

# Summary to Landscape Proof of Evidence

In Respect of: Land North of the A20, Ashford Road,  
Hollingbourne, Kent.

On behalf of Wates Developments

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023 | Pegasus Ref: P21-3456

LPA Ref: 23/500899/OUT

Author: Andrew Cook BA (Hons) MLD CMLI MIEMA CEnv





## Document Management.

Version	Date	Author	Checked/ Approved by:	Reason for revision
1	12.12.2023	Andrew Cook	AC	-



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# 1. Summary and Conclusions

## Introduction

- 1.1. I am instructed on behalf of Wates Developments ('the Appellant') to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of this Inquiry relating to an application for outline planning permission, which was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council and validated. The application proposed the following:

***“Outline application for the erection of a building for storage and distribution (Class B8 use) with a floor space up to 10788sqm (gross external area), ancillary offices, associated car parking, HGV parking, landscaping and infrastructure (all matters reserved except for access).”***

- 1.2. My Landscape Proof of Evidence comprises this document together with separate appendices.

## Planning Policy Context

- 1.3. This evidence should be read in conjunction with the Planning Proof of Evidence prepared by Asher Ross. The second Reason for Refusal cites policies in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan and Policy SD8 of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan as well as paragraphs 174 and 176 of the NPPF. I have reviewed these policies and am aware of their planning context as far as my discipline is concerned addressing landscape and visual effects. I have been mindful of the wording in these policies together with their supporting text, whilst drafting my Proof of Evidence. I recognise it is for planners to determine the weight that should be applied to these policies and my analysis set out in this Proof of Evidence and appendices.

## Description of the Scheme

- 1.4. The site can be described as a distribution warehouse set within green infrastructure which includes native tree planting. The proposed building is designed to have an overall height of 67.5m AOD which would be seen in the context of the adjacent development at Woodcut Farm which is 68.2m AOD. This proposal would be restricted to a maximum height of 67.5m AOD with the height of the building determined by the slab level datum. The proposal would deliver a high-quality scheme, both in terms of its built form and in terms of the green infrastructure that is proposed around the perimeter of the site.

## Effect on Landscape Elements

15. The site forms a single arable field with no internal landscape features. The existing tree belts and hedgerows define the boundaries of the site in most places, all of which as off-site vegetation would be retained. The proposal would have a bearing upon a number of landscape elements. The land cover and land use would be lost to accommodate the proposal. A substantial amount of new tree cover would be introduced along with some hedgerows, all of which would form a naturalistic environment comprising indigenous shrub and tree species. The topography would change from a gently sloping site to one essentially level to accommodate the development platform for the building and areas of hard standing. The proposal would result in some beneficial effects with regard to landscape elements within the site, specifically hedgerows and tree cover. The scheme would inevitably result in the loss of some arable land, comprising one field. There would be no change to landscape elements beyond the site. There is the opportunity to introduce tree planting off-site on the south side of the Ashford Road, see appendix 10. There would be a moderate adverse effect on the character of the site itself and immediate environs.

## Effects on Local Landscape Character

16. With regard to landscape character, the site and its immediate surroundings fall within the **National Character Area, the Wealden Greensand, NCA 120** and locally within the **Leeds Castle Parklands (LCA 49) and White Heath Farmlands (49-2)**. The key characteristics that define the local landscape characters beyond the site would remain physically unaffected (including experiential aspects), and there would be no change to the landscape character of the area beyond the site and its immediate environs with the proposed scheme in place. The effect on landscape character beyond the site and its immediate environs would be negligible.
17. The site is proposed to accommodate a distribution warehouse which would be of high quality design and would reflect other large-scale buildings in the locality. The proposal would result in a change to the character of the site, an inevitable consequence of accommodating housing on a greenfield site and thus resulting in a moderate (adverse) degree of effect, as it relates to the site itself and would be limited and highly localised.
18. Regarding the proposed green infrastructure, the proposal would bring about a degree of change in character that would be beneficial reflecting tree belts and hedgerows in the

locality. This planting would be beneficial in nature in effect. Additional tree planting off-site would reinforce the rural character of the adjacent fields to the south of the site.

### **Effects on Visual Amenity**

- 1.9. In terms of how the proposed scheme would have a bearing upon general visual amenity, I would note the following main observations. The potential to observe the scheme in terms of the visual envelope would be mainly restricted to the immediate environs of the site and contained within the local landscape. As such, the proposed building would have a limited visual envelope. Where observed, the proposed scheme would be generally framed and screened by built form including the Woodcut Farm Business Park, together with existing tree cover and hedges in the area.
- 1.10. Where observed, it would generally be seen in the context of adjacent industrial development, Woodcut Farm. This means that the proposed scheme would not visually extend the visual envelope of the existing Business Park as it relates to the wider landscape but rather it would fall within the existing visual envelope associated with the wider environs. The degree of effect would be quite limited and localised.
- 1.11. As for the nature of effect with regard to visual amenity, I adopt a precautionary approach and assume that the nature of effect would be adverse in overall terms even though the landscape design scheme itself would be attractive and beneficial.
- 1.12. The proposal would result in some physical loss of arable land. The proposals would result in a change to the appearance of the local landscape. The visibility of the building would be seen alongside Woodcut Farm and be in keeping with the general visual appearance of the area. Once the green infrastructure is established and has the opportunity to mature, the proposals would have an increasing screening effect with regard to the site and as appreciated visually within the local environs. The proposed development would have some limited and highly localised visual adverse effects. I address the AONB later.

### **Effect on the Character of the Countryside (RfR)**

- 1.13. At the National Level, the site and the surrounding area falls within the Wealden Greensand reference 120 which is an extensive area of landscape which envelopes Maidstone settlement. This landscape whilst having essentially a rural character, is heavily punctuated by a wide variety of built infrastructure. With the proposed scheme in place, the overall defining

elements that collectively form the general character of this landscape would not change with the proposed scheme in place. The proposal would, in effect, have a negligible effect upon this National Landscape Character Area.

- 1.14. At the more local level, the Kent Strategic and Maidstone Landscape Character Assessments provide a more granular level and identify a number of Landscape Character Areas. The site itself sits within a small Landscape Character Area and Landscape Character Type. This includes the land immediately to the north which is now characterised by the Woodcut Farm Business Park whilst further to the west lies recently constructed office development and caravan park (Bearsted Caravan Club) as well as a car maintenance site, Bearsted Autos. The local character area extends north to also include the M20 motorway corridor. Immediately to the north-east of the site lies junction 8 of the M20 and further eastward lies the village of Eyhorne Street. Immediately to the south of the site in the same area lies the A20 junction and motorway slip roads and further east of which lies a large hotel complex (Mercure) complete with heliport.
- 1.15. It is notable that the local landscape area accommodates both the A20, Ashford Road together with the M20 motorway and forms a major transport corridor punctuated with highway infrastructure including high-level lighting columns, large signage and overhead gantries. Whilst the area is essentially countryside, it is heavily punctuated with a wide variety of built infrastructure, with those elements in the immediate vicinity of the site having a strong urbanising influence upon it.
- 1.16. The introduction of the proposed building, and car parking would not introduce a feature that is out of character with this local character area. Indeed, it would be in keeping with the adjacent Woodcut Farm development. Whilst the composition of views would change with the proposed scheme in place, the overall character that defines the local environment in terms of green and built infrastructure would not materially change with the proposed scheme in place. The character of the site would change from an isolated arable field to a business park environment, an inevitable consequence of this proposed development on a greenfield site resulting in a moderate adverse effect on the landscape character of the site itself. Beyond the site and its immediate environs, the effect on the local character of the area would be negligible (adverse) in terms of degree of effect.

### **Effect on Appearance of the Countryside (Visual Amenity) (RfR)**

- 1.17. The proposal would have a bearing upon local visual amenity, however, effects upon views would be limited and highly localised with the exception of some distant views from the AONB which would be affected to a negligible degree given the viewing context and distance. The proposed building has been carefully located with regard to firstly, site selection and secondly, design with regard to the layout within the site itself. The site benefits from a strong development context framework, together with the existing landscape such that the proposal would have a limited visual envelope. In summary, the Woodcut Farm development immediately to the north would visually screen the proposal in terms of views from the north and close proximity to the site. Visibility of the proposal from the landscape to the west of the site would quickly fall away over a short distance due to built form, vegetation and topography.
- 1.18. In terms of views from the east, there would be few locations from where to observe the proposed building with public viewpoint locations primarily associated with major highways where speed and concentration, together with direction of travel are the priority and sensitivity to such development being low. Where the building would be observed over short range distances, it would be seen in the context of highway infrastructure with the Woodcut Farm as a backdrop. Views from the south are similarly restricted due to tree cover, built form and topography.
- 1.19. A short section of Old Mill Road nearest to the site and the A20 road frontage would have views of the building, but it would be generally seen as a small element within the viewing context of the Woodcut Farm buildings. The nearest footpath to the south of the site which would afford close range views, has no evidence of use, nor has a further public footpath further south terminating at the A20. As a result, little weight can be attached to the effects on these paths. In terms of the landscape to the north, this is heavily wooded. The tree cover, built form and topography would limit short and mid-range views of the proposed building in the vicinity of Maidstone Services and Snarkhurst Wood.
- 1.20. At over 1km to the north of the site lies the AONB escarpment, where elevated views from some sections of public rights of way would afford visibility of the proposal, though this would be from a small element in the wide panoramic views which currently reveal a landscape heavily punctuated with built infrastructure including Maidstone in the distance and Woodcut Farm adjacent to the site. The muted colours associated with the building design



would further ensure the building was seen as recessive and not visually prominent in such views. Whilst there would some change in the view from the AONB escarpment, the overall defining character of the landscape beyond the AONB would remain materially unchanged with the proposed scheme in place. Effects upon views from the AONB escarpment would be negligible adverse.

### **Effect on the Setting of the AONB in Views from Old Mill Road (RfR)**

- 1.21. The northern part of Old Mill Road affords northward views due to a lack of roadside hedgerow. This view reveals fields in the foreground and Woodcut Farm development in the middle distance. With the proposed scheme in place, the building would be seen in the same viewing context as Woodcut Farm development. The lighting columns associated with the A20, Ashford Road would sit in the foreground of the proposed building with their light units sitting in line or above the building roofline. The building would screen tree cover north of the site associated with the motorway and Maidstone Services but it would still sit below the horizon and the general legibility of the AONB escarpment slope would remain seen beyond the trees in the middle distance. It is this scarp which is considered to be a key defining feature of the AONB and visibility of this would continue to prevail with the proposed building in place with no major adverse effect upon visual amenity in this regard as far as views towards the AONB and its setting are concerned. The proposed scheme would conserve the visual amenity as it relates to the visual setting of the AONB in terms of views of the escarpment.
- 1.22. Views towards the AONB in the locality of the site are generally restricted to glimpsed and fleeting views in the main with regard to public rights of way and local highways. A short section of the northern part of Old Mill Road affords some views towards the AONB escarpment. Such views are contextual, see viewpoint 6 photomontage, appendix 11. The foreground is defined by several fields and the middle distance is defined by Woodcut Farm development, whilst in the vicinity of the site there is a concentration of high level lighting columns beyond which lies a line of mature tree canopies and it is only beyond these tree canopies that the AONB escarpment is observed in the far distance revealing grassland and woodland on the highest rising ground.
- 1.23. The proposed building would be located in the middle ground situated in front of some of the lighting columns and tree cover. It would allow views beyond to the upper slopes of the escarpment such that the legibility of the escarpment forming the far horizon would remain

with the proposed scheme in place. The landscape scheme, revision E would introduce tree cover in the site frontage which would partially screen and soften the appearance of the building.

- 1.24. With the benefit of the off-site tree planting and further woodland planting associated with the site frontage, (Revision F) this tree cover would increasingly screen both the proposed building and adjacent Woodcut Farm development reducing the visual profile of these buildings in the middle distance in the medium and longer term. The proposal would conserve the setting of the AONB with regard to views from the Old Mill Road, with either planting design.

### **Views from the AONB Escarpment (Scarp Slope)**

- 1.25. There are a number of public rights of way extending along the escarpment to the north-east of the site. However, a short distance to the north of the site lies Snarkhurst Wood which extends over some local high ground and as a result, from much of the escarpment to the north-east, the proposed scheme would lie on the lee side of this local topographic feature and effectively screened from views from much of the AONB escarpment which probably explains why the AONB have identified the one viewpoint 12 in their response. In light of this overall analysis, I consider that the proposal would have a negligible effect upon the visual amenity as experienced from the AONB and in particular, its escarpment. The landscape character of the AONB itself would remain physically unchanged with the scheme in place even taking into account experiential and perceptual elements. Furthermore, the identified special qualities associated with the AONB would be conserved with the proposed scheme in place.

### **Conclusion**

- 1.26. For the reasons stated above it is my view that on landscape and visual grounds there are no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed distribution warehouse scheme on land adjacent to the A20, Ashford Road. Therefore, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold the scheme and allow the grant of planning permission so far as landscape and visual issues are concerned and as this relates to the setting of the AONB.



Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)  
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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