
11th May 2021

Land South of
Blakesley Hill, Greens
Norton

**Landscape
Evidence of**
Mr. Robert Hughes
BSc (Hons), PgDipLA
CMLI

Appeal between: Richborough Estates and
South Northamptonshire Council

Volume 3: Summary

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Volume 3: Summary



Summary

Introduction

- S.1. My name is Robert Hughes, I am a Director at Incola Landscape Planning and also a sub-consultant to Tyler Grange Group Ltd. I specialise in landscape and visual planning issues associated with development and change. I hold a BSc (Hons) degree in Rural Resources Management from the University of Wales Aberystwyth and a Post Graduate diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Central England. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (LI).
- S.2. My evidence deals with landscape and visual matters in relation to an appeal by Richborough Estates against the refusal of an outline application for up to 69 dwellings with associated access, landscape and drainage infrastructure (all matters reserved save for access) on land adjoining the western edge of Greens Norton, south of Blakesley Hill.

Proposed Development

- S.3. The appeal site comprises a single field of 2.87 hectares on the western edge of Greens Norton, bounded by residential properties on Benham Road and Falcon View to the east, Blakesley Hill to the north, Bury Hill to the west and residential gardens and paddocks to the south. The properties to the east back onto the site and form a well-defined, abrupt and linear edge to the settlement and a backdrop in local views from the west. The site lies at the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill, with the lane and roadside trees and hedgerows along Bury Hill containing the site and to the west and separating it from the wider countryside. The appeal site is strongly influenced by the above factors and is well related to the settlement edge
- S.4. The application was accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Tyler Grange. The LVA informed the design principles which are embedded into the development parameters and illustrative masterplan proposals.
- S.5. Although the character, layout and landscaping are reserved matters, the development of the proposals has been landscape led, informed by the findings of the LVA and design inputs by chartered Landscape Architects. This has ensured that the development respects the landscape character and setting of Greens Norton, minimising landscape and visual effects and retain existing landscape features. The parameters plan for the proposed development includes for a landscape buffer to the north, west and southern boundaries incorporating retained trees and hedgerows, drainage features and opportunities for additional landscape planting.
- S.6. The parameters also identify a 'green development edge' to the southern and western edges of the proposed development. Within these areas, development is to be limited to two storeys, with bungalow provision in this area and an increased use of detached properties. There is also a 'residential amenity area' that runs alongside the eastern



boundary adjacent to existing properties to include set back and boundary treatments to mitigate impacts on the amenity of residents of these properties.

- S.7. Through the above measures, the parameters have responded to the landscape and visual context of the site, ensuring that the proposed development retains existing boundary vegetation and allowing opportunities for additional planting within the landscape buffer and areas of open space as well as space for the maturation of existing hedgerow trees.
- S.8. The lower density, less formal development frontage to the western and southern boundaries within the green development edge will combine with the retained and additional planting in the landscape buffers to provide a defensible and softer settlement edge that will provide an improved transition and more positive interface between Greens Norton and the surrounding countryside than currently exists.
- S.9. In addition to the parameters plan, an illustrative masterplan has been prepared to test the design principles and capacity of the site. Whilst the masterplan is not fixed as part of the outline proposals, it demonstrates how the site may be developed sensitively and to provide a good contextual fit and gentle transition to the wider countryside to the west and south, including outward looking development frontages, single and two storey dwellings to the edges of the site and a rural edge character utilising irregular building lines and deeper setbacks. The LVA contains a landscape strategy plan that shows indicative native tree planting to boundaries and within the buffers to the north, west and south, as well as areas of wildflower meadow, attenuation features managed for wildlife.

Landscape and Visual Effects

- S.10. With reference to the LVA and my own assessment, I have considered the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development and conclude that the effects will be limited and localised, without detrimental effects on the wider landscape character area. As summarised by the LVA:
- Residential development is not uncharacteristic of the approach to the village form the west where the existing settlement edge is already clearly apparent;
 - The proposed mitigation planting at the site boundaries will provide a softer settlement edge and assist in assimilating the development into the wider landscape; and
 - Some localised adverse effects on visual amenity will arise and adjoining residents will experience a change in visual context with views over the site curtailed.

Landscape Effects

- S.11. The site does not contain any notable, rare or unique features or represent particularly valuable characteristics of the Tove Catchment LCA or Undulating Claylands LCT. Overall, the perception and distinctiveness of the wider LCA will not be compromised by the proposal.



- S.12. The proposals also retain and enhance hedgerows and hedgerow trees and provide opportunities for new tree planting in line with the Council's Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines that support the development plan.
- S.13. The proposed development relates well to the settlement edge and is situated at the gateway to Greens Norton on Blakesley Hill. The existing settlement edge forms an abrupt edge and impact on the character and perception of the site on the settlement edge. Bury Hill provides a defined boundary and clear transition between the edge of settlement landscape and the wider countryside beyond. This is accentuated by the topography which falls away to the west of Bury Hill. The proposals provide an improved settlement edge and transition with the wider countryside, with Bury Hill forming a long-term defensible edge to the settlement.
- S.14. It should be noted that the proposed development and landscape strategy reflects the approach adopted by the application at Mill Lane to the south of Greens Norton (Planning Application No. S/2020/1340/MAO). This has been identified by the Council as providing betterment to the settlement edge that offsets the loss of the existing site characteristics.

Visual Effects

- S.15. The extent of visibility of the site and proposed development is limited to views within approximately 800m to the north and west, with the majority of receptors being people adjacent to the site on Bury Hill and Blakesley Hill when passing by the site. In wider views, the site is partially visible, experienced as part of expansive panoramas and in context with the existing settlement.
- S.16. There would be a high magnitude of change for resident so properties adjacent to and overlooking the site. There have been no matters raised by the Council in relation to unacceptable impacts upon residential amenity. The visual effects on residents of Greens Norton will be highly localised and limited to residents of those properties adjacent to and with views of the site.
- S.17. For people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of recreational routes, the changes to views when passing the site will be experienced in the context of the settlement edge and influence of existing houses, infrastructure and traffic.
- S.18. When walking along the footway on Blakesley Hill to the north of the site, the experience is in the context of entering or exiting the village. The proposals are set back development from the hedgerow beyond open space, retaining the character of the approach to the village.
- S.19. The focus of views from Bury Hill and Bradden Road are the elevated, panoramic views across the wider countryside and landscape to the west and south, which are recognised as characteristics of the local landscape by the Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines and are to be conserved and enhanced. These outward views across the wider landscape will not be affected by the proposed development.



Main Issues

- S.20. Within the Committee Report, Officers agree with the findings of the LVA, recognising the limited and localised impacts of the proposed development and opportunities for improvements to the settlement edge west of Greens Norton. This includes the following:
1. The appeal site is not subject to any formal landscape designation and is not a valued landscape under Paragraph 170 of the Framework;
 2. The appeal site does not represent particularly valuable characteristics of the wider landscape character area within which it is situated;
 3. Landscape harm arising from the proposal is limited and localised, relating to the change of the site from an agricultural field on the settlement edge to residential development
 4. The appeal scheme would be well-related in visual terms to the existing village;
 5. Visual impacts arising from the proposed development would be restricted to the immediate locality without a prominence in the wider landscape significantly greater than existing settlement edge;
 6. The provision of new public open space is a benefit of the proposal, contributing to the social aspect of sustainable development;
 7. Bury Hill to the immediate west of the site would provide a substitute for Benham Road in terms of being a long-term defensible edge to the settlement;
 8. This edge (along Bury Hill) could be developed in a higher-quality manner than the existing approach into the village, which is characterised by the rear boundaries of properties on Benham Road; and
 9. The indicative layout shows outward facing properties and managed landscaping, both of which could be secured at reserved matters.

- S.21. The Council's Statement of Case also recognises the limited nature of effects, stating that:

"The appeal site is located on relatively elevated land and is visible from several approaches by road to the village. The existing interface between the village and surrounding countryside is well established here and is not appreciable over long distances. The proposed development would be relatively self-contained. Visual impact is largely restricted to the immediate locality; impact on the wider landscape is limited." (paragraph 7.1)

Reasons for Refusal and Council's Statement of Case

- S.22. Despite the above and the recognition by Officers and the Council that any harm associated with the proposed development is limited and localised, and that the proposal provides an opportunity to provide an improved settlement edge, the application was refused on grounds of localised landscape harm, and adversely affecting the character of this part of the village.



S.23. The Statement of Case identifies localised landscape harm resulting from the loss of a tranquil, undeveloped field that forms an area of transition between the edge of Greens Norton and open countryside and concludes that the identified harm is not outweighed or mitigated by the potential for a high quality design-led approach to landscaping, layout, building mass, siting and form at reserved matters stage.

S.24. Local Plan policies referenced in RFR2 are:

- JCS Policy R1(b) 'Spatial Strategy for the Rural Areas'.

Paragraph (b) requires development in Rural Areas to: *"Not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village"*

- LPP2 Policy SS2 (1a) 'General Development and Design Principles'.

Paragraph (1a) states that planning permission will be granted where proposed development: *"Maintains the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm its identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement"*

1.1. The Council's Statement of Case introduces the following:

- *Harm to the distinctive character of the landscape west of Greens Norton (JCS Policy S1D (1); and*
- *Harm to tranquillity (JCS Policy S1D (4)*

S.25. As set-out in my evidence, I have identified the following key matters that relate to the reason for refusal and Council's Statement of Case:

Landscape Value

S.26. The appeal site is not situated within a landscape that is designated at either a national, statutory level nor at a local, non-statutory level. The land surrounding Greens Norton was assessed as a potential candidate Special Landscape Area (SLA) within the Council's Review of Special Landscape Areas [CD6.21] and was excluded having been assessed as not meeting the identified criteria thresholds.

S.27. As set-out within the appellant's SoC and examined further within Section 3 of this proof of evidence, the appeal site is of ordinary value, comprising a field on the edge of Green Norton that is influenced by the existing abrupt built edge formed by adjacent properties, placing it within an urban fringe at the transition between the settlement and the wider countryside situated beyond Bury Hill to the west.

S.28. The appeal site does not contain any rare or unusual landscape features and does not contribute to any identified important local views or opens spaces. The boundary hedgerows



have been managed as part of the use of the land and adjacent fields for agriculture, including the removal of former hedgerow trees and tree belts.

- S.29. The influence of the built edge, containment of the appeal site by roads (Bury Hill to the west and Blakesley Hill to the north) and adjacent land use for residential gardens combine to reduce the quality and condition of the site.
- S.30. The above conclusions are supported by the assessment of landscape value contained within the LVA, as well as further analysis contained in my evidence.

Attributes of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton

- S.31. A review of the Council's evidence base and supporting documents to Local Plan Policies R1 and SS1, has found that the appeal site does not contribute to any attributes of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton.

Greens Norton Village Design Guide

- S.32. The design guide identifies areas of Important Open Space to the south of the village, between Bradden Road and Bengal. These areas are crossed by public rights of way and comprise enclosed areas of land that are separated physically and visually from the land west of Greens Norton and the appeal site.
- S.33. The Design Guide also mentions the pocket park that is located to the south of the village, off Bengal Lane. The park is situated towards the valley bottom south of Bradden Road, is well wooded and is separated from the appeal site by the rising topography and hedgerows.
- S.34. The guide also identifies a view looking southwest from a bridleway north of Bengal Manor. The view looks away from the direction of the appeal site. The site is not visible from the location indicated due to intervening vegetation and built form on the southwestern edge of the village.

Northamptonshire Current Landscape Character Strategy and Guidelines

- S.35. The landscape character strategy and guidelines identify key character features and associated guidelines for these. One of those is the elevated and expansive views across the landscape from elevated land. The guidelines are to conserve and enhance these views.
- S.36. There are characteristic open expansive views across the wider landscape from Bury Hill to the west and southwest, as well as views the south Bradden Road. These views do not look across the appeal site and will not be affected by the proposed development.

Tranquillity of the appeal site

- S.37. As examined within my evidence and the LVA, the appeal site is strongly influenced by the abrupt settlement edge west of Greens Norton formed by adjacent properties and is situated



at the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill. The site is within an edge of settlement context, on the entrance to the settlement and is not a quiet, tranquil location.

- S.38. With reference to the Transport Assessment and evidence prepared by James Parker of Hub Transport Planning, it has been demonstrated that there is no significant difference in traffic flows between Blakesley and other approaches into the village, and that the proposed development will have a negligible perceived affect ton the tranquillity of the lanes and roads west of Greens Norton.
- S.39. For people using Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Road as a recreational route, the main indicator of tranquillity are the expansive views across the wider landscape obtained when looking towards to the west and south and the connection that these have with the countryside beyond the village. The proposed development will not impact upon these views, with the houses set back from Bury Hill beyond landscape buffers and areas of open space containing new tree planting, meadows and wildlife ponds. The proposed development will not significantly affect the tranquillity of the adjacent lanes for those people using them for recreation and amenity.
- S.40. Areas to the south of Greens Norton, including the pocket park, rights of way and areas of open space around Bengal are of a more tranquil, rural character and will not be affected by the proposed development.

The extent of harm to the local landscape character setting to the West of Greens Norton

- S.41. As supported by the analysis within Design and Access Statement and the Appeal Decisions for proposals on Land North of Towcester Road, the pattern of growth of Greens Norton has been along the roads leading out from the centre of the village. This includes the modern development to the east of the site and along Falcon View that forms an abrupt and hard edge to the settlement.
- S.42. As explored within the LVA and my evidence, the proposed development will provide an improved settlement edge, with properties fronting areas of open space and landscape buffers incorporating new trees planting, combining with retained trees and hedgerows along the western boundary with Bury Hill to provide a defensible, long-term boundary to the settlement and soft transition.
- S.43. The expansive open views across the wider landscape experienced from Bury Hill and Bradden Road will be retained in proximity to the site and western edge of the settlement.

The effects of the Proposed Development upon visual amenity.

- S.44. As summarised above when considering visual effects of the proposed development, the site and proposed development will only be visible from a small area, with any visual effects being highly localised.
- S.45. There would be a high magnitude of change for resident so properties adjacent to and overlooking the site.



- S.46. For people walking along Blakesley Hill and Bury Hill as part of recreational routes, the changes to views when passing the site will be experienced in the context of the settlement edge, with the focus of views being across the wider countryside and landscape to the west and south. These outward views across the wider landscape will not be affected by the proposed development.
- S.47. The visual amenity for people using the wider rights of way and open spaces around the village will not be affected by the proposed development, being physically and visually separated by the intervening topography, built form and vegetation.

Summary

- S.48. Having undertaken a review of the landscape and visual context and main issues relating to the appeal including the value, tranquillity and character of the landscape and character and setting of Greens Norton, I have demonstrated that the proposed development in accordance with the parameters submitted with the outline planning application would comply with both national and local policy.
- S.49. These include the following as cited in the second reason for refusal and introduced in the Council's Statement of Case:
- *West Northamptonshire JCS Local Plan Part 1: Policy S1 – Distribution of Development – D (1) and (4); and Policy SS2 (1a) 'General Development and Design Principles'*
 - *South Northamptonshire Local Plan Part 2: Policy SS2 (1a) 'General Development and Design Principles'*
- S.50. The appeal site is not situated within a landscape that is designated for its quality of value at either a local or national scale and is not a valued landscape under the provision of NPPF paragraph 170. The site represents an ordinary landscape and does not share any characteristics or features of particular value as recognised by published landscape character assessments.
- S.51. The site is situated on the settlement edge and is strongly influenced by the abrupt linear edge of adjacent to properties on the western edge of Greens Norton and the gateway to the village on Blakesley Hill to the north.
- S.52. The site does not share any features of characteristics of particular significance to the character and setting of Greens Norton. Areas identified as Important Open Space and views are situated to the south of the village at Bengal and the pocket park and are separated from the site and western edge of the settlement.
- S.53. The proposals would result in limited, localised landscape and visual effects, whilst offering opportunities to improve the quality of the built edge, providing a soft transition to the countryside and a defensible boundary formed by Bury Hill.



- S.54. The proposals will retain existing trees and hedgerows to the southern and western boundaries, which will be enhanced through new tree planting within landscape buffers and hedgerow trees. Open Space, including circular walks and opportunities for wildflower meadows and wildlife features associated with attenuation features will provide public amenity and recreation benefits.
- S.55. Elevated and expansive views across the wider landscape from Bury Hill and Bradden Road will be maintained. The amenity of people walking along Blakesley Hill, Bury Hill and Bradden Hill will be respected, with housing set beyond areas of open greens space and new landscape planting.
- S.56. For these reasons and those set out within my evidence, I am of the professional view that there are no appropriate grounds for refusing this appeal on the basis of landscape and visual matters.

