
HOLT ROAD HOUSING SCHEME

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

June 2018



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was undertaken by a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), with more than ten years post-qualification experience of the landscape and visual assessment of development projects. The LVIA was directed and overseen by a second CMLI with over twenty years similar experience.
- 1.2 The LVIA follows good practice guidance set out in *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (the GLVIA)¹ and adopts an approach proportionate to the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development, whilst not seeking to provide unnecessary detail. The conclusions of the LVIA have been determined through application of professional judgement, supported by reasoned justification. A detailed methodology is set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Landscape and visual effects are separate, although closely related and interlinked issues. Landscape effects are caused by physical changes to the landscape, which may result in changes to the distinctive character of that landscape and how it is perceived. Visual effects are changes to what can be seen by people as a result of what is proposed. A visual assessment assesses the change in visual amenity undergone by people (either individually or in groups) that would arise from any change in the nature of views experienced.
- 1.4 It should be noted that the landscape (including the context in which views are experienced) is dynamic, i.e. it is affected by social, economic, technological and climatic changes, all of which can influence patterns of land use, land cover and land management. As such, the baseline context for the LVIA is not static.

Description of the Proposed Development

- 1.5 The Proposed Development is described in the Planning Statement. The principal elements are summarised below:
- Construction of 62 no. new dwellings;
 - Provision of a new sports pitch located at the western edge of the Site, and overlapping land outside the Site boundary, which is also under the control of the Applicant;

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 3rd edition 2013. *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*. Routledge: Abingdon.

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- Associated access roads; and
 - Associated public realm landscaping.

1.6 The landscape proposals for the Site are illustrated indicatively on drawing 101, and would include retention of much of the existing boundary vegetation, and the planting of new trees and hedges within private plots, along boundaries with the access roads, and along the boundary between the housing area and the proposed sports pitch.

Legislative and Policy Context

1.7 Full details of the planning and policy background for the proposal, including an appraisal of effects on relevant landscape-related policies, as set out in the adopted Statutory Development Plan, are included in the Planning Statement. Key legislation and policy documents relevant to the LVIA are summarised below.

European Landscape Convention

1.8 The UK Government is a signatory of the European Landscape Convention (ELC), which became binding in March 2007. The Convention is aimed at the protection, management and planning of all landscapes and raising awareness of the value of a living landscape. It relates chiefly to public bodies and to the policies, plans and programmes produced by these.

1.9 The LVIA is a development specific process which accords with Article 6C. The LVIA is informed by extant Landscape Character Assessment studies (described in Section 3 below), which more directly relate to the provisions of Article 6C.

Planning Policy

1.10 Full details of relevant planning policies are set out in the Planning Statement. Relevant documents include:

- *Planning Policy Wales*, edition 9 published in November 2016; and
- *Wrexham Unitary Development Plan* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2005);
- *Wrexham LANDMAP Supplementary Planning Guidance* (published by Wrexham Borough Council 2007);
- *Local Planning Guidance Note 7. Landscape and Development* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2003);

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- *Local Planning Guidance Note 19. Wrexham's Town Character Areas* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2001);
 - *Local Planning Guidance Note 30. Design* (adopted by Wrexham County Borough Council 2009).

2.0 Methodology

Current Guidance

- 2.1 As noted in Section 1, this LVIA has been based on the published good practice guidelines set out in the GLVIA, and is proportionate to the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development.

The Study Area

- 2.2 The Study Area for the LVIA has been determined following a site visit to ascertain the surrounding context into which the Proposed Development would be introduced. This confirmed that due to the nature of the Site and its surroundings, and the type of changes proposed, that the influence of the Proposed Development would be very localised, and as such the study area covers the Site and its immediate vicinity only.

Significance of Effect

- 2.3 In the case of development (such as that proposed) that does not require Environmental Impact Assessment, there is no requirement to state whether an effect is significant or not. However, it is considered likely to be of assistance to the decision-maker if such a statement is included in the LVIA.
- 2.4 Not all landscape and visual effects arising as a result of a particular proposal will be significant. Furthermore, where likely significant environmental effects are predicted, this does not automatically mean that such effects are unacceptable. The acceptability of landscape and visual effects is a matter to be weighed in the planning balance alongside other factors. What is important is that the likely environmental effects of any proposal are transparently appraised and described, in order that the relevant determining authority can bring a balanced and well-informed judgement to bear as part of the decision-making process. The judgement made will depend on the specific circumstances being considered.

Consultation

- 2.5 Refer to the Planning Statement for details of consultations undertaken.

Limitations

- 2.6 The field visit to inform the LVIA was carried out in May 2018, when deciduous vegetation was in leaf. Where relevant to its conclusions, the LVIA has regard to likely seasonal change in visibility.

3.0 Baseline

Data Collection

- 3.1 Baseline data for the LVIA has been gathered by both desk and field based surveys. These have included review of extant landscape character assessment studies (see below) and field visits to gain an understanding of the landscape and visual context of the site.

Baseline Conditions

The Site and its Surroundings

- 3.2 The Site of the Proposed Development occupies the eastern two-thirds of an existing playing field located off the B5100 Dean Road, close to the eastern edge of Wrexham. The playing field where the Site is located is largely enclosed by suburban residential development, with a short section of the southern boundary along the A534 Holt Road being more open. The playing field is not public open space, but is used by the public at the discretion of the landowner. The location of the Site is indicated on Figure 1, and photographs looking towards the Site from nearby locations are illustrated on Figures 2a-b.
- 3.3 To the north, east and south, the Site borders onto the existing residential gardens of properties on Denbigh Close, Monmouth Road, and Goulbourne Avenue. Boundaries typically comprise close board fencing approximately 1.5 to 2m high, sometimes with vegetation also present including hedges of similar height, and occasional taller trees. As such, views into the Site from ground floor windows and gardens are well screened. There is also tree and shrub vegetation present within the Site itself, most evident along the north-eastern boundary with properties on Monmouth Road. Most properties have clear views into the Site from first floor windows.

3.4 The western boundary of the Site runs through the existing playing field. This area is also adjoined by properties in a similar fashion as described above. A day care centre with a small car park is located at the north-western edge of the Site.

3.5 In the south-eastern corner of the Site, the boundary adjoins Holt Road, rather than residential properties. A wire mesh fence (height approximately 2m) marks the boundary and there is a gate to allow access. There is no tree cover along this section of the boundary. On the southern side of Holt Road there are further residential properties, and some of these have views across the road into the Site.

Landscape Designations

3.6 The Site is not covered by any landscape designations at either a national or local level.

Landscape Character Assessment and Related Studies

3.7 LANDMAP is the formally adopted methodology for landscape assessment in Wales and, as such, forms the baseline for this assessment. The *Wrexham LANDMAP Supplementary Planning Guidance* (adopted 2007) subdivides the Borough into a series of four broad landscape types and twenty-seven geographically distinct landscape character areas (LCA).

3.8 The Proposed Development would be located within the Urban landscape type and within LCA 10: Wrexham Town. LCA 10 is further divided into sub-character areas (SCA), based on work undertaken in 2001 (which is also available as a separated SPG document referenced in Section 1 above). The Proposed Development would be located in SCA 4c: Recent Estates. An extract from the SPG relating to LCA 10 and SCA4c is included as Appendix 2 to the LVIA

Future Landscape Change

3.9 In the absence of the Proposed Development, it is assumed that the Site would continue in its current use, i.e. it would continue to be used as a playing field with the permission of the landowner, and that access by the general public via Dean Road and Holt Road would remain.

4.0 Assessment of Effects

Construction

- 4.1 Refer to the Planning Statement for a description of the construction stage of the Proposed Development.
- 4.2 Construction would, by necessity, require the use of specialist vehicles and other plant, some of which would be readily apparent by virtue of their colour, size or movement. In addition to the presence of these abnormal items, the very presence of construction activity on site, would change the appearance of parts of the Site, whilst this activity is ongoing.
- 4.3 Such construction activity would be clearly visible from first floor rear windows of approximately 25-30 properties bordering onto the Site and from the retained part of the playing field to the west. Some elements of construction are also likely to be evident from Holt Road, even if this is limited to views of a Site boundary hoarding. The temporary presence of construction activity would change both the character of the Site and views from nearby receptors for a period of approximately eighteen months.
- 4.4 Whilst temporary, this change is likely to result in some adverse effects due to the presence of new elements, which would be dynamic in nature and which would contrast with the more static nature of the existing Site.

Landscape Effects: Operational

Effects on Landscape Fabric

- 4.5 The landscape fabric of the Site comprises amenity grassland, with some scattered boundary vegetation including shrubs and trees.
- 4.6 Amenity grassland is commonplace both locally and nationally, and can easily be recreated via new seeding if necessary. Susceptibility to change is low. The playing field does however make a contribution to character locally, and has value to people by virtue of its functional uses. Overall value is medium. Overall sensitivity is low to medium.
- 4.7 The boundary vegetation comprises a range of different types of vegetation, including various native and non-native shrubs, and semi-mature and mature trees (mostly concentrated towards the southern boundary). Such a mix of vegetation is

not uncommon in a suburban context, but any replacement planting would require time to grow (and in the case of mature trees, a long period of time would be required), and as such, immediate like-for-like replacement is not possible. Susceptibility to change is medium to high. The boundary vegetation provides a sense of transition between the existing playing field and the houses and road beyond, and makes a positive contribution to character. Value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is medium to high.

- 4.8 The Proposed Development would result in the loss of the majority of the existing vegetation cover within the Site and its replacement with new houses, private gardens and boundary features, public realm landscaping, and internal access roads. This change would be permanent. At this stage, it is envisaged that the majority of the perimeter vegetation at the Site boundary would be retained, and that additional planting would be added. It is anticipated that full details of landscape treatments, including any measures required to protect retained vegetation would be set out in reserved matters submissions and/ or controlled via planning condition.
- 4.9 The area at the western edge of the Site would undergo limited change in order to create the proposed sports pitch.
- 4.10 There would be a large magnitude of change in the landscape fabric of the Site, which result in a moderate level of effect. Most of the more sensitive boundary vegetation would be retained, and new tree and hedge planting would be introduced. Given this, effects would not be significant. The net loss of vegetation cover within the Site would be adverse.

Effects on Landscape Character

- 4.11 The character of the landscape/ townscape of the Study Area is medium density late 20th century suburban. Two-storey houses with private gardens and occasional two-storey apartments predominate, with a mix of building styles and materials, and with occasional shops and community buildings. Quiet side streets and cul-de-sacs lead into housing areas from the main through roads. The susceptibility of the landscape/ townscape to the type of change proposed is low. Value is medium, due to the amenity function of the playing field. Overall, sensitivity is low to medium.
- 4.12 The introduction of the Proposed Development would lead to the loss of approximately two-thirds of the existing playing field and its replacement with new two-storey housing, associated garden areas, public realm landscaping and access

roads. There would be limited change to the remaining area of playing field in the western part of the Site, which would be subject to some improvements. None of these changes would be out of keeping with the existing character. The proportion of the Study Area that is built up would increase. Change would be permanent. The influence of the Proposed Development would be most apparent within the Site, from the adjacent properties, and from the short stretch of Holt Road that borders the Site.

- 4.13 A small to medium magnitude of change in character would occur, resulting in a minor to moderate level of effect. The existing suburban character would be maintained. Effects would be adverse but would not be significant.

Visual Effects: Operational

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 4.14 Receptors with views of the Proposed Development would comprise residents looking out of first floor rear windows within approximately 25-30 nearby properties (views from ground floor windows would be wholly or largely screened by retained garden boundary features), users of the retained section of the playing field (west of the Site), and users of Holt Road.
- 4.15 Residents have a high susceptibility to change in view from their properties. The views in question are not protected by any landscape designation and consist of views of a mixture of other properties and associated infrastructure, and open space. Nevertheless, people tend to value the views from their properties, and value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is high.
- 4.16 The users of the playing field will be aware of changes in their surroundings, but will often be focused upon the activity they are pursuing rather than views. Susceptibility to change is medium to high. The playing field is used permissively with the consent of the landowner (i.e. it is not public open space). It is not the subject of any landscape designations, but does have a clear recreation/ amenity function. Value is medium to high. Overall, sensitivity is medium to high.
- 4.17 Road users, whether in vehicles or on foot, have a medium susceptibility to change. There is little specific inherent value in the views available from Holt Road, which simply present a typical suburban scene. Value is low to medium. Overall, sensitivity is medium.

The Effects of the Proposed Development

- 4.18 The Proposed Development would introduce new two-storey buildings, and associated landscaping and access roads. There would be a new junction on Holt Road. Change would be permanent.
- 4.19 From the adjacent properties, the existing views across the playing field from first floor rear windows would be replaced by views of new houses and gardens, and glimpses of the new access roads through gaps between the new buildings. These views would not be dissimilar to views from the front windows at the same properties. Change experienced would differ at each property but typically would be moderate in magnitude, resulting in a moderate level of effect. Effects may be considered by some as adverse, but would fall within the expectations of what might typically be seen from a house in a residential area, i.e. views of other houses which are broadly similar in size, scale and architectural style. The general amenity of residents would be protected by the guidance set out in respect of housing layout design. Given these factors, effects would not be significant.
- 4.20 The properties south of Holt Road would have views of a new road junction and new public realm landscape treatments in this area, as well as some of the new properties at the south-eastern edge of the Site. This would replace the existing views across a road to a mesh fence with a playing field beyond. Change would be small to medium in magnitude, resulting in a moderate level of effect, which would not be significant. The frontage of the Site with Holt Road would have potential to be improved by the new ornamental planting at the entrance into the Site. As such, effects may ultimately be considered beneficial or neutral, rather than adverse.
- 4.21 Views experienced from the playing field would include the new properties at the western edge of the Site, including boundary treatments. Similar features are already visible on the other boundaries, and the changes associated with the Proposed Development would simply shorten views eastwards rather than result in any fundamental change. New tree and hedge planting along the eastern edge of the playing field would help integrate the new housing. A small to medium magnitude of change would occur, resulting in a moderate adverse level of effect, which would not be significant.
- 4.22 From Holt Road, relatively fleeting views of the new junction and associated landscaping would be available, and views of those properties at the south-eastern edge of the Site would also be available. Additionally, there would be a view into the

Site along the access road running north from Holt Road. Such change would be unremarkable in this context, where housing, ornamental planting and junctions with side roads are commonplace. Change would be small in magnitude, resulting in a minor to moderate level of effect, which would not be significant. The view from Holt Road would arguably improve somewhat as a result of the proposed planting at the new junction, and as such, effects could be considered neutral or beneficial.

5.0 Mitigation

5.1 No further mitigation measures are proposed.

6.0 Residual Effects and Conclusions

6.1 The Proposed Development would introduce new housing within a suburban context and would occupy a proportion of land currently used as a playing field. The Site is largely enclosed by existing suburban development, and the new development would be consistent with this existing character. As such, effects upon landscape character would not be significant.

6.2 The more sensitive elements of landscape fabric, i.e. boundary tree and shrub vegetation would be largely retained, and new tree and hedge planting would form part of the proposal. Effects on landscape fabric would not be significant.

6.3 Whilst the Proposed Development would be prominent locally, views of suburban housing are typical of what is experienced in the Study Area, and whilst some properties would experience changes in the composition of views, visual effects would not be significant.

APPENDICES

FIGURES