

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF MARK FLATMAN: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES

ON BEHALF OF:

West Berkshire District Council

IN RESPECT OF:

An appeal against the refusal of planning permission by West Berkshire Council for

PROPOSAL:

Change of use to 7no. Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising 7no. static caravans, 7no. day rooms, 7no. touring caravans and associated works at Land at Lawrences Lane, Thatcham

PINS REFs: Appeal APP/W0340/W/22/3292211

LPA REF: 21/02112/FUL

LPA: West Berkshire District Council

November 2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1.1 My name is Mark Flatman. I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and a Director of Liz Lake Associates, Chartered Landscape Architects and Urban Designers (LLA). I have a degree and a Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Greenwich University, and I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I have worked in professional practice since 1996. During this time, I have prepared landscape proposals for a range of projects including private landowners, historic landscapes, and educational, commercial and residential developments in town and rural settings.
- 1.1.2 I have prepared Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs) to accompany planning applications for a range of projects including residential, leisure and recreation, commercial and enabling development. I have also prepared the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments, including those required for the Environmental Impact Assessments of highway and transport infrastructure projects, minerals and waste development, as well as residential and commercial development.
- 1.1.3 I have acted on behalf of a number of developers, but also as Landscape Officer for many Local Authority clients, including Maidstone Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, South Norfolk District Council, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council as well as this Local Authority, West Berkshire.
- 1.1.4 Liz Lake Associates is a multi-disciplinary environmental and design consultancy with over 30 years' experience of master planning, landscape planning, landscape architecture, urban design, heritage and environmental impact assessment. The company is a registered practice of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.1.5 I declare that the evidence which I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry in this proof of evidence is true. It has been prepared and is given in accordance with the

guidance of the Landscape Institute. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

1.2 Scope of Evidence and Background to the Appeal

1.2.1 The application (21/02112/FUL) was refused by the Council and this Appeal is,

“...in respect of an appeal lodged on behalf of Ms Gumble (the Appellant) against refusal of planning permission (Council reference 21/02112/FUL) for the change of use to 7 no. Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising 7 no. static caravans, 7 no. day rooms, 7 no. touring caravans and associated works at Land at Lawrences Lane, Thatcham”.

1.2.2 The application was refused for a number of Reasons and my evidence for this Appeal focuses on the Landscape and Visual aspects, which is principally Reason 5: Landscape and Visual Amenity which states,

“The application site is located in a sensitive rural location within open countryside to the north of Thatcham that forms part of the setting of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Lawrences Lane is an unclassified, narrow and winding, rural road that connects Thatcham and Cold Ash. It is locally valued as a recreational route for pedestrians and cyclists, as demonstrated by recent proposals to restrict motor vehicle traffic and create a quiet route for recreational access to the countryside.

The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019) includes the land within the Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH4) character area. The area is dominated by an east-west orientated, heathland ridge and characterised by varied topography, from flat plateau area to steeply undulating slopes. It provides a rural setting to the adjacent towns of Thatcham and Newbury and also in containing settlement within the area and contributing to the rural character. Open farmland on lower slopes contributes to a sense of separation between the elevated character area and the towns of Thatcham and Newbury in the valley below. The strong network of public rights of way, the extensive areas of open access land, and the

proximity of these to the settlements of Newbury and Thatcham give the character area a high recreational value.

The proposed development would detract from the landscape character of the area as the characteristics of the development are consistent with identified detractors in the LCA. Firstly, the development would extend development further up Lawrences Lane, thereby decreasing the separation between settlements and eroding the transition between settlement and countryside. This is contrary to the area's landscape strategy which seeks to avoid extended linear development along roads, which creates a more developed character.

The proposed development also has an adverse visual impact through the introduction of fencing and the siting of caravans on the land. Whilst the visual impact is localised to the stretch of Lawrences Lane outside the application site, and some distance glimpsed views further up Lawrences Lane and from the public footpath to the east, the visible development is nevertheless a detracting feature in the landscape.

The propensity of the development to introduce additional traffic, including occasional larger vehicles, would further detract from the landscape character of the area. Heavy traffic on narrow rural lanes is another recognised detractor within this landscape character area. The Council's draft proposals to restrict access for vehicles to create quiet routes for access to the countryside demonstrates that this is a key issue along Lawrences Lane, and increases the weight that should be given to this consideration. The increased traffic generated by the development would be inconsistent with these draft proposals, which are another element of the landscape strategy for the area.

The application is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, Policies CS14 and CS19, the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019), and the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan and Position Statement on Setting”.

1.2.3

I am aware that the Appellant has, since the application was refused, submitted a revised scheme for consideration. I understand that the revised scheme has been

accepted by the Inspector under the Wheatcroft principles and it is on this basis that I have prepared my evidence, using the information and plan referred to below.

1.2.4 In preparing this proof of evidence I have made use of the following plans and documents prepared by Tirlun Design Associates Ltd. (TDA):

- 'Revised Site Layout, Landscape Strategy & Arboricultural Mitigation Measures', a plan dated May 2022, reference TDA.2692.02 (TDA)
- Landscape Statement of Evidence... , dated May 2022 (TDA)

1.2.5 The scope of my role for this Appeal is to provide Landscape Officer advice. In doing so, I have reviewed the above Landscape Statement of Evidence and the judgements made, to determine whether (or not) I consider there to be deficiencies, or indeed an underestimation of the likely effects.

1.2.6 My evidence covers the character, setting and appearance of the rural Site and considers the landscape and visual issues associated with the proposed permanent development, together with a review of the effects of the proposals on the character of the landscape and the changes in visual amenity. In this regard, my evidence supports the landscape related reasons for the Council's 5th Reason for Refusal.

1.2.7 I am aware there are some overlapping issues with the Council's other Reasons, which other specialists are dealing with.

1.2.8 It is important to emphasise that the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3)¹ are guidelines to best practice, and the foreword to this publication on page vii, confirms the importance of sound professional judgement and at 2.26 bullet point 5, p22 that "*Professional judgement is a very important part of LVIA*".²

¹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), 2013. P.vii. (CD 3.5)

² Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), 2013. P22. (CD 3.5)

- 1.2.9 Paragraph 2.26, p22 also states that *“In carrying out an LVIA the landscape professional must always take an independent stance, and fully and transparently address both the negative and positive effects of a scheme in a way that is accessible and reliable for all parties concerned”*.³
- 1.2.10 To support my evidence, I have taken a series of photographs (MF Appendix A). Some of these photographs include views towards the Site where existing caravans and mobile homes are visible and form a useful reference point.
- 1.2.11 I undertook an accompanied Site visit with Council Officers prior to the Appeal and took some additional photographs to supplement my evidence, using a Canon EOS 6D digital camera with a 50mm fixed lens.
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³ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3), 2013. P22. (CD 3.5)

2 POLICY CONTEXT RELEVANT TO THIS APPEAL

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 I have set out the national and local policy context here for reference purposes in so far as it relates to the landscape and visual issues.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.2.1 A number of policies that form part of the NPPF are of relevance in landscape and visual terms, as follows:

Achieving Sustainable Development (Paragraph 8)

2.2.2 There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental:

“c) An environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment;...improving biodiversity”⁴

Achieving Well-designed places (Paragraph 130)

2.2.3 A number of planning principles are stated, and these include the following:

- *“will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), available online at : <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

- *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- *create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”⁵*

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (Paragraph 174)

2.2.4 A number of planning principles associated with conserving and enhancing the natural environment are stated, and these include the following:

- *“a: protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- *b: recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;.....”⁶*

2.2.5 In relation to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Paragraph 176 states,

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), available online at : <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework> last accessed on 27.07.18

⁶ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), available online at : <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework> last accessed on 20.10.22

“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads . The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas”.

2.3 National Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2015)

2.3.1 Paragraph 25 of the national planning policy for Traveller Sites (2015)⁷ states that,

“Local Planning authorities should very strictly limit new traveller site development in open countryside that is away from existing settlements or outside area allocated in the development plan. Local planning authorities should ensure that sites in rural areas respect the scale of, and do not dominate, the nearest settled community, and avoid placing an undue pressure on the local infrastructure.”

2.3.2 Paragraph 26 outlines some matters that local planning authorities should attach weight to when considering applications. These matters are,

- a) effective use of previously development (brownfield), untidy or derelict land*
- b) sites being well planned or soft landscaped in such a way as to positively enhance the environment and increase its openness*
- c) promoting opportunities for healthy lifestyles, such as ensuring adequate landscaping and play areas for children*

⁷ National Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2015)

- d) *not enclosing a site with so much hard landscaping, high walls or fences, that the impression may be given that the site and its occupants are deliberately isolated from the rest of the community.*

2.4 Local Policies

2.4.1 The West Berkshire Local Plan, which covers up until 2026, is made up of several key documents, including the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD), and the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). The policies that are relevant to this appeal and to landscape and visual issues are listed below. Full extracts of these can be found within the adopted Core Strategy DPD.

CS7: Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

To meet the identified need for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople(56) pitches within the District, the Council will make appropriate provision through the identification of sites within the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD. The requirement for transit sites will be addressed through the same DPD. In allocating sites, and for the purpose of considering planning applications relating to sites not identified in the relevant DPD, the following criteria will need to be satisfied for sites outside settlement boundaries:

- *“Safe and easy access to major roads and public transport services;*
- *Easy access to local services including a bus route, shops, schools and health services; Located outside areas of high flooding risk;*
- *Provision for adequate on site facilities for parking, storage, play and residential amenity;*
- *The possibility of the integrated co-existence between the site and the settled community, including adequate levels of privacy and residential amenity both within the site and with neighbouring occupiers;*
- *Opportunities for an element of authorised mixed uses;*
- *The compatibility of the use with the surrounding land use, including potential disturbance from vehicular movements, and on site business activities;*

- *Will not materially harm the physical and visual character of the area;*
- *Where applicable have regard for the character and policies affecting the North Wessex Downs AONB.”*

CS14: Design Principles

2.4.2

To that extent as it relates to landscape and visual issues, the policy stipulates that new development,

“...must demonstrate high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area, and makes a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire. Good design relates not only to the appearance of a development, but the way in which it functions. Considerations of design and layout must be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to the immediate area, but to the wider locality. Development shall contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Development proposals will be expected to:

- *Create safe environments, addressing crime prevention and community safety.*
- *Make good provision for access by all transport modes.*
- *Ensure environments are accessible to all and give priority to pedestrian and cycle access providing linkages and integration with surrounding uses and open spaces.*
- *Make efficient use of land whilst respecting the density, character, landscape and biodiversity of the surrounding area.*
- *Consider opportunities for a mix of uses, buildings and landscaping.*
- *Consider opportunities for public art.*
- *Conserve and enhance the historic and cultural assets of West Berkshire.*

- *Provide, conserve and enhance biodiversity and create linkages between green spaces and wildlife corridors.*
- *Make a clear distinction between public and private spaces and enhance the public realm.*
- *Consider opportunities for including Home Zones (71) where practicable.”*

CS 18 Green Infrastructure

2.4.3 This policy states that,

“The District’s green infrastructure will be protected and enhanced. The Council will work with partners, including Parish Councils and the community to address the District’s green infrastructure needs and deficiencies as set out in the forthcoming Green Infrastructure SPD.

New developments will make provision for high quality and multifunctional open spaces of an appropriate size and will also provide links to the existing green infrastructure network. Specific standards for provision within new developments will be identified in the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD and through the masterplanning for strategic sites.

Developments resulting in the loss of green infrastructure or harm to its use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted. Where exceptionally it is agreed that an area of green infrastructure can be lost a new one of equal or greater size and standard will be required to be provided in an accessible location close by.”

CS19: Historic Environment and Landscape Character

2.4.4 Relevant to landscape and visual issues this policy states that:

“In order to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced, the natural, cultural, and functional components of its character will be considered as a whole. In adopting this holistic approach, particular regard will be given to:

- a) *The sensitivity of the area to change.*
- b) *Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.*
- c) *The conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of heritage assets and their settings (including those designations identified in Box 1).*
- d) *Accessibility to and participation in the historic environment by the local community.*

Proposals for development should be informed by and respond to:

- a) *The distinctive character areas and key characteristics identified in relevant landscape character assessments including Historic Landscape Characterisation for West Berkshire and Historic Environment Character Zoning for West Berkshire.*
- b) *Features identified in various settlement character studies including Quality Design – West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document, the Newbury Historic Character Study, Conservation Area Appraisals and community planning documents which have been adopted by the Council such as Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements.*
- c) *The nature of and the potential for heritage assets identified through the Historic Environment Record for West Berkshire and the extent of their significance.”*

TS3: Detailed Planning Considerations for Traveller Sites

2.4.5

Insofar as it relates to landscape and visual issues, the policy states that,

“Proposals for development will be expected to comply with policies within the West Berkshire Development Plan and have regard to guidance outlined in the Government’s good practice guide on Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites where appropriate. In addition proposals will:

- *Provide an integrated water supply and drainage strategy in advance of development to ensure the provision of adequate and appropriate infrastructure for water supply and waste water, both on and off site. Development will be occupied in line with this strategy. All sites that are not connected to the mains sewerage system will ensure there are no deleterious effects to Special Area of Conservation (SACs) and river and wetland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).*
- *Incorporate appropriate vehicle access and turning space.*
- *Include appropriate landscaping proposals, retaining and incorporating key elements of landscape character into the site design.*
- *Be well designed and laid out with shelter and amenity buildings which are appropriately located and constructed of sympathetic materials suited for the purpose.*
- *Identify internal walking routes and show how they will be linked to existing routes including the Public Rights of Way network. They will also take advantage of the landscape features of value within the site. Opportunities to improve external routes to services and facilities will be sought.*
- *Identify appropriate green space/green infrastructure in line with the Council's adopted standards as set out in Policy RL1 of the Local Plan 1991 – 2006 (Saved Policies 2007).*
- *Provide a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in accordance with the Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual impact Assessment 3rd ed. 2013. This will inform the development design and layout of the site and requirements for green infrastructure.*
- *Provide an extended phase 1 habitat survey together with further detailed surveys arising from that as necessary. Appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures will need to be implemented, to ensure any protected species are not adversely affected.*

- *Provide appropriate mitigation to offset impact on key species and habitats through appropriate buffering, on-site mitigation and off-site compensation measures.”*

2.5 Thatcham Landscape Sensitivity Study (April 2009)

2.5.1 West Berkshire Council commissioned Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd to undertake a report to determine the integrated landscape sensitivity of the local landscape character areas which form the Local Development Framework study area. The key landscape sensitivity factors are set out under the ‘key elements’ and ‘other interests’, all of which should be taken into account.

2.5.2 It is intended to provide guidance to the local planning authority when deciding the type and scale of development that may be appropriate within West Berkshire whilst respecting its character. The appellant has not made reference to this document within the report.

2.5.3 The Appeal Site falls within LLCA 14F: Colthrop Manor Plateau Edge as identified within this study, with an overall sensitivity rating of medium, but which states importantly that the land,

“...is characterised by its open farmed landscape with major blocks of woodland, and undulating escarpment slopes forming part of the northern enclosure to the Kennet Valley. Settlement is sparse but the area is an important setting to north Thatcham”.

2.5.4 Furthermore, the LLCA (page 14) crucially identifies two key views of the undeveloped rural countryside north of Thatcham (between the AONB and the town’s northern edge) that are important to maintaining the integrity of the LLCA, but also in the context of this Appeal Site,

- ‘View south across Kennet Valley from Park Farm’
- ‘View from Floral Way up to Harts Hill’

2.5.5 The document goes on to confirm that there are common characteristics with the area to the north (those being the characteristics associated with land towards the AONB),

“Wider Landscape - LLCA 14F: Colthrop Manor Plateau Edge has strong landscape links with 14A and continues eastwards beyond the study boundary. There are also common characteristics with 13D to the north. The area is part of the hillsides that enclose the Kennet Valley, rather than the plateau to the north. The area is highly visible from the Kennet Valley and the Greenham escarpment, with localized views from neighbouring areas.

Setting to the urban form - LLCA 14F: Colthrop Manor Plateau Edge provides a strong contrast to the urban form of Thatcham town and Colthrop Park 20D. It forms an important setting to Thatcham and rural transition zone between the urban area and the AONB. The boundary to Thatcham is long and the urban edge exposed in the west and much better screened or broken up in the east.”⁸

2.5.6 The key elements of the landscape sensitivity and other landscape sensitivity interests are outlined within the assessment read,

“Key elements of landscape sensitivity

- *Lower slopes of important ridgeline*
- *Big Gully a local landmark*
- *Good views across the area and long views across the Kennet Valley*
- *Colthrop Manor is a local landmark*
- *Well vegetated boundary to the A4*
- *Little development with scattered farmsteads and minor roads*
- *High and medium/high historic landscape sensitivity in west and east*

⁸ Landscape Sensitivity Study: Thatcham, pg 15

- *Part of Dunston Park (not registered) and good archaeological evidence*
- *Historic settlement at Siege Cross Farm*
- *Blocks of Ancient Woodland and Woodland BAP habitat*

Other landscape sensitivity interests

- *Variable field boundaries and neat hedges*
- *Extensive area of grade 3 agricultural land*
- *Colthrop Park is visually intrusive but otherwise the area has a good level of tranquillity*
- *Exposed edge to the perimeter road*
- *Central core is medium to low historic landscape sensitivity*
- *Medium to low bio-diversity sensitivity*
- *Both Village Design Statement and Parish Plan.*⁹

2.6 North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement – Setting (2019)

2.6.1 North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership prepared this document to inform local planning authorities, landowners, applicants and other interested parties regarding development outside but within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The document is also intended to guide policy makers, to assist in the preparation of planning applications and to assist in the decision making process. It forms an extension of the principles laid out within the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2019-2024). It states,

“The setting of the North Wessex Downs does not have a defined geographical boundary but it should be addressed as the area within which development and land

⁹ Landscape Sensitivity Study: Thatcham, pg 14 & 15

management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design can be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The surroundings of the North Wessex Downs AONB and the protected landscape of the AONB add value to each other as the landscape and landforms link visually and functionally, joining the surroundings to the AONB. Proposals for change in the setting should, therefore, have regard to the inter-relationship with the AONB and the landscape character and special qualities.

Examples of adverse impacts on the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB could include:

- *development which would have a significant visual impact on views in or out of the AONB;*
- *breaking the skyline, particularly when this is associated with developments that have a vertical emphasis and / movement (chimneys, plumes or blades for example);*
- *loss of tranquillity through the introduction or increase of lighting, noise, or traffic movement or other environmental impact like dust, vibration, spatial associations and historic relationships;*
- *introduction of abrupt change of landscape character;*
- *loss of biodiversity, particularly if of habitats or species of importance to the AONB;*
- *loss of features of historic and natural landscape interest, particularly if these are contiguous with the AONB;*
- *change of use of land such that to cause harm to landscape character; and*
- *development individually or cumulatively giving rise to significantly increased traffic flows to and from the AONB, resulting in loss of tranquillity and erosion of the character of rural roads and lanes;*
- *Increase in air and water pollution.*

Adverse impacts might not be visual, as listed above tranquillity, a special quality of the North Wessex Downs AONB can be affected by a development which for example is noisy, even if not visible from the AONB.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership will expect local authorities, where appropriate, to take into consideration the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB when determining planning applications and, in accordance with their Section 85 duties, to ensure that only development that conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the AONB, in this case in relation to its setting, is supported.”

2.6.2

Avoiding Harm to the Setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB

“The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership does not set out to judge the precise extent of the setting of the AONB. The scale, height, siting, use, materials or design of a proposed development will determine whether it affects the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. A very large or high development may have an impact even if some considerable distance from the AONB boundary. Therefore, there is no defined boundary where the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB ends.

However, distance away from the AONB will obviously be a material factor in forming a decision on any proposals, in that the further away a development is from the AONB boundary the more the impact is likely to be reduced. Development likely to result in a negative impact on the setting of the AONB will not be supported, in accordance with meeting the key aims of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan and the primary purpose of designation. Accordingly, development resulting in the conservation of the existing setting of the AONB and its enhancement will be supported where all other environmental considerations are also acceptable.

The best way of minimising adverse visual impacts on the setting of the AONB is through avoidance in the first place so that schemes conserve and enhance the setting of the AONB. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership therefore, in relation to development within or affecting its setting, expects the following:

- *measures to consider impact on the setting of the AONB, including where required through Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments;*

- *care over orientation, site layout, height and scale of structures and buildings;*
- *consideration not just of the site but also the landscape and land uses around and beyond it;*
- *careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;*
- *restraint and care over the installation and use of street lighting, floodlighting and other external lighting to prevent harm to the dark night skies of the AONB;*
- *the grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context (though detrimental impact on historic buildings/groupings will need special consideration to avoid insensitive development); and*
- *detailed mitigation measures, for example including native landscaping (where possible contributing to BAP targets), and noise reduction (though again landscaping in certain contexts can be damaging to historic features/deposits/landscape/character so again will require careful consideration).*

It is considered that many issues in relation to new development within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB can be resolved through careful design, appropriate materials, location and layout and mitigation measures from landscaping to use of minimal, well-directed and full cut-off street (and other external) lighting. “

2.7 National Character Area Profile

2.7.1 The Site lies within National Character Area profile 129: Thames Basin Heaths as defined by Natural England, 2014. The key characteristics of the NCA 129: Thames Basin Heaths relevant to the Site are as follows,

- *“Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys floored by London Clay. In the far west, Chalk forms the Hampshire Downs escarpment and the river beds of the Kennet and Pang.*

- *High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites.*
- *Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium.*
- *Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses.*
- *Prehistoric earthworks such as barrows and hill forts mark promontories on the plateaux. Archaeology is well preserved on historic heathland. Mosaics of open heathland and grassland with scrub, secondary woodland and plantation. Valley bogs, ponds and streams enhance diversity.....*
- *Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland.....*
- *Valley floors are wet with ditches, numerous watercourses, ponds, waterfilled gravel pits, reedbeds and carr. Historic features include mills, relict water meadows, and canals such as the River Wey Navigations.*
- *20th-century conurbations, including Camberley, sprawl along the Blackwater Valley, with associated roads (including the M3) dissecting heathland and woodland into blocks. Elsewhere, there are winding lanes and historic*

*dispersed villages and farmsteads of traditional, locally-made brick and tile.*¹⁰

2.8 District Level Landscape Character Assessment

2.8.1 The Site lies within landscape character area WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic as identified within the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (LUC, August 2019). For reference, some of the elements are outlined below,

2.8.2 The key characteristics of LCA WH4 are;

- 1) *“Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge - Plateau gravel drift deposits and sands and gravels overlaying clay have created an undulating topography with both steep and gentle slopes rising to a central ridge between Bradfield Southend to the east and Ashmore Green to the west.*
- 2) *Presence of surface water and small streams - A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage, with surface springs along the clay interface and a highly divided network of small streams. The Bourne, a tributary of the River Pang, follows a prominent valley running eastwards from the eastern end of the central ridge, and numerous smaller streams run down from north and south from the main ridge line. In the Beenham and Bradfield Southend areas the streams have become deeply incised, creating pronounced ridges.*
- 3) *Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths - The area is distinctive for its varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which result in nutrient-poor soils. The mixed sand, clay and gravel substrate creates a mosaic of land cover including damp pasture, paddocks and heathland, the latter concentrated in Bucklebury, but woodland is a prominent landscape element. Most former heathland is now*

¹⁰ NCA 129: Thames Basin Heaths, Natural England, pg 6

tree-covered, with coniferous plantation and regenerated woodland, and interlinked linear woodland extends down the slopes from the ridge across the clay towards the valley landscape, including thin wooded valleys centred on minor tributary streams such as The Bourne. On localised tracts of more fertile loamy soils, mostly on lower, gentler slopes such as those dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham, there are areas of arable farmland.

- 4) *Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows - There is a varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post-medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate, and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Field boundaries include dense and intact hedgerows with trees, with larger amalgamated fields present in some areas.*
- 5) *Parklands are a characteristic feature - Areas of parkland are evident, defined by well-established pastures with mature free-standing trees. Some are still associated with their estate houses, as at Englefield, whereas other areas of parkland stand-alone e.g. Woolhampton Park.*
- 6) *Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment - A fairly well-populated area with numerous, mostly linear, villages along the ridge (including Bradfield Southend, Beenham, Cold Ash and Hermitage), with further settlement spread out along the roads during the 20th century. Smaller hamlets and farmsteads are often located on the mid slopes, whilst larger private residences and large institutional buildings, such as Douai Abbey and several private schools, are scattered throughout the woodlands. The main building material is brick and tile, although timber framing and thatch also occur. Tree cover means that settlements typically feel rural and isolated, with many houses set back from the road and fronted by trees (this is particularly the case at Upper Bucklebury), although modern*

development is more evident towards the western end of the character area at Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Hermitage and along the B4009.

- 7) *A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape - Busier roads, notably the M4, are limited to the fringes of the character area, and within the area the undulating and wooded landscape contains and limits the influence of roads. On the ridge slopes, winding rural lanes pass through open and wooded landscapes, and are frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks.*
- 8) *An accessible landscape - An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape, connecting the small settlements, and many of the woodlands and commons have open access.*
- 9) *Quiet, intimate and secluded character - The varied landform and land cover means that there are many secluded locations within this area, despite the relatively dense settlement pattern, and a sense of elevated separation from the urban areas to the south west.*¹¹

2.8.3

The valued features and qualities of LCA WH4 are,

- 1) *“Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB - The eastern half of the character area, and land to the north of the southern edge of the ridge between Cold Ash and Woolhampton forms part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and open farmland, deriving from the area’s varied geology, and the sense of seclusion often engendered from this mix, are noted as special qualities relating to this character area¹². Historic parklands are also noted as being a particular feature of the lowlands above the Kennet Valley.*

¹¹ West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, August 2019, Pg 178 & 179

¹² Special qualities derived from The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan.

These are supplemented by the information contained in the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002)

- 2) *The visual role of the wooded ridge crest and slopes - The woodlands along the east-west ridge create a unifying backdrop for the larger settlements to the south of the area and within the AONB to the north. Views from the ridge are frequently limited by tree cover, creating a secluded character, but open locations provide views south to similar woodland and heathland mosaic forming the southern side of the Kennet valley, and north to AONB chalk downland rising to a wooded ridge to the north of the Pang. Open farmland on the lower slopes contributes to a sense of separation between the elevated character area and the towns of Thatcham and Newbury in the valley below.*
- 3) *The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats - The variety of woodland forms, including valley woodlands and wooded ridgelines, the presence of heathland, rivers and the varied field pattern, make this an interesting and intimate landscape. The ecological importance of heathland, ancient woodland and grassland habitats adds to landscape interest.*
- 4) *A very rural character away from major roads and urban edges - Landform and tree cover mean that away from the urban edges of Thatcham and Newbury and from the M4 there is a rapid transition upslope to a more intimate rural landscape, with small traditional villages and farmsteads and dark skies. The transition in character along Stoney Lane between Shaw and Ashmore Green is an example of this. The wooded context of settlements and roads helps integrate their built form into the landscape.*
- 5) *Recreational value - The strong network of public rights of way, the extensive areas of open access land and the proximity of these to the large settlements of Newbury and Thatcham give the character area a high recreational value.*
- 6) *Historic landscape character - The vernacular character of many of the settlements, the parklands and estates that bring order to the landscape,*

historic field patterns and the role of woodland in limiting urban influence, combine to evoke a perception of strong time-depth.”¹³

2.8.4

The detractors associated with LCA WH4 are as follows (importantly they mirror the key issues associated with the North Wessex Downs AONB LCA, given the proximity and similarity between the areas;

- 1) *“Past hedgerow loss for arable farming - Loss of field boundary elements in the latter half of the 20th century, especially hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, reducing the variety and scale of the landscape in some areas. This is chiefly evident in locations away from woodlands and steeper slopes.*
- 2) *Changing land use patterns resulting in gradual loss of landscape variation and Biodiversity - Conversion to forestry and lack of management over the last century led to loss or decline of deciduous woodland, with its associated variety and ecological interest. Afforestation and, as a result of lack of grazing, the development of scrub woodland, resulted in a significant reduction in the extent of open heathland; however there has been some recovery of the latter as a result of clearance of invasive vegetation carried out since the early 1990s. Dairy farming has now ceased in the area, and animal husbandry has been reduced to sheep and cattle raising. The main farming activity is cereal and rape seed production.*
- 3) *Increase in horse paddocks - Paddocks with weak boundary features (e.g. post and wire fences) and poor quality grassland have a localised detrimental impact on landscape character, often typifying settlement fringes.*
- 4) *Impact of the M4 on character - The M4, which passes through short sections of the character area at the far eastern and north-western ends, and the A4 which forms the southern boundary between Thatcham and the*

¹³ West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, August 2019, Pg 180

eastern end of Woolhampton, are audibly intrusive locally; however visually their impact is limited by tree cover alongside the routes and/or within the wider landscape, and for parts of the M4 by cut grading.

- 5) *Decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements - The expansion of Thatcham and Newbury since the mid-20th century, and also of villages within the character area, has reduced the physical and perceptual separation between settlements. This is particularly evident at the western end of the character area, where there is near coalescence along the main connecting roads between Newbury and Thatcham, Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Curridge and Hermitage.*
- 6) *Increased suburbanisation - Modern housing along main routes and on adjacent cul-de-sacs, together with street lighting and pavements, has introduced suburban characteristics to some places, particularly where there is less tree cover to mask changes e.g. the southern end of Cold Ash and linear development along the B4009 Long Lane just north of Shaw. Incremental development of the countryside settlements is also an issue, including the enlargement of curtilages, security lighting, entry gates etc.*
- 7) *Loss of gradation between settlement and countryside - Farm buildings and small pasture fields adjacent to settlements have proved vulnerable to development (typically of small residential clusters), due in the former case to presence of existing structures and in the latter to the screening/containment provided by boundary features. However, farm buildings, even when development has left them adjacent to settlement edges, contribute to rural character when they retain a relationship with farmland; and small enclosures, even when used as paddocks, form a transition between settlement and countryside that can contribute positively to landscape character, particularly when they retain a relationship with a historic settlement core.*
- 8) *Increased traffic on the rural lane network - There is pressure on the network of rural lanes, many of which are single track with few passing*

places. Heavy traffic on narrow lanes has a significant impact on countryside character, but standard highway improvements such as widening, kerbing, signage and broad visibility splays can create a more urban character which is out of context as well as encourage greater usage.”¹⁴

2.8.5 The landscape strategy for LCA WH4 is;

- 1) *“Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB - Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its varied landscape of woodland, heathland and farmland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.*
- 2) *Conserve and restore heathland characteristics - Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of re-wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites. Consider potential for reintroduction of grazing management.*
- 3) *Promote appropriate woodland management - This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas (e.g. alongside the M4). Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnected valleys: the aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in*

¹⁴ West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, August 2019, Pg 180 & 181

- areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation, and to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform.*
- 4) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements - Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields and around horse paddocks. Preserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.*
 - 5) Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements - Retain a sense of distinction between individual settlements through a clear understanding of the role of landform, tree cover and rural buildings in characterising settings and in forming boundaries that conserve and enhance distinctions in character – e.g. the historic farmstead at Henwick, along a rural lane, contained by tree cover and on rising ground, marks a rapid change to a rural landscape from the nearby edge of Thatcham. Avoid extended linear development along roads, which creates a more developed character resulting in the loss of individual settlement identity. More small scale focused development set back from main routes often has less impact on character and can be more readily contained by landscape.*
 - 6) Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside - Where possible retain small, enclosed fields around villages, and farm buildings which contribute positively to rural character.*
 - 7) Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way - Avoid measures to ease traffic flow that would have an adverse impact on character. Retain and manage hedgebanks, ditches and verges and replant hedges on banks where these have been lost, including individual oak trees planted at irregular intervals to maintain continuity and enhancement of the existing landscape character. Consider potential to designate Quiet Lanes, and measures to discourage the use of narrow lanes as ‘rat runs’ or by overly large vehicles – e.g. adequate signage and lower speed limits.*

8) *Maintain open views from routeways - Whilst woodland and hedgerow planting is generally to be encouraged, sporadic long views across open land add to the variety that characterises this area. Gaps between dwellings that offer views across open farmland help to retain rural settlement character.*¹⁵

2.9 Relevant Appeal Decisions

2.9.1 In dismissing an Appeal at Lenham Rd, Headcorn in Kent¹⁶, the Inspector considered the differences between landscape and visual harm, and the effectiveness of mitigation since,

*“10. The appellants would be prepared to undertake landscaping to improve screening of the site from the road and to strengthen the hedge on the south west boundary. They also suggest a realignment of the access track. However, whilst these measures might well, in time, mitigate the harm to the appearance of the countryside from public viewpoints they would not address the harm to the intrinsic landscape character.”*¹⁷

2.9.2 Indeed, it is my view that even if this Inspector finds that the proposed landscape scheme is sufficient in visual terms or can be made sufficient through conditions, I consider that there is still material harm to the character of the countryside in this location through the siting of inappropriate development in a sensitive location.

¹⁵ West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, LUC, August 2019, Pg 181 & 182

¹⁶ Appeal Decisions APP/U2235/A/13/2198352 and APP/U2235/A/13/2198345.

¹⁷ Appeal Decisions APP/U2235/A/13/2198352 and APP/U2235/A/13/2198345.

3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES

3.1 TDA Landscape Statement of Evidence

- 3.1.1 In order to try to address the landscape and visual concerns TDA have prepared a Landscape Statement of Evidence, to accompany a revised site layout plan. As noted above, the Council's policy TS3 Detailed Planning Considerations for Travellers Sites, there is a requirement to provide a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The TDA Statement of Evidence (hereafter referred to as 'The Statement') is not a comprehensive LVIA, therefore does not comply with policy, and is deficient in a number of ways as follows.
- 3.1.2 The Statement makes no reference to the National Character Areas, the Thatcham Landscape Sensitivity Study (April 2009), the AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment, which are available at the time of writing. These are important in understanding the landscape context of the site.
- 3.1.3 The Statement makes no analysis of the value attributes or characteristics of the Appeal Site (pre-development) as an undeveloped parcel of land, its contribution to the local landscape character of the area. Instead, the emphasis in the conclusion at 6.4 is an incorrect claim that this is a "previously developed (brownfield)" Site, with the inference being that this will provide betterment. My review of Aerial mapping (MF Appendix A, Figure 3) shows the pre-development arrangement of the Appeal Site to have been rural and unaltered/ unchanged for over 20 years until the Appeal Site was developed post 2020. The baseline position for the Appeal Site is that which occurred prior to the unauthorised (and now refused) development occurring. Only a small part of the Site can be considered previously developed land.
- 3.1.4 The Statement does not identify the key components of the Appeal Site or the local landscape character (pre-development), nor for any specific elements or perceptual features such as openness and tranquillity that are likely to be affected by the scheme, such as;

“...overall character and key characteristics, individual elements or features, and specific aesthetic or perceptual aspects...”¹⁸

- 3.1.5 The Statement does not evaluate judgements on the susceptibility of the landscape (or Appeal Site) to accommodate the proposed development or combine them with the value of the landscape receptor in order to ascertain the sensitivity of any receptors, as required by GLVIA3¹⁹.
- 3.1.6 The Statement does not combine judgements on the sensitivity of receptors with the magnitude of the effect, in order to understand the significance of that effect²⁰.
- 3.1.7 The Statement contains three paragraphs claiming to be the ‘Landscape Character Impact Assessment’ at 5.17-5.19. It wrongly alleges that because something may not be visually prominent, this means there is effectively no harm to character. I evaluate the effects on character below.
- 3.1.8 The Statement contains a review of visual receptors, which is deficient in so far as there are missing receptors and as well as an understating of the effects. MF Appendix A, Figure 1 Viewpoint Location plan, shows the wider area I have identified as having the potential for visual effects, including from Cold Ash to the northwest of the Appeal Site, and a residential area along Southend to the west, in addition to those identified in The Statement. I evaluate the effects on views below.
- 3.1.9 The Statement does not distinguish between the sensitivity visual receptors, which is a function of its susceptibility to change and the value attached to the view, as set out in GLVIA3²¹, which states,

“6.33 The visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include:

- *Residents at home (but see Paragraph 6.36);*

¹⁸ Para 5.34, p.86 GLVIA3

¹⁹ Figure 5.1, p.71, GLVIA3

²⁰ Figure 5.1, p.71, GLVIA3

²¹ Para 6.31-6.34, p.113-114, GLVIA3

- *People, whether residents or visitors, who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape and on particular views;*
- *Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.*

Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes tend to fall into an intermediate category of moderate susceptibility to change. Where travel involves recognised scenic routes awareness of views is likely to be particularly high.”

- 3.1.10 The Statement has not considered the change in views to occupiers of residential properties near or adjacent to the Site. As above, GLVIA3 is clear that residents at home are most susceptible to change, and also confirms that “... *it may also be appropriate to consider private viewpoints, mainly from residential properties.*”²² It is my opinion that these residential views should have been included in the Appellant’s assessment due to their intervisibility with the Site.
- 3.1.11 Section 4 of The Statement concerns the Revised Scheme, Landscape Strategy and other measures. From my visit, I note that only part of the Appeal Site has caravans, day rooms or mobile homes at present, as such there will be an increase in the number of visible elements and therefore an intensification in the amount of development (should the Appeal scheme be allowed).
- 3.1.12 At 4.2 it claims the revised layout “*careful positioning and orientation of mobile homes and day rooms.... whilst minimising their visual impact on the surrounding landscape*”. I consider that the re-orientation of mobile homes now forms a ‘wall’ of white colour contrasting running along the Appeal Site frontage, which will increase the visual impact of the scheme. In particular, this will include views from Cold Ash (it is notable that the Site has an open, exposed edge along its northern boundary –

²² Para 6.17, p.107, GLVIA3

refer to my photos in MF Appendix A, Figure 2, sheets 4 and 5 – which show clear outward views towards Cold Ash.

- 3.1.13 The Statement claims that the effectiveness of the planting scheme will only take 2-3 years to establish (section 5.5 TDA), I find this unlikely and an exaggeration, especially where the Appeal Site has open edges that are more exposed to the white colour contrasts (from Cold Ash), or where the viewpoint receptors are more elevated (to the northeast).
- 3.1.14 The Statement claims in conclusion (5.14) that in 2-3 years the revised scheme will have established and “will have no discernible impacts upon views..”. I disagree with this statement, as I consider the scheme will still cause harm after 2-3 years. At this point in time (by reference to the photo example in Appendix 3 of The Statement), the planting will clearly still be establishing and it will not have reached a height to screen the mobile homes. For those viewers/ receptors who are not standing right next to the planting belt and are set back at distance, including slightly elevated positions, the viewer will still be able to see the mobile homes.
- 3.1.15 The Statement includes a Visual Appraisal (section 5, 5.4- 5.13). I comment on specific views as follows,
- 3.1.16 Viewpoint 1: I do not consider the impacts will be ‘nullified’ (as is suggested) or residual impact will be ‘no change’, since there will be mobile home(s) repositioned lengthways to the foreground with some very new planting, which will take time to be established. I consider this to be Moderate Adverse.
- 3.1.17 Viewpoints 3 and 4: I agree with The Statement.
- 3.1.18 Viewpoints 5 – 7: I do not consider the impacts will be ‘nullified’ as claimed - with the repositioning of mobile homes (and the introduction of all 7) the contrasting white tones will become more apparent than the current view, particularly from the vicinity of view 5 – the existing barn is visible and mobile homes will extend to wrap around the rear of this element. The Appeal Site’s eastern boundary is not entirely planted, so views will remain from the higher ground to the east. I agree that planting will assist to a degree in the longer term, but not to the degree stated in 2-3 years.
- 3.1.19 Viewpoint 8: I agree with The Statement.

- 3.1.20 Viewpoints 2 and 9: The author of The Statement has selectively chosen views on Lawrences Lane that are set back from the Appeal Site and at distance behind existing features, in an attempt to demonstrate a lack of harm. However, I would invite the Inspector to consider the harm to visual amenity along the entire Appeal Site frontage, as being the key section of the lane subject to impacts arising from the unauthorised development. I have considered the lane in this context below.

3.2 Site Location and landscape context

- 3.2.1 The following sections of text form my appraisal of the Appeal Site, its value, contribution to the character of the area and then an assessment of the effects of the proposed development.
- 3.2.2 The Appeal Site is located in open countryside (albeit close to the settlement edge) immediately beside Lawrences Lane, a peaceful and tranquil, rural lane recently closed to through traffic as a result of an Active Travel plan implemented by West Berkshire Council.
- 3.2.3 The settlement to the south/west comprises the modern edge of Thatcham, which is well softened by a mature backdrop of trees, woodland (including Little Copse) and vegetation patterns, meaning there is a transition from urban to rural character, which occurs on the junction of Lawrences Lane, just north of Acorn Drive.
- 3.2.4 Prior to development, the Appeal Site was quite clearly an area of open countryside under agricultural use that was characterised by grassland containing a barn, with boundaries of native trees and hedges, and a backdrop of woodland on rising ground. These characteristics, together with the lack of development (sparse) and the quiet rural lane are typical of and contiguous with the rural area and form the representative features of the LCA. In the wider landscape, there is a continuing strong sense of cohesion, where the field patterns are irregular and several blocks of woodland cloth the slopes leading up to the AONB and ridge, with similar features that mirror those of the lower slopes.

- 3.2.5 Views along the lane prior to development in March 2021 show that the Appeal Site formed part of the rural character of the lane, with a series of open or glimpsed views either side of the lane, from where the viewer could appreciate a rural context (see photos MF Appendix A Figure 4). As such, it can be seen that the Appeal Site formed a key component in those views of the rural character of the area beyond the settlement, indeed it was not an untidy or derelict site. It is also clear that from aerial photographs, it is evident that the Appeal Site was undeveloped (aside from a barn) in 2020 and in the near 20 years leading up to the incursion in March 2021.

3.3 Landscape Value, Susceptibility and Sensitivity

- 3.3.1 The Appeal Site does not lie in a designated landscape; however, it lies within the setting of a designated landscape and there are some attributes of the AONB (which recognises character, value and quality) to the north that are shared with the characteristics of the lower slopes extending down to the edge of Thatcham. It is recognised that landscapes do not start and end at the boundaries of a Character Area, the landscape runs through areas so a hard line is not drawn. As mentioned earlier, the value of the Site and the surrounding area is not explored within The Statement. As a result of the unauthorised development, the Appeal Site has a character and appearance that is wholly incongruous and in total contrast to both the inherently rural surrounding landscape and the settlement edge.
- 3.3.2 I acknowledge that the Appeal Site does not form part of a Valued Landscape (for the purposes of the Framework, i.e para 174a); however, all landscapes including undesignated ones have a value (and there are no locally designated landscapes in West Berkshire),
- “the fact that an area of landscape is not designated either nationally or locally, does not mean it does not have any value..... and more recognition that ordinary landscapes also have their value, supported by the landscape character assessment approach”²³.*

²³ Para 5.26, p.83 GLVIA3

3.3.3

The table and paragraphs below provide a summary of my assessment of the landscape value of the land and the landscape context and surrounding area with an overall judgement on value, using GLVIA3 guidance notes (Box 5.1, p.84) which identifies 8 key areas to help identify valued attributes, included in the table below. I have also taken into account the most recent guidance from the Landscape Institute, which is their Technical Guidance Note TGN-02-21 ‘Assessing landscape value outside national designations’.

Criteria: (Box 5.1, GLVIA3, pg.84)	MF Comments
Landscape Quality	<p>The structures and development on the Appeal Site are recognised as not contributing to the quality of the area. The pre-development baseline and landscape context are both of much greater quality and display many of the components and qualities that are representative of the LCA.</p> <p>The incongruous qualities of the Appeal Site are fully reversible and therefore it could be easily restored to contribute to the surrounding landscape that is of good quality and condition and contributes to value (without development).</p>
Scenic Quality	<p>The scenic quality of the existing Appeal Site is currently reduced as a consequence of the unauthorised development. This is in stark contrast to the surrounding scenic qualities in a landscape that has coherent visual unity and a strong sense of place, in a location where the Appeal Sites immediate context forms part of the key views expressed in the LCA. The Appeal Site would contribute to scenic quality in the area if returned to its pre-development agricultural state.</p> <p>Therefore, the site (without development) contributes strongly to value within views of the surrounding landscape of scenic quality.</p>
Representativeness	<p>The existing Site is currently not representative of the surrounding landscape and represents an isolated detractor within it, elements which could easily be removed.</p> <p>The pre-development attributes of the Appeal Site and the surrounding landscape are</p>

Criteria: (Box 5.1, GLVIA3, pg.84)	MF Comments
	<p>highly representative of the LCA and its key features, being grassland surrounded by hedges and trees, and an isolated barn in keeping with the character of the area.</p> <p>The Appeal Site is of value within the surrounding landscape and (without development) contributes to the coherence and fabric of the surrounding representative landscape.</p>
Rarity	<p>The landscape both of the Site and surrounding landscape do not contain any particular landscape features noted for their rarity.</p>
Conservation Interests	<p>The Appeal Site itself does not have any Listed Buildings or Conservation features within the boundary; however, the north west boundary along Lawrences Lane is an old hedge bank with mature trees.</p> <p>There are a few Listed buildings within the surrounding landscape. However, there are several landscape conservation features in the surrounding landscape, for example areas of semi natural ancient woodland (some SSSIs), irregular field patterns, old oaks and historic hedgerow boundaries of medieval and post medieval origin, as well as historic parklands and heathland.</p>
Recreational Value	<p>Whilst the Appeal Site itself does not support public access for recreation, it lies adjacent to Lawrences Lane, which is a key access for walkers, runners, cyclists and dog walkers etc., accessing the countryside and connecting to PROWs. The value is amplified by the recent closure of part of the lane (north corner of the Appeal Site).</p> <p>Additionally, the Appeal Site does feature within views across the landscape from the nearby network of routes, and therefore of value in the appreciation of the open countryside.</p>
Perceptual Aspects	<p>The overall perception of the LCA is one of coherent visual unity and a strong sense of place with distinct features that are similar to those in the AONB to the north and is immediately apparent stepping away from the edge of Thatcham. The increasing sense and feeling of tranquillity (with less traffic noise) has been increased with the closure of the lane.</p>

Criteria: (Box 5.1, GLVIA3, pg.84)	MF Comments
Associations	There appear to be no particular persons (artists or writers or events in history) that are associated with the site.
Overall Value Judgement	<p>Taking all the above value factors into consideration, I consider the Value of this location to be of Medium-High Landscape Value locally.</p> <p>This contrasts with the value of the Site itself, which has new features that contrast and detract compared to its undeveloped pre-development baseline position.</p>

3.4 Susceptibility

3.4.1 Part of the baseline approach for LVIA is the consideration of susceptibility, which in GLVIA3 is stated as being;

“the ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies”.

3.4.2 I consider the susceptibility of the landscape overall to be of **Medium-High Susceptibility**. This is an established landscape with a well-defined character where only well-considered changes could be accommodated without loss of key characteristics, individual elements or features and specific aesthetic or perceptual aspects or, overall landscape character.

3.5 Landscape Effects

3.5.1 The key landscape issues related to these proposals are in relation to their permanence, character, density in context with the surrounding landscape where the proposals mean that the effects on landscape receptors, including local character of the site and the surrounding landscape will be permanent and irreversible.

3.5.2 The following table summarises my assessment of the landscape effects of the proposed development, compared with its pre-development position.

			The Appeal Site (Lawrences Lane)		Further comments
Receptor	Sensitivity	Phase	Magnitude of change	Significance / Level of Effect	
Landscape Features and Perceptual Aspects					
Land Cover (Agricultural Grassland)	H	Construction	High	Substantial Adverse	The proposed development causes a permanent and total loss of the agricultural grassland, when compared with the pre-development position, with the introduction of new elements, hard surfacing, parking and fencing.
		Year 1	High	Substantial Adverse	
		Year 15	High	Substantial Adverse	
Agricultural Field Pattern	H	Construction	Medium	Substantial-Moderate Ad	The proposed development will interrupt the Agricultural Field Pattern, as a result of further sub-division of land which carve up the field into smaller components for each plot; however, it is recognised that the overall framework of the original field pattern will be maintained.
		Year 1	Medium	Substantial-Moderate Ad	
		Year 15	Medium	Substantial-Moderate Ad	
Vegetation: Existing trees and hedge structure	H-M	Construction	Low	Slight Adverse	The proposed development results in a net increase in new features overall, including trees, hedges and scrub planting, which will contribute to the Appeal Site resource and its character. However, there would be a loss of vegetation along the Lane, should passing place(s) be required for vehicles with caravans in tow and/or a pedestrian access is required at the southwest corner.
		Year 1	Low	Slight Beneficial	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate Beneficial	
Landscape Openness	M	Construction	Medium	Moderate Adverse	The proposed development will result in a loss of openness as a result introducing new built elements (24 elements – caravan, day rooms and mobile homes), together with hard surfacing, vehicles and associated domestic paraphernalia. New planting will help counteract the loss of openness over time.
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate Adverse	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate-Slight Adverse	
Settlement Pattern	H-M	Construction	High-Medium	Substantial-Moderate Ad	The proposed development lies close to the existing settlement; however, the existing settlement lies to the west of Lawrences Lane and is well integrated, with long rear gardens with trees and mature vegetation patterns to either side of the lane, which is well defined. The proposed development will step beyond that into rural open countryside, extending built form along the lane into the undeveloped gap.
		Year 1	High-Medium	Substantial-Moderate Ad	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate Adverse	

			The Appeal Site (Lawrences Lane)		Further comments
Receptor	Sensitivity	Phase	Magnitude of change	Significance / Level of Effect	
Lighting	M	Construction	Medium	Moderate Adverse	The proposed development will inevitably result in new lighting features forming an obvious presence in the locality beyond the settlement edge, including from mobile homes and outdoor lighting. Some lighting can be controlled by condition, but it is likely to be visible, even with mitigation in place.
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate Adverse	
		Year 15	Low	Moderate-Slight Adverse	
Tranquility	H-M	Construction	High	Substantial Adverse	The proposed development inevitably results in a loss of tranquility, through the introduction of built form and the presence of people and domestic activity (cars, people, animals, garden machinery etc.,) beyond the settlement edge in rural open countryside.
		Year 1	High	Substantial Adverse	
		Year 15	High	Substantial Adverse	
Character of Lawrences Lane	H	Construction	High	Substantial Adverse	The proposed development results in a clear loss of rural character along a section of Lawrences Lane, through the introduction of new elements which are alien to the countryside character (including caravans, mobile homes and day rooms) beyond the settlement edge in rural open countryside. Prior to the unauthorised development, the open nature of the countryside was experienced on both sides of the lane, with an appreciation of open grassland with well treed backdrops, this experience has been removed. Alterations to the lane including passing place(s) and loss of vegetation will further detract from the character, as would the introduction of stepped access in the southwest corner, although it is recognised that nos. 40/41 Southend has rear gated access onto Lawrences Lane (which is domestic). Whilst new planting may help soften the impact of new elements, it will start to enclose one side of the lane entirely, eliminating gappy views across the open field.
		Year 1	High	Substantial Adverse	
		Year 15	High	Substantial Adverse	
Overall Site Character	H-M	Construction	High	Substantial Adverse	Taking all the attributes and individual features into consideration, there will be a wholesale alteration to the character of the Appeal Site as a result of the proposed development. Although, there are planting proposals, these will take some years to establish; however, there will still be harm to the character of the Appeal Site compared to the baseline position, pre any development.
		Year 1	High	Substantial Adverse	
		Year 15	High-Medium	Substantial-Moderate Adverse	
Landscape Character					

			The Appeal Site (Lawrences Lane)		Further comments
Receptor	Sensitivity	Phase	Magnitude of change	Significance / Level of Effect	
LCA H4	M	Construction	Medium	Moderate Adverse	The proposed development will cause permanent harm to a relatively small part of the character of the area; however, the development incorporates some new planting which forms part of the overall change to character.
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate Adverse	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate-Slight Adverse	
Qualities and Setting of the AONB (i.e. land beyond LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons – part of Lowland Mosaic)	H	Construction	Negligible	Negligible	The proposed development lies within the very edge of setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB, that is land lying between the 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons and the built settlement edge of Thatcham. However, it is recognised that although there are very apparent changes to the Appeal Site itself and local character, these will not be felt in the wider context of the AONB or its setting, given the proximity of the settlement edge in relation to that setting. In addition, there are no views of the Appeal Site from the AONB that have been identified, which lies at c.800m distance beyond a ridgeline. As a result, I do not find material harm to the setting of the AONB.
		Year 1	Negligible	Negligible	
		Year 15	Negligible	Negligible	

3.6

Visual Effects

3.6.1

I have taken some additional photographs to demonstrate the views both in and out of the Appeal Site. Since 2019, the use of single frame shots has become commonplace in LVIA photography, since presenting wide panoramas on A3 sheets are too small to provide a representation of a development²⁴. In addition, I have provided some 'google streetview' snapshots of the Appeal Site from Lawrences Lane as it was in March 2021. I am also aware that the unauthorised development has not been completed, as a stop notice was served. Therefore, it is my understanding that many of the elements (caravans, cars, mobile homes and day rooms) that would form the Revised Site Layout are not present on the Appeal Site. Existing views of

²⁴ LI: Visual Representation of Development Proposals TGN 06/19, p17; para 4.2.2 and Type 1 Summary (MF Appendix D).

mobile homes (for example), therefore only reflect a partial picture of the final development where development is already visible.

3.6.2 It is important to consider the effect of year round views, including when trees have no leaf cover, primarily between the end of October and April.

3.6.3 In addition to TDAs visual effects within The Statement (which I concluded are understated – see above), I have identified the following views which should form part of the assessment.

			Lawrences Lane		
Receptor	Sensitivity	Phase	Magnitude of	Significance / Level	
Southend (public realm in residential area)	M-L	Construction	Low/ Negligible	Slight Adverse	The proposals result in a limited change from the amenity value associated with a open countryside to a filtered views of white mobile homes on elevated ground beyond the lane in winter, between gaps in the building line. Although the presence of existing vegetation will help soften views, the contrasting white colour will be glimpsed. Once established the development will remain less visible, softened by planting.
		Year 1	Low/ Negligible	Slight Adverse	
		Year 15	Negligible	Negligible	
Residential properties, primarily Nos 41/40 on Southend	H	Construction	Medium	Moderate Adverse	The proposals result in a clear change from the amenity value associated with a field in the rural open countryside to a line of mobile homes (and other elements visible in gaps) on elevated ground beyond the lane; although the presence of existing vegetation will help soften views, the contrasting white colour will be apparent above the double row of fencing and new planting from houses and their gardens. Once established the development will remain less visible, softened by planting.
		Year 1	Medium	Moderate Adverse	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate-Slight Adverse	
Settlement edge at Cold Ash/ Cold Ash Hill	H	Construction	Low	Moderate-Slight Adverse	The proposed development will form a new visible element from properties along Cold Ash Road, where a line of contrasting white colour mobile homes will be most apparent wrapping around the northern boundary of the Appeal Site, which is only partially vegetated.
		Year 1	Low	Moderate-Slight Adverse	

			Lawrences Lane		
Receptor	Sensitivity	Phase	Magnitude of	Significance / Level	
		Year 15	Low	Slight Adverse	Due to gaps in the vegetation along Lawrences Lane, it will take a number of years for the proposed vegetation to establish, although it is unlikely to completely screen the development.
Lawrences Lane (Site frontage)	H	Construction	High	Substantial Adverse	The proposed development will completely alter the visual amenity of the lane from one side, from an appreciation of open countryside pre-development (with views of the grassland field, barn and a wooded backdrop) in views along the lane, to one of mobile homes (in contrasting colours) and other elements, including domestic paraphernalia. Whilst the planting will help soften the proposals, it will still enclose the views and reduce the open qualities of the frontage pre-March 2021).
		Year 1	High	Substantial Adverse	
		Year 15	Medium	Moderate Adverse	

4 Summary and Conclusions

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- 4.1.1 My name is Mark Flatman. I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and a Director of Liz Lake Associates, Chartered Landscape Architects and Urban Designers (LLA). I have a degree and a Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Greenwich University, and I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I have worked in professional practice since 1996. During this time, I have prepared landscape proposals for a range of projects including private landowners, historic landscapes, and educational, commercial and residential developments in town and rural settings.
- 4.1.2 My evidence covers the character, setting and appearance of the rural Site and considers the landscape and visual issues associated with the proposed permanent development, together with a review of the effects of the proposals on the character of the landscape and the changes in visual amenity. In this regard, my evidence supports the landscape related reasons for the Council's 5th Reason for Refusal.
- 4.1.3 The Site lies within landscape character area WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic as identified within the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (LUC, August 2019).
- 4.1.4 The Appeal Site is located in open countryside (albeit close to the settlement edge) immediately beside Lawrences Lane, a peaceful and tranquil, rural lane recently closed to through traffic as a result of an Active Travel plan implemented by West Berkshire Council.
- 4.1.5 The settlement to the south/west comprises the modern edge of Thatcham, which is well softened by a mature backdrop of trees, woodland (including Little Copse) and vegetation patterns, meaning there is a transition from urban to rural character, which occurs on the junction of Lawrences Lane, just north of Acorn Drive.
- 4.1.6 Prior to development, the Appeal Site was quite clearly an area of open countryside that was characterised by a partially grassland parcel containing a small element of

previously developed land with a barn, with boundaries of native trees and hedges, and a backdrop of woodland on rising ground. These characteristics, together with the lack of development (sparse) and the quiet rural lane are typical of and contiguous with the rural area and form the representative features of the LCA. In the wider landscape, there is a continuing strong sense of cohesion, where the field patterns are irregular and several blocks of woodland cloth the slopes leading up to the AONB and ridge, with similar features that mirror those of the lower slopes.

- 4.1.7 Views along the lane prior to development in March 2021 show that the Appeal Site formed part of the rural character of the lane, with a series of open or glimpsed views either side of the lane, from where the viewer could appreciate a rural context (see photos MF Appendix A Figure 4). As such, it can be seen that the Appeal Site formed a key component in those views of the rural character of the area beyond the settlement, indeed it was not an untidy or derelict site. It is also clear that from aerial photographs, it is evident that the Appeal Site was undeveloped (aside from a barn) in 2020 and in the near 20 years leading up to the incursion in March 2021.
- 4.1.8 The proposed development will cause irreversible and permanent harm to the local character of the area, the character of Lawrences Lane and to views from a number of receptors, as set out above. Accordingly, it fails to accord with the Council's policy CS7: Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, since there is material harm to the physical and visual character of the area. Furthermore, the harmful development fails to respect or enhance the character and appearance of the area, as required by CS14 and it does not contribute positively to local distinctiveness or sense of place. As such the Council's requirement through policy CS19 is that of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced; however it is clear that the proposed development does not conserve or enhance landscape character.
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