

Rutland County Council

Planning Application Ref. 2021/1124/MAO

Land North of Braunston Road, Oakham, Rutland.

Outline application for the development of up to 100 no. dwellings including up to 30% affordable housing, open space, green infrastructure, children's play area and SuDS.

Landscape review by Bayou Bluenvironment (BBE), including review of Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA), [FPCR, September 2021], Design & Access Statement (DAS), [ABA, September 2021] including the Concept Masterplan [ABA, Drawing No. P21-1316_002 Sheet No: 1 Rev: C] submitted in support of the outline application on behalf of Jeakins Weir Ltd.

1. Landscape Sensitivity

1.1 This site was previously reviewed in September 2019 as site SHELAA/OAK/01 by Rutland County Council (RCC) and BBe, as part of RCCs Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. RCCs initial landscape assessment as agreed by BBe stated: *"The site is within Zone 4A of the 2010 Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Study (LS&CS) [DTA, May 2010]. A slightly lower capacity has been allocated because the site presents an important landscape setting to west Oakham, emphasised by its rolling and rising relief. The existing interface between the town and the site is stark, but this is insufficient justification for an extension of that development on landscape grounds. The prominence of development from public vantage points would be high. Development across higher land to the west of Oakham would introduce an uncharacteristic element to settlement form. Overall high landscape sensitivity and moderate to high landscape value. The zone is allocated low capacity to accommodate proposed development"*. Consequently a red RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rating was considered appropriate in 2019.

1.2 At the time of the 2019 landscape assessment no details of any proposed residential development on site SHELAA/OAK/01 had been submitted and thus the assessment was made of the sensitivity and capacity to accommodate development across the entire site. The above extract from the landscape assessment refers to the site lying in Zone 4A as identified within the 2010 LS&CS; the site comprises the southern half of Zone 4A that in its entirety extends from Braunston Road northwards to Cold Overton Road. Zone 4A is described in the LS&CS as lying on the western edge of Oakham within the High Rutland Fringe landscape character type (LCT), characterised by its distinct rising relief and low intensity pastoral use, particularly within the northern field (i.e. immediately north of the site) where the change in gradient and elevation is most prominent. The northern field's steeper sided pasture appears not to have been improved, with a rough grazing use evident. The southern field (i.e. the site), consisting of a low dome profile between Braunston Road and the stream appears to have lost field boundaries in the past as a small number of free standing mature trees belie the position of former hedgerows. The site has considerable intrinsic landscape interest, which can be seen to be both emphasised and diminished as a result of its immediate relationship with the western edge of Oakham.

1.3 With regard to settlement form and pattern, the LS&CS recognises that should Zone 4A (in its entirety) be developed it would have a limited impact upon overall settlement form apart from its outward extension. However, with the change in elevation across the zone any development that rises above the general level that is characteristic of this part of the town would introduce a relatively alien component to the townscape.

1.4 The LS&CS suggests that development within Zone 4A would be prominent in the landscape in views from lower stretches of Braunston Road and from elevated but intermittent views from Cold Overton Road. The northern section of the zone in particular could also be seen rising above the two storey development from within the housing estate on Oakham's western edge itself. The rising relief of the ground may mean that the upper reaches of the zone, if developed, could be visible from further vantage points within the town and from open land to its south, east and north. However, these are likely to be distant and of limited significance. The LS&CS also recognises that properties backing onto Zone 4A from the Glebe Way estate enjoy extensive private views across it which if developed, would be seriously diminished if not totally removed.

1.5 The LS&CS recognises that mitigation measures may be appropriate to reduce adverse landscape and visual effects, such as further boundary woodland planting and hedgerow strengthening and management. Furthermore, it suggests that consideration could be given to the benefits of development across only the inner (eastern) half of the zone so as to minimise impacts of development on higher reaches which would be conspicuous and inconsistent with settlement character. In addition, the highest reaches of the zone on the slopes rising to meet Cold Overton Road to its northern edge should remain open to avoid conspicuous development. A 'green corridor' either side of the small stream that dissects the zone and which maintains its distinctive vegetated ribbon should also be retained. It is recognised in the LS&CS that detailed design would be of high importance in determining landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity given the characteristics and location of Zone 4A.

1.6 The 2019 landscape assessment formed part of RCCs SHELAA that necessarily considered the merits of each site at that time. More recently planning permission has been granted by Rutland County Council for residential development of up to 62 dwellings on land immediately to the south of Braunston Road (Ref. 2020/1473/MAO) that was allocated in the draft Local Plan (that site formed the northern part of Zone 4B in the LS&CS and was reviewed by BBe in 2019 as site OAK/16; an initial Red RAG rating was re-assessed as Amber following further landscape review by BBe recognising in particular the flatter topography of the northern part of Zone 4B, gently rising east to west from 123m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to 135m AOD approximately, its well defined boundary hedges and trees, and Brooke Hill Wood to the south that combine to reduce its sensitivity to residential development).

1.7 Residential development approved for that site to the south of Braunston Road will extend the town beyond current built limits (of the adjacent houses on Hanbury Close to the north of Braunston Road) on land gently rising to approximately 135m AOD. It is considered that this development reduces the sensitivity of the site to the north of Braunston Road to residential development that is confined to the more easterly, lower and flatter parts of the site up to the 135m AOD contour line and which avoids the characteristic steeper, rolling topography of the High Rutland Fringe LCA within which the site lies.

2. Proposed Development

2.1 In general it is considered that the proposed residential development as indicated on the Concept Masterplan represents an appropriate landscape-led scheme that considers the site's key sensitivities, constraints and opportunities (however, see paragraph 2.5 below). The illustrative layout on the masterplan shows that an appropriate new western edge to Oakham can be created in this location without resulting in overriding significant adverse landscape and visual effects.

2.2 The DAS describes the key design elements incorporated into the scheme. Of specific relevance to landscape and visual concerns are proposals to:

- Limit the developable area to below the 135m contour line, setting-back new development from the western site boundary to avoid the higher ground, to create a softer development edge and a sensitive landscape transition from built form to the wider countryside beyond;
- Retain existing trees within the site and boundary hedgerows and hedgerow trees wherever possible;
- Incorporate new native boundary woodland and woodland edge planting to provide screening and to assimilate the development into the landscape;
- Reinststate an historic hedgeline linking mature trees within the site and separating the developable area to the east from areas of grassland / open space on higher ground within the site to the west;
- Dedicate a significant proportion of the site (approximately 60% of the total site area) to landscape, green infrastructure, open space, and habitat proposals related to the stream along the site's northern boundary and new wetland / attenuation areas;
- Set-back new development from existing housing close to the eastern site boundary;
- Set-back new development from the southern boundary with Braunston Road in keeping with the open roadside character to the east.

2.3 The proposed development occupies a site area of 7.99 hectares (ha) in total and comprises residential development of up to 100 dwellings within an area of 3.03ha, achieving an average density of 33 dwellings per ha. The DAS suggests there may be differing densities across the site, with higher densities to the east and lower densities towards the peripheries of the site. It is considered that this may represent an over-development of the site with greater densities than exist to the east and as proposed to the south of Braunston Road; the approved scheme to the south (Ref. 2020/1473/MAO) comprises up to 62 dwellings on a site area of 3.38ha giving an average density of 19 dwellings per ha. Furthermore, by way of further comparison, the Jeakins Weir development at Spinney Hill, Uppingham Road, Oakham, comprises 96 dwellings on a site area of 3.2ha giving an average density of 30 dwellings per ha.

2.4 Proposals to set-back development from existing site boundaries to the north, east and south, and to limit the developable area to below the 135m contour line, results in the proposed built development having to be squeezed into the central/eastern portion of the site. The footprint of buildings illustrated on the Concept Masterplan appear too small in comparison with the footprint of existing dwellings to the east (also shown on the masterplan). This also leads to comparatively smaller plot sizes.

2.5 According to the DAS the height and massing of the proposed development will vary across the site; predominantly 2-storey but with occasional increasing height to 2.5 storeys. The DAS suggests that the variation in heights and massing accords to the nature of the public realm to be created and to aid legibility and provide articulation within the street scene. Whilst it is appreciated that a mixed size and tenure of units will ultimately be decided to meet local demand, the size and scale of development (and other features that will be the subject of detailed design) should fully take into consideration the site's key sensitivities, constraints and opportunities to ensure an appropriate landscape-led design. Existing and proposed residential development to the east and south comprises a mix of 2 storey housing and single storey bungalows; it is considered that this pattern of development would also be appropriate on the site, with careful consideration of where different heights of dwelling would be most appropriate to minimise adverse landscape and visual impacts in accordance with site topography, and in particular where 2.5 storey dwellings are unlikely to be acceptable. Consideration could also be given to innovative split-level design (for example executive-

type detached bungalows) within the higher parts of the site close to the 135m contour line to minimise landscape and visual impact whilst at the same time allowing elevated views out.

3. Landscape and Visual Effects

3.1 A site visit was undertaken on 29 November 2021 to view the site and its landscape and visual context. All the viewpoints within the LVIA were visited.

3.2 The LVIA has been undertaken of the layout illustrated in the Concept Masterplan and with the assumption that development on the site will be predominantly 2 storeys to a maximum height of around 8.5m to ridge above ground level. However, as referred to above, some dwellings may be 2.5 storeys which may create further landscape and visual effects than as reported in the LVIA.

3.3 The LVIA provides an accurate description of the existing baseline conditions of the site and its landscape and visual context in terms of landscape character and views. The site and its immediate landscape are assessed in the LVIA as of medium value and overall medium sensitivity which are considered appropriate. The visual baseline identifies a number of visual receptors around the site that could be affected by the proposed development, and the existing views from twenty viewpoints are accurately described. The LVIA recognises that existing properties to the east of the site with views across it are of high susceptibility to change and overall high/medium sensitivity to the type of development proposed. More filtered views from properties further away from the site, such as on Glebe Way, are of high/medium susceptibility to change and overall medium sensitivity to the type of development proposed. The LVIA also considers views from public rights of way to the south and west, the Woodland Trust site to the southeast, and from road users on Braunston Road and Cold Overton Road.

3.4 The LVIA recognises that, in general, distant views towards the more elevated parts of the site are possible from vantage points in the wider landscape to the south, east and north. However, these views are distant and limited and where visible the site – predominantly above the 135m contour - is seen as a very minor element, beyond the existing properties and buildings. Importantly, providing any proposed development does not encroach beyond the 135m contour line, it will not be seen on the skyline or extending markedly up the High Rutland Fringe slopes from more distant viewpoints.

3.5 The LVIA acknowledges that there will inevitably be adverse landscape and visual effects of new built development within open countryside on the edge of the town. However, a number of key features are incorporated into the scheme that are designed to minimise any potential landscape and visual effects, as outlined in paragraph 2.2 above. It is considered that, subject to detailed design, these measures should successfully assimilate the proposed new built development and establish an appropriate new landscape edge to this part of Oakham. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposed scheme will improve the current open and rather abrupt settlement edge and create a stronger, softer and more filtered ‘green’ access to Oakham on the Braunston Road approach from the west. Key characteristics of the High Rutland Fringe landscape character area that are important to the landscape setting of Oakham to the west, in particular its series of rounded ridges and valleys with occasionally steeply rising relief, pastoral land use with well-defined hedgerow boundaries, and small parcels of woodland and copses dotted throughout the landscape, will remain around the western side of Oakham following development of the site as proposed in the outline application.

3.6 Visual effects are likely to be relatively limited. The LVIA acknowledges that those properties adjacent or in close proximity to the site boundary will experience the greatest visual effects arising from the proposed development, especially during the construction phase when change will be most conspicuous. It is anticipated that those properties which immediately abut or are in close proximity to the site will initially experience moderate-major adverse effects at worst, reducing to minor or moderate adverse after fifteen years. However, this assessment should be treated with some caution until details of the layout and design, including size, scale, heights, massing and materials are known. Wherever possible current views across the site towards the rising countryside beyond should be retained, and sky-lining of new properties avoided.

3.7 Effects on views from public rights of way and from the Woodland Trust community woodland will be negligible. Users of adjacent or nearby roads including Braunston Road and Cold Overton Road, which will have the clearest views into the site, will experience moderate adverse effects at worst upon completion of the scheme. The housing site to the south of Braunston Road is more open in views from the road whereas existing boundary hedgerows and trees to the south and southwest of the site to the north of Braunston Road already provide an element of screening and landscape assimilation to the site, especially when entering the town from the west. The LVIA suggests that overtime the maturing of the proposed perimeter landscaping and structure planting will further assist in assimilating the proposed development within the existing surrounding landscape setting, and that overall landscape and visual effects would be reduced. This is considered an accurate assessment.

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02 December 2021.