

Landscape

SUMMARY Proof of Evidence

Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Section 78 appeal against the refusal of planning permission

Witness: Liz Allen CMLI

Subject of Evidence: Landscape

Appeal: APP/W0340/W/24/3356688
APP/W0340/C/24/3351139

Site: LAND SOUTH OF SANDHILL, HAMPSTEAD NORREYS
ROAD. HERMITAGE

Proposal: PART RETROSPECTIVE. CHANGE OF USE OF LAND
FOR THE FORMATION OF 5 GYPSY/TRAVELLER
PITCHES COMPRISING EACH OF 1 MOBILE HOME, 1
TOURING CARAVAN AND 1 DAYROOM

Date: APRIL 2025

Council Reference: 23/00815/FUL

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The evidence which I have provided for this appeal is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution.
- 1.2 My evidence addresses the landscape and visual impacts of the full application on the appeal site. As the appeal site is set within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, the proposed development will fundamentally need to conserve and enhance the character and qualities of the National Landscape.
- 1.3 Within Section 1 of my proof, I set out my professional credentials and the scope of my evidence.
- 1.4 Section 2 of my proof sets out the National and Local Plan policies against which I have considered the application.
- 1.5 Section 3 of my proof provides a summary of the landscape context and character of the appeal site, setting out the relevant landscape character assessments. These include the North Wessex Downs AONB (National Landscape) Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2002) (CD8.22), National Character Area 129 (NCA 129) Thames Basin Heaths (CD8.21): and West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment August 2019 (WBLCA 2019). (CD8.24) Hermitage Design Guidelines and Codes September 2022 (CD8.25) and the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan 2023-2039 (CD8.8)
- 1.6 The appeal site is located within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape: *Landscape Type 8: Lowland Mosaic* and *Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons* (NWD AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002). Described as containing a variable land cover which forms an intricate mosaic of woodland and pasture with small areas of remnant heathland, large interconnected woodland blocks and a strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees. As stated under the heading of key management requirements the overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons, with conservation of key assets including pasture, field patterns and hedgerows. There is also a need to conserve and enhance this small-scale rural character from development,

whereby the encroachment of larger settlements can result in a change in scale and also the nature of their settlement boundaries.

- 1.7 At a more local level and as per the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019, the appeal site is set within *Landscape Character Type: Woodland and Heathland Mosaic* and *Landscape Character Area WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (LCA WH4)*. In summary, LCA WH4 is described as a varied, complex and attractive land cover mosaic, with a varied field pattern with strong hedgerows and dominated by woodland with remanent heaths. Valued features and qualities for this area (WBLCA 2019 page 180) include the North Wessex Downs National Landscape designation and the varied landcover mosaic with its field pattern, described as an interesting and intimate landscape, where heathland, ancient woodland and grassland habitats add to landscape interest. A listed detractor for this character area also addresses the issue of loss of gradation between settlement and countryside, whereby small pasture fields have become vulnerable to development.
- 1.8 As per the WBLCA 2019, the Landscape strategy for LCA WH4 primarily concerns itself with the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape. Additional detailed requirements also include: conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements, including hedgerows; retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements, including the avoidance of extended linear development along roads and conserve elements which mark the transition between settlement and countryside.
- 1.9 My section 3 also highlights the objectives as set out within the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) 2023-2039 (CD8.8) and Hermitage Design Guidelines and Codes September 2022 (CD8.25). These include the views towards the open countryside as well as views from the countryside towards the village settlement.
- 1.10 Section 4 of my PoE set out a description of the appeal site and its surrounding landscape context. Overall, where the appeal site is located has a good fit with the description of the landscape character assessments.
- 1.11 Section 5 of my PoE provides a summary of the proposals including the requirement for the 2.3m high acoustic fence which will align the northern boundary of each pitch and the removal of a stretch of the roadside hedgerow for sight lines and the proposed pedestrian path.

- 1.12 Section 6 of my PoE provides a summary of my original assessment of Draffin's LVIA. Overall Draffin's LVIA did not follow the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition 2013 which resulted in a biased assessment which supports the proposed development. Within my PoE, I detailed how I reached this conclusion, by showing how Draffin's assessment methodology did not comply with the GLVIA 3rd Ed; there was insufficient reference to the National Landscape; there was also limited reference to the WBLCA 2019, especially the valued features of this landscape, the detractors and the overall landscape strategy. Fundamentally Draffin did not use the pre-development condition (grassed field) of the appeal site as the baseline for the LVIA. Draffin's visual assessment was also incomplete and the proposed planting measures inadequate for their required function to mitigate the adverse visual and landscape effect on the landscape.
- 1.13 I also provide a summary of Draffin's visual assessment alongside my own assessment. Although the Zone of Theoretical Visibility is limited to a small area, there are a high number of well used public routes and locations in close proximity where the appeal site and proposed development will be visible from. These include views from the adjacent B4009 and Eling Way both resulting in a major/moderate adverse visual effect. This would mean that the proposed development would result in changes to the view and the enjoyment of that view so that the proposed development dominates the view. It would also introduce many intrusive or incongruous elements that would harm the appearance and scenic quality of the view.
- 1.14 Finally, within Section 6, I address the suitability of the proposed mitigation measures. The proposed mitigation measures will not be robust enough to significantly reduce the visual effect on the identified visual receptors and will also not as require conserve and enhance this area of the National Landscape. Any proposed mitigation screen planting would also take an unacceptable amount of time to establish, leaving views open to the proposed development for a number of years. Also, it will impossible to mitigate the open access and associated visibility splays required into the appeal site, where the proposed development will continually be visible.
- 1.15 Within section 7 of my PoE, I set out my own landscape assessment of the proposed scheme. I firstly assess the direct effect of the development proposals on the landscape features of the appeal site (grass, hedgerow, trees), then the effect on the landscape character, the settlement edge character and the surrounding landscape character. I then finalise with the overall impact on the landscape character area within the National

Landscape and the West Berkshire's local landscape character area. The development proposals will result in a direct loss of a small field of grassland, a length of treed hedgerow, both valued features which contributes to the rural character of the settlement edge of Hermitage. Furthermore, the development proposals will also have a permanent effect on the appeal site's landscape character, changing from an open field to an area dominated by the five pitches including circa 115m of 2.3m high acoustic fences, mobile homes, static caravans, utility buildings, hardstanding and garden areas all suburban in character, resulting in a permanent substantial adverse landscape effect. Overall, as the development proposals cannot be successfully mitigated this will result in a permanent change to the rural landscape character of the surrounding landscape and settlement edge character of Hermitage, resulting in major adverse landscape effects.

- 1.16 With regard to the NWD National Landscape, I assessed the effect of the proposed development on the Landscape Type 8: Lowland Mosaic and Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons. My assessment showed that the proposed development will result in a permanent major adverse landscape effect, which will also not conserve and enhance the National Landscape.
- 1.17 At a more local level, I then provided an assessment on the local landscape character *LCA WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic*. This was undertaken by following how to assess the suitability of a proposal as set out within Appendix 5 of the WBLCA 2019. Following this methodology my assessment showed the development proposals will not contribute to the landscape strategy, will have an adverse effect on the key characteristics of this area, harm valued features and qualities and exacerbate an identified detractor. This LCA is also described as an accessible landscape providing direct access to the countryside from Hermitage. The Eling Way which is located to the east of the appeal site provides a well-used multi recreational path, views from this path will be degraded by the proposed development. Overall, the proposed development will have a major adverse landscape effect on *LCA WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic*, which cannot be mitigated
- 1.18 Section 8 of my PoE provides an assessment against National and Local Plan policy. (West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) ADPP5, CS7, CS14 and CS19, Housing Site Allocations DPD (2006-2026) Adopted May 2017: Policy TS3. and the West Berkshire Emerging Local Plan (2022-2039 (CD8.9) Policies, SP2, SP7, SP8, DM15 and DM20. Policy ADPP5 (and WBC Emerging Policy SP2 North Wessex Downs National Landscape) recognises the area as a National Landscape where development will be

required to respond positively to the local context, conserving and enhancing local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the National Landscape. Policy CS19 (and WBC Emerging Policy SP8) considers the conservation and enhancement of the local landscape character areas of West Berkshire. I have shown within my PoE, how the undeveloped character of the appeal site contributes to the landscape character of this open area of countryside set within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. As stated within Policy CS19 ... *in order to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced particular regard will be given to ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.*

1.19 I fully support the Council's reason for refusal and conclude that the proposed development is therefore contrary to NPPF paras, chapter 2, para 7, 8(c), chapter 12, (para 135 a, b & c) and chapter 15 (para 187 (a) and 189. Planning policy for traveller sites 27; the West Berkshire Local Plan Core Strategy, Policies ADPP5, CS7, CS14, CS19; Housing Site Allocations DPD (2006-2026) Adopted May 2017 Policy TS3 and the West Berkshire Emerging Local Plan (2022-2039 (CD8.9) Policies, SP2, SP7, SP8, DM1, DM15 and DM20.

1.20 In conclusion, the proposed development will result, in my opinion, the following:

- Permanent harm to the National Landscape with development which will not conserve and enhance the special qualities of this designated landscape
- The loss of and degradation of valued features and qualities which contribute to the rural settlement character of Hermitage
- Introduction of ribbon development in an area of open countryside within the National Landscape, along a main road into Hermitage which will be visible for a high number of people and visitors

1.21 Accordingly, on this basis I respectfully invite the Inspector to dismiss this appeal.