Landscape and Arboricultural Advice

Reference: 3/24/1255/OUT
Site address: Land South of A507, West of A10 Buntingford
Date of response: 10/10/2025

Recommendations:

☒ Objection
☐ No objection
☐ Further information and/or amendments required

Proposals:

Outline planning application for development of employment land (flexible use B2, B8, E(c) and E(g)), informal open space, associated works and infrastructure including a new access from A507, with all matters reserved except for access.

Previous advice:

Previous landscape advice was provided by Place Services (on behalf of East Herts) dated 14/10/2024.

Further information has now been submitted.

Observations:

LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

- The site is located within landscape character area 'Cherry Green Arable Plateau' (LCA 141) of the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment (2007). The area is principally an open arable landscape with extensive views over a gently undulating plateau. This rural context provides a natural contrast and boundary with the built development of Buntingford to the east.

  In their assessment of the nearby development site, on 'Land East of A10 at Buntingford,' considering the principle of development within the gap between the existing settlement edge and the A10, the Planning Inspector stated that *"I am satisfied that the* ***A10 would provide a buffer and defensible boundary between the urban edge and the countryside****."*

  The Inspector's view is echoed for this proposal. The A10 corridor provides a logical boundary to the western settlement edge of Buntingford, and there is concern that the proposed development would 'leapfrog' the corridor and represent an incursion into the open countryside beyond.

- However, there is an existing employment area 'Buntingford Business Park' and allocated extension, to the west of the A10, north of the proposed development site. The location of the site within a relatively low-lying flat area enclosed, by the apex of the roundabout approach routes (A10 and A507), a framework of vegetation, and the ridgeline further to the west, helps to mitigate its landscape and visual impact to an extent.

  There is concern that the proposed development site does not benefit from such effective mitigation as the existing site, due its more open and elevated aspect on the east facing valley slopes, and its encroachment beyond the ridgeline to the west. This is discussed in further detail within the following comments with regards to landscape and visual effects and the mitigation strategy.

LANDSCAPE + VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- An initial Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was submitted as part of the full application (LVIA).

- An 'Addendum LVIA Report: Land South of A507, Buntingford, Stantec, May 2025' (LVIA-A), and accompanying plans, have now been submitted.

  The LVIA-A provides an assessment of the scheme amendments and concludes that the landscape and visual effects remain at the same level as assessed in the initial LVIA.

  The amendments include:

  - Confirmation of building heights
  - A new built form edge to the A507 Baldock Road
  - Adjustments to visibility splays and highways design at the access road junction with the A507 Baldock Road, removal of existing roadside vegetation, and new planting scheme.
  - Additional hedgerow and tree planting to site boundary with A10 and A10/507 Baldock Road roundabout.

  The LVIA-A provides assessment of 3 no. additional viewpoints (A-C) and concludes that the additional assessment does not alter the conclusion of the initial LVIA.

Landscape Effects – Landscape Character Area

- The site is located within landscape character area 'Cherry Green Arable Plateau' (LCA 141) of the East Herts District Landscape Character Assessment (2007).

- The submitted LVIA judges LCA 141 as **high value** and **high susceptibility**, resulting in **high sensitivity**. The previous landscape advice agreed with this judgement.

- The LVIA assessed that there would be a **minor adverse** significance of effect. The previous landscape advice agreed with this judgement. However, there is

greater concern for the negative impact of the proposed grasslands and scattered tree planting along the western side of the site that are in stark contrast to the muted tones and openness of the prevailing arable landscape character, which is described[1] as *"principally an open arable landscape with extensive views over a gently undulating plateau"* and therefore weakens the overall cohesion and strength of character. In addition, the proposed grassland feels physically and visually severed from the development by the existing and proposed woodland and encroaches over the elevated ridgeline into the open countryside beyond.

Landscape Effects – Site + Immediate Surroundings

- The LVIA assessed that here would be a **moderate adverse** significance of effect. The previous landscape advice agreed with this judgement.

Visual Effects

- With regard to the initial LVIA the previous landscape advice concluded that *"Generally, we do not disagree with the judgements made within the assessment of visual receptors. Where our judgements may differ, these are not deemed substantial."*
- The LVIA-A now provides assessment of 3 no. additional viewpoints (A-C)

Views from the East (Representative viewpoint A)

- There is concern for the impact of the development upon views from the east. These are currently open views, across the sloping landform, up towards the elevated ridgeline and The Thicket woodland.

  From here the proposed buildings eastern elevations (up to 12.5m high) would be visible, at 5m above road level (A10), with the upper floor/roofscape of the buildings behind, stepping up the slope to the ridgeline.

  There is concern that the proposed planting scheme is not sufficient to provide the most effective mitigation. It is currently intended to provide a single row of

[1] East Herts Landscape Character Assessment

trees alongside the existing roadside hedgerow, along the eastern site boundary with the A10 and roundabout. A single row of trees lacks canopy density and overlapping and will not provide effective visual softening (especially during leaf fall).

As mentioned above, the buildings sit 5m above the roadside hedgerow. It is therefore advised that the most effective location for mitigation planting would be further up slope, to the building's eastern elevations (between the building and the SuDS basin).

Throughout the development structural mitigation planting feels thin and lacks space for large scale tree canopies to help break up the bulk of the buildings and their roofline provide, as well environmental benefits.

Indeed, the layout currently feels dominated by hardstanding. Overall, a more robust framework of soft landscape and structural mitigation planting is required throughout the building blocks.

Informal Open Space

- It is understood that public open space is being provided for the local community. However, it is not clear how it links with the existing community and how it would be conveniently accessed. Notably there are no direct links with the closet community at Longmead. It is currently not convincing that this would be a genuinely attractive and well used space.

Contours + Levels + Cut and Fill

- The illustrative masterplan shows the proposed buildings arranged perpendicular to the contours. This approach would require the greatest areas and volumes of cut and fill to create a level development platform(s). Options to align the buildings and work with the contours, avoiding cut and fill, should be explored – balanced with visual impact. Clarification of how any excavated material would be disposed of is also required.

Site sections are required to show how the proposed development sits within the contours/levels. They should also show the location of structural mitigation planting.

ACCESS

- Plans to show the proposed access general arrangement, and the landscaping scheme, are not apparent within the submission and, as a matter for approval, are therefore required.

- The arboricutural report confirms the removal of existing trees and hedgerows (G13-B2, G14-C2, H17-C2, H49-B2, H50-B2, and H51-C2) from along both sides of Baldock Road to accommodate the proposed new access.

  The existing vegetation makes a positive contribution to the local landscape character and visual amenity. The hedgerows are predominantly in good condition and provide a sense of enclosure and an attractive rural setting to the highway. It would be preferable to see the existing vegetation retained.

- The proposals appear to show the replacement of the existing rural road with a widened carriageway and roundabout, with pedestrian crossings and lighting columns, and segregated pedestrian and cycle paths, and new structural planting along both sides of the eastern and western approaches. This highly engineered and urban approach does not feel appropriate and will detract from the character and quality of this countryside location.

- At this stage the proposed access is not supported. There is concern for the removal of a substantial section of the existing roadside vegetation and the introduction of a highly engineered and urban solution in this rural location. As a matter for approval landscaping mitigation and enhancement scheme is required.

In conclusion, at his stage the proposed development gives rise to significant adverse landscape and visual effects (for the reason as discussed above) and is therefore not supported.