, at Year 1 and at Year 15. Whilst mitigation planting would soften some aspects of the development over time, it would not replace the existing open views across undeveloped countryside nor prevent the development remaining a prominent and intrusive feature within the view.

2.3.3 Pedestrians using nearby Public Rights of Way within 0.5km of the site would also experience major adverse visual effects during construction and at Year 1, reducing to moderate to major adverse by Year 15 as mitigation establishes.

2.3.4 Residents occupying dwellings closest to the site would experience moderate adverse visual effects during construction and at Year 1. Whilst mitigation planting would assist in reducing the prominence of the development over time, I assess residual effects of moderate to minor adverse by Year 15. These effects are greater than those identified within the Appellant's LVIA.

2.4 Conflict with Local and National Planning Policy

2.4.1 It is my opinion that the appeal proposals conflict with both local and national planning policy. The scheme would fail to conserve, enhance or strengthen the character of the site and surrounding landscape and would therefore conflict with East Herts District Plan Policy DES2. The substantial urban extension proposed on land west of the A10 would also be incompatible with the character and appearance of the rural area beyond the Green Belt, resulting in conflict with Policy GBR2.

2.4.2 The proposals would fail to maintain the Rib Valley setting of the Buntingford Community Area and would adversely affect views from the surrounding countryside. Accordingly, the scheme conflicts with Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan Policies ES1 and HD2. By introducing a substantial urban development into currently open countryside and causing significant harm to landscape character, visual amenity and the rural setting of Buntingford, the proposals would also fail to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside as required by NPPF paragraph 187(b).



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