

**SITE AT HOME FARM
Gresford Road, Llay. Wrexham LL12 0NW**

**Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Appeal by Mrs Margaret Crewe**

PLANNING APPEAL 22th - 25th November 2016

**PINS Ref: APP/H6955/A/16/3147116
LPA Ref: P/2014/0905**

SUMMARY OF PROOF OF EVIDENCE : LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACTS

**Tom Hollick BA(Hons) DipLD CMLI
On Behalf of Mrs M Crewe**

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Introduction

- 1 My name is Tom Hollick, Consultant to BCA Landscape (Chartered Landscape Architects), appointed by the Appellant to address the landscape and visual impact issues arising from the Appeal. I have been a Chartered Member of The Landscape Institute since 1977. Much of my experience involves the assessment of potential development sites and the design of appropriate treatments to integrate them with their surroundings ; this covers both rural and urban settings

Scope of Evidence

- 2 The proposed development is for up to 365 houses and 300m2 of retail space at Home Farm, Llay. The application is in outline only with all matters reserved. My evidence considers the impact of the proposed development within the landscape context.
- 3 Reference is made to the Landscape & Visual Appraisal (LVIA, CD10), particularly the plans 01 - 09 in Appendix C, submitted to Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) in August 2015 as part of the Planning Application. My Evidence is supported by further Plans, numbered 10 - 16 in Appendix Two of my main Proof (CD69).
- 4 The Planning Application (Ref P/2014/0905) was submitted to the Planning Committee on 5th October 2015. Despite the Case Officer's (CO) analysis of the submission (contained in the CO Report CD34) and his recommendation for approval (CD34 'Conclusion' p.125) it was refused.

Site Appraisal - Landscape and Visual

- 5 The landscape and visual appraisal of the Home Farm site was carried out in accordance with the accepted GVLIA methodology as the first step in the design process leading to the submission of the Planning Application. It is thus an integral part of the process, thus in line with policy recommendations at both national level (TAN12) and local level (WCBC's LPGN).
- 6 The LVIA appraisal (CD10) identified the principal features of the site ; I have re-visited the site in preparation for the Appeal and the condition since 2014 is unchanged. The appraisal lead to the following key findings. First, that the zone of visibility is limited to the immediate context, a matter agreed through the inclusion of the LVIA Plan 04 (CD10 Appendix C) in the PSoCG (Appendix 4).
- 7 Second, that the site landscape of pasture, hedgerows, and linear tree groups is the prevailing character north and east of Llay, defined within the Landscape Character designation (LCA8) as 900ha within the Borough and extending further into the neighbouring authority of Cheshire West. It is thus a common feature within the context.
- 8 Thirdly, in terms of the effect on landscape the criteria set out in section 4 (4.5) of my Evidence concludes this is of low sensitivity, and development would be a low magnitude of change when considered against the context in which it would sit.
- 9 in terms of the potential visual effects, there are relatively few receptors to views of the site : the more sensitive viewpoints from dwellings are limited to the houses along the west side of Gresford Road, in Old Meadow Court, and more scattered dwellings in Chapel Lane (to the north) with two further houses on the south boundary. The LVIA notes that these all benefit from a degree of natural mitigation through the maturity of the perimeter hedgerows and trees.

Landscape Strategy

- 10 A landscape strategy was submitted as an integral part of the proposal. The key elements are shown on the Plan 08 Ver2 submitted with the Application (CD10, Appendix C) also summarised on Plan 17 (CD69, Appendix Two)
 - i) The retention of perimeter hedgerows and trees, thus maintaining the visual quality of the boundary, and providing screening and softening of any development in views from the surrounding area.
 - ii) The provision of greenspace around the south, west and north sides, an additional buffer between the existing and the proposed housing with the potential for further development as publicly accessible space, with more planting to enhance the setting and diversify habitats.
 - iii) Greenspaces within the illustrative masterplan, shown as 3.18ha, to provide additional benefit in publicly accessible space and the opportunity for further planting (to achieve enhancements to screening, setting and habitat diversity).

- iv) The addition of over 900m of new footpaths to improve linkages between the existing village, the Home Farm site, and the surrounding network of footpaths.
 - v) Prescriptions for the improvement of habitats through additional planting.
- 11 The detail resolution of the strategy would be undertaken at the Reserved Matters stage, and subject to Conditions (as currently set out in the PSoCG CD65, Section 7). However, the strategy establishes a firm brief for the landscape design element of the project, if approved.
- 12 The Council did not provide the Applicant with any evidence to refute the findings of the LVIA (CD10) which was carried out by an experienced Chartered Landscape Architect and which, at paragraph 7.8 concluded that -
- “... the development proposal will not result in any adverse effect considered to be of significance to either the character or appearance of the site and surrounding landscape setting that would make this proposal unacceptable in landscape and visual terms.”*
- 13 This view was also taken by the Case Officer who stated in his report (CD33, p119) that he was satisfied that an acceptable form of development is achievable without prejudice to the amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring properties, highway safety, and ecology, noting -
- “The indicative plan demonstrates that a broadly acceptable form of development is achievable within the site, including the provision of open space and landscaping that will contribute towards the appearance of the development, particularly along the Gresford Road and Straight Mile frontages, as well as being usable for recreation”.*

Reason for Refusal - Policy Context and Statement of Case

- 14 However, the Decision Notice (CD33) identifies that the proposal is contrary to the Policy PS2 (plus others, being PS1 and H5), and expresses the view that it thus constitutes a significant intrusion into the rural landscape. It also questions whether the proposal represents a logical extension to the village.

Does the proposed development constitute a significant intrusion into the rural landscape ?

- 15 I do not consider that it is - in landscape terms the principal features of the site edge are retained to continue their contribution to the rural setting. The Home Farm land cover of pasture is the prevailing feature in the area, identified by the Landmap classifications and extending further into the neighbouring authority. The use of a very small proportion (15.68ha) for residential development is a negligible amount

Is the proposal a logical extension to the built up area of the village.

- 16 This view is expressed in the WCBC Statement of Case (CD63) at 6.3. I have reviewed the series of historic development maps since the origin of the village in 1912, providing housing for those working at the Llay colliery then being opened up. I note the expansion of the village until 1975 took place west of Nant-y-Gaer woods, and that Gresford Road only provided access to the scattered farms and houses to the east. I conclude that Nant-y-Gaer was in fact the logical boundary to the original settlement of Llay, reinforced by its landform and trees. The colliery closed in 1966 ; subsequent development maps from 1984 to the present day show the development east of Nant-y-Gaer, developed in response to a different need, that of suburban housing.
- 17 This also follows the guidelines of Planning Policy Wales 8 (PPW8), in which section 4 notes that development in the countryside should be located within and adjoining settlements where it can best be accommodated in terms of infrastructure (in this case the ready access), landscape and habitat (in this case the integral landscape strategy). The expansion of Llay is thus logical when assessed against PPW8 criteria.

Visual Effect of the Landscape Strategy

- 18 It is accepted that the proposed development will have a visual impact, but that this is inevitable when greenfield sites are developed. In this respect the site already has a level of natural mitigation through the structure of hedgerows and trees both defining the site and within the immediate context, creating a restricted nature of the ZTV (as agreed).
- 19 The landscape strategy maintains the existing 'grain' of the landscape by the retention and development of perimeter hedgerows and the planting of additional woodland in the proposed greenspace. Once matured, and assuming a traditional scale of development, this strategy will limit the visual envelope (ZTVI) to the existing extent.

Landscape Effect

- 20 The site presents a logical extension to the Llay settlement building upon the modern residential expansion of the village set within a logical framework of settlement, highways, and the built development since 1975. It would be seen in the context of development on the west side of Gresford Road, thereby helping to mitigate its impact by setting within a residential context.
- 21 The loss of the fields within the Site will have a limited adverse effect on the wider resource. The development is likely to secure beneficial effects to the vegetation resource through the provision of a new area of public open space and structural landscaping measures, particularly on the boundaries. There will be benefits to habitat diversity and connectivity.
- 22 The proposed perimeter greenspace will secure a transition between the existing settlement and new development, screening or filtering views towards the development. There will be benefits for public leisure and recreation within this greenspace, primarily new footpath links and play spaces. It will also secure extended grassland habitats with seasonal wetland areas securing biodiversity benefits.

Visual Effect

- 23 I have considered the likely visual effect of the development. I have noted that the existing context provides a degree of 'instant' mitigation through the maturity of the boundary hedgerows and trees, retained in the site planning. I have described how the landscape strategy provides perimeter greenspaces, which in addition to the benefits summarised in 10.6 above will ensure that the development can be integrated into the surrounding landscape. It will not have a detrimental effect on the countryside. There is consequently no conflict with the Policy PS2.

UDP Policy Context

- 24 I have examined the UDP Policy context identified by the WCBC Statement of Case, and conclude there is no conflict with this. I have also reviewed the LPGN and conclude that the Home Farm design has followed these guidelines in producing the development proposals to the current stage.

Conclusion

- 25 I therefore conclude that the development at Home Farm will not result in any adverse effect considered to be of significance to either the character or appearance of the site and surrounding landscape setting that would make the proposal unacceptable in landscape and visual terms.