
LANDSCAPE COMMENTS IN RELATION TO LAND OFF HAZELEY ROAD, TWYFORD

13 December 2017

A. Introduction

In 2015/16 The terra firma Consultancy Ltd (terra firma) carried out a number of landscape studies on behalf of Twyford Parish Council (TPC) and Twyford Neighbourhood Plan (TPN) as part of the plan evidence. This work comprised:

- Part 1: Twyford Landscape Character Assessment (TLCA);
- Part 2: Twyford Housing Site Assessment; and
- Part 3: Twyford Settlement Boundary Review

Further to these studies terra firma has been asked by TPN to assess their subsequent work related to their preferred strategic housing site S26, land off Hazeley Road. This report briefly describes the site, summarises the findings of the 2016 Housing Site Assessment, sets out the information reviewed, and makes comment on the proposed scheme for housing on site S26. This report is authored by Alison Galbraith, who carried out the 2016 Housing Site Assessment.

B. Site description and selection

Site 26 is a sloping arable field, once part of a larger, linear field now partly taken up by sports pitches for the Twyford School. The south-eastern boundary is formed by the Hazeley Road, with the B3335 forming part of the north-western boundary. The village centre car park with the pharmacy and village hall sit to the south west, parts of which are within the boundary of the Twyford Conservation Area. The buildings and grounds of Twyford School sit to the north and the sports pitches to the east, with the large Pre-prep buildings on the north-western boundary. A hedge forms the southern boundary, with tree belts to the north western and northern edges. The eastern boundary is formed by a post and wire fence, making views along the valley possible. The site has vehicular access off of the Hazeley Road. A small group of mature trees is located in the north of the site.

The site has been selected due to its potential for providing multiple public benefits including proximity to the Parish Hall and the facilities of the village centre, additional parking to serve the village centre, measures to prevent future flooding of the village from Hazeley Bourne, and open space for community use.

C. Findings of Part 2: Twyford Housing Site Assessment (THSA - by terra firma)

The report concluded that the capacity of site 26 is constrained by the fact that it forms part of the typical valley leading to the village and that its development could affect some sensitive views. It was recommended that the western part of the site could be developed for housing, lining up the edge of built form with that south of Hazeley Road, providing this could be achieved without causing further harm to the rural character of the lane and approach to the village. Any development proposals

would need to ensure that views along the valley and from within the conservation area are protected and a fully detailed landscape and visual impact assessment would be required to inform the final capacity of the site. Sensitive planting within and at the edge of the development would be needed to replicate the wooded character of the village edge and link to existing hedges, tree belts and woodland.

Sensitive views were noted from public footpaths to the south-east, and Bourne Lane to the east, and from the Monarch's Way along Hazeley Road. The raw edge of settlement to the west of the site was noted, as was the site's contribution to the open, rural approach to the village along the valley. The site's location adjacent to, and partly within, the Twyford Conservation Area imposes a constraint on the site's development and development of the whole site would result in the loss of the linear pattern of the conservation area to the west.

D. Information reviewed

- Hazeley Road, Twyford: Concept Options, Spindrift (Jan 2017)
- Twyford Neighbourhood Plan – Draft 2 – for Strategic Environmental Assessment (undated)
- Perspective sketches, Huw Thomas Architects (May 2017)
- Sketch Layout for S26 based on Spindrift Option 3, Twyford Parish Council, (Jan 2017)
- Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA), Allen Pyke Associates (Nov 2016)
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2016, Erratum May 2017), South Downs National Park Authority
- Viewpoints as supplied by Twyford Parish Council.

E. Assessment of the proposals

i. Description of proposals

The preferred proposal is for 20 units as per the sketch layout by TPC, with the access road running along the eastern and northern edges and additional land for community use with 22 spaces added adjacent to the existing car park. As well as the main access road, 2 further accesses would be created from Hazeley Road to frontage parking areas serving 4 units facing onto the road. Buildings are set back from Hazeley Road by 10-15m due to the area being designated as flood zone 3. The proposed development site extends further east than recommended in the THSA, but in lieu of this retains a small group of mature trees in the north of the site set within open space. New tree planting is proposed to the eastern boundary, with intermittent hedging, with hedging also between the additional land for community use and the housing. Due to the sloping ground, which falls away from north to south, with contours parallel with Hazeley Road, terracing is proposed to take houses in 2 lines, back to back, with banking between the rear gardens.

The development brief set out in the draft Neighbourhood Plan states that:

- Proposed houses would be small (a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed semi-detached and terraced houses), with high quality design and materials.
- A comprehensive landscape scheme would need to be prepared, to include land to the east (within same ownership).

ii. *Comments on proposals*

- The retention of existing mature trees on higher ground is welcomed, as is limiting housing to the lower slopes, except where less visible, i.e in the north-west corner.
- Proposed planting to the eastern boundary is welcomed, although a continuous hedgerow would be more in keeping with a field boundary character and have increased habitat benefit.
- Setting back built form from the northern and eastern edges is positive, allowing space for planting and open space to the sensitive countryside edges, but the design of gable ends garden boundaries will need to be carefully considered to avoid blank walls and fences facing onto sensitive views.
- The inclusion of SUDS features generally will need to be allowed for, and offer the potential for creating a strong framework and character to the development.
- Whilst opening up the existing boundary hedge along Hazeley Road would create a positive interface with the road, reflecting the relationship of housing with the road on its south side (further to the west), the loss of hedgerow for access and visibility splays should be minimised and all vehicular access points carefully designed to minimise effects on the rural character of the road.
- Areas of open space should have active fronts created by house frontages to provide informal surveillance.
- The design of artificial landform will need to be carefully considered and integrated sensitively into the natural topography.
- The plan shows a stepped link between the village centre / shops / surgery and the houses in the north of the site. Could an alternative, ramped link on a more gentle slope be provided, possibly linking the two public open spaces?
- Should a pavement be needed along Hazeley Road there would be an impact on the character of the lane and proposed hedgerows and trees. A public footpath could be included along the north side of the hedge.

iii. *Effects on views*

The LVIA looked in detail at the effects on views, in relation to the specific proposals, and conclusions were subsequently tested with a series of perspective sketches (by Huw Thomas) from key viewpoints. The LVIA concluded that significant adverse effects were only identified for the properties immediately opposite the site on Hazeley Road, and pointed out that this would be inevitable given the site's urban fringe location, with the implication that development on any of the possible sites around the village would result in a similar impact on views from nearby houses. I agree with this assessment.

Regarding public views, the LVIA stated that:

'Development would not detract from any recognised public views, features or skylines and would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on adjoining land, uses or property by reason of overlooking, overshadowing or by being overbearing' (page 21).

The sketch views largely reinforce this conclusion, illustrating that glimpses of the proposed development would be possible from the surgery car park to the south-west, Bourne Lane (and footpath) on the valley side to the south-east, and from Roman Road, within the settlement on the valley side to the south. The development would be set against the backdrop of the settlement, rising ground and wooded higher ground to the northern boundary. I consider that the sketch views include all key viewpoints and the effects upon them are fairly assessed in the LVIA with the exception of views from Hazeley Road / Monarch's Way and the surgery car park.

The LVIA does not include photographs from Hazeley Road, apart from private views 2a and 2b from Littlebourne Lodge and Cottage from where the site is screened by the tall hedge south of the playing fields. The perspective sketch (reference 2207-08, 04-05-17) showing the view from Hazeley Road near the junction with Bourne Lane illustrates that the development would be visible above the hedge, although proposed planting to the site's eastern edge would reduce the effect over time, as shown in perspective sketch 2207-05. I consider the magnitude of change to this view is higher than assessed in the LVIA (in table 5), i.e medium rather than low, but reducing to low once new trees are established. The sensitivity of these view receptors would normally be high due to the location within the SDNP and being on the route of the regional footpath but, while no justification is given for the reduced sensitivity, I agree these view receptors are less sensitive as they are on the road and the settlement edge is already visible. A moderate sensitivity combined with a medium adverse magnitude of change, would result in an overall moderate adverse effect on views from Hazeley Road, but this would reduce over time to minor significance of effects.

I agree that views from the surgery car park are less sensitive (low) but the magnitude of change would be greater i.e, high rather than medium with the loss of views across open countryside. This would result in an overall moderate significance of effects.

I am satisfied that views towards the village within the valley – which were a key concern identified in the TSHA - would not be unacceptably affected provided detailed design and construction is carefully carried out, with input from a landscape architect.

iv. Effects on landscape character and settlement pattern

Part of the site is within the Twyford Conservation Area (TCA) but the boundary crossing the site is an arbitrary one, not reflecting any feature on the ground and the site does not contribute to the character of the TCA. I agree with the LVIA's conclusion that there would be minor adverse effects.

The site is part of a dry valley, which is identified as a key characteristic in both the TLCA (TLLCA D) and the South Downs, in their Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (SDILCA). The dry valley characteristic is less sensitive closer to Twyford as it is affected by the raw edge of the settlement and the sports pitches to the east of the site.

The moderate sensitivity assigned to TLLCA D in the LVIA is debatable, as it should be of high value by virtue of being within the SDNP. The magnitude of effects are judged in the LVIA to be low, reducing to negligible over time, although my

assessment is that the magnitude would be greater, i.e medium reducing to low, with an overall residual moderate significance of effect. I accept that the existing raw settlement edge would be softened with the proposed planting, creating a new vegetated edge. The effect on the wider SDNP is assessed in the LVIA as negligible – this is not justified but could result from the perception that only a small geographical area would be affected. I consider that the magnitude of change is greater than negligible because a key characteristic of the SDNP will be affected, albeit only affecting its immediate location.

Nevertheless, even taking into account these differences in the assessment of effects, I do not think the proposed development would result in unacceptable harm to landscape character at a level wider than the site and adjacent road.

The proposed development would result in the widening of the historic core shape of the village (to the north-west of the site) but would not affect the experience of the historic core as perceived along the High Street. The proposed development would also extend further east along Hazeley Road than the existing strong line of the built up edge along the south side of Hazeley Road which was recommended in the TSHA as a logical point to line up new development north of the road. There are more houses south of the road further to the east, with open gaps between. The proposed development would bring a more densely developed orthogonal edge further east along the valley, although this would be mostly evident in plan view. The perception within the valley would be that the settlement edge is more vegetated than existing (south-west of the site).

F. Departure from recommendations made in the THSA

The THSA is a high level assessment identifying key sensitivities and making broad recommendations regarding the development of a site. There is an expectation that more detailed work needs to be carried out and that this will shape proposals. This has been the case for site 26, where detailed visual assessment and sketch perspective views with some accuracy have shown that effects on views would be acceptable, and a greater understanding of existing trees and possibly flooding has resulted in a different development area, i.e extending further east than the houses on the southern side of Hazeley Road.

G. Conclusion

This report sets out a number of comments on the proposed layout and identifies some landscape and visual effects which are considered to have been underestimated in the LVIA. Notwithstanding this, the effects would be considered moderate adverse at worse and in the context of the need for housing and the benefits of the proposal in terms of open space provision, flood alleviation and additional parking in the village centre these would generally be considered to be acceptable.