

**NINE PROPOSED CARBON ZERO DWELLINGS
WITH MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT
ON LAND AT GAMFORD HOUSE
GAMFORD LANE ROSSETT**

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

prepared by

**APPLETON DEELEY PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE
CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

on behalf of

**URBAN DEVELOPMENTS AND CONSTRUCTION
TREVALYN, WREXHAM**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Assessment forms part of an application for planning permission for the development of nine Carbon Zero dwellings with mixed-use provision, on a brown field site at Gamford Lane, Rossett. It should be read with reference to Drawing no 1.

1.2 Its purpose is to establish the nature and type of landscape character that relates to the application site, because it is located within an area of open countryside unmistakeably defined as of agricultural character. By contrast with this wider character type, the application site cannot be described in this way, because it is of a materially different character which, if not recognised for its present characteristics, could lead to an injustice in determining this application within its pertinent parameters.

1.3 In a previous application and discussion with Wrexham Borough Council, it has been maintained by the Council that the application site is of agricultural character. This assessment demonstrates that such a description is not only inaccurate and unjustified, it is plainly wrong and potentially harmful to the fair and proper determination of this application. The Council has claimed that proposals for residential development of the site would be harmful, because they have regarded it as a site of agricultural character. It is the applicant's case that the proposed residential and mixed-use development would result in substantial beneficial change, from the site's present post-industrial condition, to that afforded by way of the proposal which would see a development of residential character located within a landscape setting commensurate with the recognised agricultural character of the wider setting. Within this setting, other small residential developments have taken place over time to become part of its present landscape character.

1.4 From our assessment of the site's landscape character it is, in its present condition, demonstrably not that of agricultural character, but industrial.

1.5 This assessment demonstrates the applicant's case in this regard.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 National Resources Wales (NRW), has undertaken a country-wide assessment of National Landscape Character. It refers to sub areas of the National Landscape, in particular to Character Area NLCA14 Maelor, which includes all landscape character types in and around Rossett. It is therefore applicable to the application site and is used in this assessment in that regard.

2.2 Key characteristics of Area NCLA 14 are listed as follows :-

Key Characteristics

- **Flood plain or rolling lowland** - sandstone and siltstone / mudstone is overlain in places by glacial till, fluvio-glacial drift and river alluvium, for example, along the course of the Dee, giving rise to a gently undulating landform.

- **A rural agricultural character** - intensively farmed with much arable land and parkland, with more arable to the east.
- **Mixed native hedgerows with hedgerow trees** - in a medium scale field pattern, with larger scale fields to the east.
- **Small scale deciduous farm woodland** – occasional blocks interspersed with farmland.
- **Meres, mosses and flooding** - The flood plain of the River Dee. Scattered field ponds and mosses such as Fenn's Moss in the south east are distinctive features.
- **Relict medieval field patterns** - much of the pastoral west, characterised by ridge and furrow cultivation patterns, overlain by later, Parliamentary Enclosures.
- **Archaeology** - Prehistoric ritual and funerary sites and distinctive Medieval, moated, manorial sites occur within the area.
- **Small, rural village settlements, farms and parks** - compact nucleated hamlets and villages often of Medieval formation, for example, Bangor-on-Dee and Overton, with sandstone, red brick and grey slate frequently evident.
- **A unified agricultural composition landscape of simple composition** - with texture provided by a variety of land cover elements including pasture, rush, marsh, woodland and meres.
- **Closely related to the greater Cheshire plain**, characteristics that apply to the area where the application site is located .

2.3 From the above the most pertinent characteristics of that area are :-

- **A rural agricultural character**
- **Mixed native hedgerows with hedgerow trees**
- **Small rural village settlements, farms and parks – compact nucleated villages**

2.4 At Para 1.4 the NRW assessment refers to five key principles that apply in Landscape Character Assessment, those relevant to this matter are :-

KEY PRINCIPLE 2, which says, "*Landscape occurs at all scales and the process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale*"

KEY PRINCIPLE 4 says, "*A Landscape Character Assessment can provide a landscape evidence base to inform a range of decisions and applications;*"

2.5 For this matter to be addressed in accordance with current and recognised guidance, it is necessary to identify the actual landscape character type of the application site, albeit that it is of a small scale and different to any other character type in its proximity.

2.6 This background forms part of the basis upon which a judgement has been made between two very contrasting landscape character types. On the one hand is the character of the "host landscape" as exemplified by the foregoing whilst, on the other hand, are characteristics of the application site itself, which speak for themselves. Its character is clearly demonstrated by the following sequence of images, interspersed with the written narrative of this assessment.

2.7 The site's recent history is also relevant to the understanding of its present character, it was well-documented in a successful application to Wrexham Council for a Lawful Development Certificate issued on 9 July 2021 and prepared with regard to land uses of the site since 1997. The certified uses included B2 General Industry, B8 Storage and Distribution and Sui Generis uses of Haulage business with HGV Maintenance Depot

2.8 Research for that submission revealed that the site was developed for a variety of uses that never formed part of the conventional processes of agriculture in a rural area. Given the nature of uses that took place, the dominant use for a period in excess of ten years, was for the production of whey, carried out on an industrial scale, with buildings and ancillary equipment being erected or adapted to suit this purpose.

3.0 RECENT HISTORY

3.1 The following pages describe and illustrate substantial remaining buildings and infrastructure that were necessary to support this industrial process, together with the handling, storage and distribution of finished product to many destinations, some in the local area, others further afield.

3.2 Transportation was provided by the business owner, with a fleet of delivery vehicles based on the site, with facilities provided for their on-going maintenance and repair. Equipment and infrastructure, ancillary to the production and distribution processes, included a weighbridge with office, (existing), underground storage tanks (recently excavated), a surface level storage tank, (base remains evident), overhead pipework for transference of product in the making, linking between buildings (remnants remain), ventilation extraction flues (remnants remain), remains of winching equipment attached to a building, a drainage sump (still evident), a vast collection of delivery notes to various addresses in the North-West for considerable quantities of whey sold over a period in excess of ten years. Evidence of these statements is given in photos 1 to 10.

3.3 The artefacts referred to above bear testimony to the history of the application site since its last use which was followed by a long process of decay and dereliction. These factors combined together, with the result that the environmental characteristics they have generated have become evidence of activities totally incompatible with the landscape characterisation of “Agricultural “.

3.4 Buildings that remain are not suitable for any agricultural purpose, because they were constructed specifically for volume pig-rearing. Their layout and design are not appropriate for modern agricultural requirements, nor for the economies of scale essential for commercially successful modern farming. An economic viability assessment of conversion potential of the buildings was submitted with the previous application. Its conclusion was that their conversion was not economically viable.

Photo 1 overleaf shows the site before its deterioration had become advanced from frequent vandalism and before the removal of unsafe and insecure buildings.

3.5 Photo 2 shows the beginning of the whey production undertaking, with a weighbridge (existing) at the departure point of delivery vehicles and the office for management of the delivery process and a remaining building typical of those used for whey production. Photo 3 shows a former workshop once connected with the haulage business.

3.6 Throughout the site its buildings are linked with concrete, or concrete paving, roads, pathways and hard standings. This infrastructure occupies a considerable proportion of the site.

PHOTO 1 THE APPLICATION SITE, after whey production and vehicle storage had ceased



PHOTO 2



Weighbridge (to left of office building)

PHOTO 3



Former workshop

PHOTO 4



Whey mixing plant

PHOTO 5



Whey mixing plant

3.7 The whey mixing plant required a bespoke building for hopper storage, mixing and batching of the ultimate product. The buildings are entirely utilitarian in character, they do nothing to enhance their setting and indeed detract significantly from the wider rural landscape.

3.8 Photos 5 and 6 show the former whey mixing plant and underground storage tanks excavated and awaiting disposal. Ventilation ducts remain in situ on the mixing plant. Photos 7 and 8 show partially cleared buildings vandalised and unlawfully used for reported anti-social activities. Functional utilitarianism is evident throughout.

PHOTO 6



Whey mixing plant

PHOTO 7



Former underground storage tank

PHOTO 8



Partially cleared industrial buildings

PHOTO 9



PHOTO 10



Former workshops and residential buildings

PHOTO 11



Former residential building to site frontage

3.9 Photos 9 and 10 show former residential buildings extensively damaged over a prolonged period of time following cessation of whey production.

4.0 INTERPRETATION

4.1 The foregoing photo sequence illustrates the consequences of whey production on this site. **It is not possible to make a connection between this recent history and its respective consequences as shown in these photographs, with a site claimed to be of agricultural character.**

4.2 Furthermore, it is evident that improvement of the site's present condition, to the standard required to be commensurate with the wider site context, is essential if it is to contribute to, rather than to detract from, the environmental quality standard required by the context of the wider local landscape. In this regard that context is defined by information given on Drawing No 1.

4.3 Drawing no 1 (Location Plan and Character Setting) indicates a dispersed setting of residential buildings “nucleated” around the application site. This phenomenon has been described in this submission and former applications as **“building clusters”**. It is a matter to which the Council has given little regard, yet it is most apparent that it is the context within which this application’s proposals are entirely relevant. It is also a term used by Natural England in their description of landscape character types in the National Landscape Character Assessment.

4.4 The dispersal of building groups is an established aspect of the wider landscape setting, it affords a particular landscape character type to this part of the wider rural landscape and thereby its character, in this respect, should be regarded as a material consideration in determining this application.

4.5 Alongside that requirement comes the need to understand fully the landscape character of the existing site, which has now been demonstrated to be industrial, rather than agricultural. This is a reflection of its recent (over 10 years,) land use history and confirmation of its lawfulness by way of the granting of a lawful development certificate

4.6 The importance of the wider context is that it sets its own precedent, by being what it is in its own right. It is the result of cumulative planning decisions for development in this locality, that account for the nature and extent of development that has been authorised, or otherwise become lawful in the recent past.

4.7 In order to indicate what this means, the following images have been provided of the **“building clusters”**, referred to in this report. They are titled from descriptions used on Drawing no 1, which contains the building groups. With the exception of the application site, they are residential developments or conversions that have taken place outside the settlement limit and are as follows:-

- ***Darland Hall Area***
- ***Darland House and associated buildings***
- ***White Cottage and other buildings, Gamford Lane***
- ***Gamford and Rossett Road Cottages 1***
- ***Trevalyn Grange Farm and Barn***
- ***Gamford Road and Rossett Road Cottages 2***
- ***Lane Farm***
- ***Trevalyn 1***
- ***Trevalyn 2***
- ***Harwoods Lane***

4.8 The above are shown on Drawing no 1.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE WIDER LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

5.1 The site’s wider landscape context is characterised by a host landscape of agricultural character, in part contiguous with the settlement boundary and in other parts some distance from it. Within the latter parts, a residential pattern has emerged forming small-scale “nucleated” settlements, which we have referred to as “building clusters”. Whatever title is used, the effect remains the same, in that they have created a distinctive pattern in the landscape around a central point defined by the application site. Within this pattern the proposed use of this site for (inter alia) residential purposes, is entirely appropriate for integrating with existing uses. It would also be in keeping with the landscape character of the locality, because the application site’s position is being retained but is taking on a new and entirely appropriate use.

5.2 The following photo sequence and Drawing no 1 confirm the character of smaller scale residential development in the landscape context relevant to the application site :-

PHOTO 12 : DARLAND HALL AREA



PHOTO 13 : DARLAND HOUSE AND ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS



PHOTO 14 : WHITE COTTAGE AND OTHER PROPERTIES, GAMFORD LANE



PHOTO 15 : GAMFORD AND ROSSETT ROAD COTTAGES 1 (application site in background)



PHOTO 16 : TREVALYN GRANGE FARM



PHOTO 17 : GAMFORD ROAD AND ROSSETT ROAD COTTAGES 2



PHOTO 18 : LANE FARM



PHOTO 19 : TREVALYN 1



PHOTO 20 : TREVALYN 2



PHOTO 21 : HARWOODS LANE



4.8 It is our opinion that the Building Clusters form a valid part of the application site's wider context because they have created a distinctive pattern in the landscape around a central point defined by the application site. The proposed use of this site for, (inter alia), residential purposes, is an entirely appropriate use to promote integration of existing uses with those proposed by this application.

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