

Eileen Marshall

From: Eileen Marshall
Sent: 27 November 2023 17:55
To: Gillian McDermott
Subject: RE: W/23/02112/OUT - Orchard Farm, Defford Road, Pershore. Landscape comments

Gillian,

At the pre-application stage, 21/02481/PA for up to 450 dwellings, I advised that:

This is site CFS 0350 that I offered comments on to the Policy team as part of the SWDPR process. At that stage I objected to allocating the site for development as it is on rising ground and any development would be highly visible in the wider landscape in views from the east/southeast/south, and also in terms of the impact on the character and setting of Tiddesley Wood, a semi-natural ancient woodland.

Given these concerns, any application would need to be accompanied by a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – with visual impact being considered in both the local and more distant landscape, including from the elevated land of Bredon Hill.

In terms of landscape character, the site is located within the Landscape Type (LT) Wooded Estatelands as identified in the County Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). These landscapes are described as *'large-scale, wooded agricultural landscape of isolated brick farmsteads, clusters of wayside dwellings and occasional small estate villages. Key visual elements in this landscape are the many large, irregularly shaped ancient woodlands, often prominently situated on low crests.'* Identified Key Characteristics for the LT include:

Primary

- Large discrete blocks of irregularly-shaped woodland
- Mixed farming land use

Secondary

- Rolling topography with occasional steep-sided hills and low escarpments
- Semi-regular pattern of large, hedged fields
- Woodland of ancient character
- Discrete settlement clusters often in the form of small estate villages
- Medium distance framed views

The LCA advises *'This is a large scale landscape of farmed land and woodland. It relies heavily upon its woodland component as the critical element in defining its character.'* For this reason, it is my opinion that the setting of Tiddesley Wood is important in terms of maintaining the ancient wooded landscape character. The way in which the wood and its woodland character is perceived in public views would be adversely (in my opinion) impacted by development as proposed. The

extent of this impact, both in terms of landscape character and visual amenity and views, would need to be properly assessed by a LVIA.

Unless such an assessment could allay my concerns, I remain of the view as expressed for the SWDPR as outlined above.

The application now submitted in outline is for fewer (300) dwellings – nonetheless, the landscape and visual concerns remain.

As requested, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is submitted in support of the application, together with a Strategic Landscape Parameter Plan and an Illustrative Landscape Masterplan. The LVIA considers physical landscape features, landscape character and views/visual amenity.

The LVIA acknowledges the rising nature of the site, advising that the site falls from 50m AOD to the north/north-west to 20m AOD at Defford Road. It also acknowledges the adjacent Tiddesley Wood as being Ancient Woodland and SSSI – my colleague, the Natural Heritage Officer, will advise in respect of those designations.

The LVIA identifies views from the northern part of the site towards Pershore Abbey. Woodland planting shown indicatively on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan on lower contours could, over time, obscure those views – and this should be avoided, as those views towards the Abbey, and indeed those towards Bredon Hill from the site, are both enjoyed by the public and serve to aid legibility in the wider landscape.

There is a suggestion in the LVIA (paras 4.66-4.68) that, due to the relative containment provided by Tiddesley Wood, the site relates more to the urban area of Pershore than the open countryside further west. Although the urban edge of Pershore is adjacent to the site and there are views over the town from the site, I am of the opinion that the site maintains a rural character and that, together with Tiddesley Wood, contributes to the character of the wider Landscape Type within which the site is located.

The lighting baseline is outlined at paras 4.72 – 4.75, with reference to CPRE (Council for Protection of Rural England) “England’s Light Pollution and Dark Skies” mapping. Development on the site and associated lighting would extend the higher levels of illumination onto higher contours – extending the influence of urban development in the wider landscape at night, in views from the south/south-east (from the edge of Pershore at Defford Road, and from Pensham). I trust that the Natural Heritage Officer will advise on the effect of increased lighting on bats and the adjacent SSSI.

In terms of visual effects, the LVIA selects a number of viewpoints that are representative of visual receptors in both the local and wider landscape. Photographs are taken from those viewpoints illustrating views towards and across the site – the majority of those are taken when trees are not in leaf, representing ‘worst case scenario’ in terms of openness of views. Photographs from viewpoints (VP) 17 to 21 were taken with trees in leaf – however, in views from VP 17 and 18 within the cemetery grounds views would be largely contained by existing development on Dowling Drive. VP 19 and 20 are on Bredon Hill (see below) and VP21 on Defford Road adjacent to the site where vegetation being in leaf provides a greater degree of visual screening in the photograph than would be the case in winter months (also see below).

I agree that in the wider landscape the site is generally well contained to the north by vegetation and topography, and to the west by Tiddesley Wood. However, in the local landscape, the site is

highly visible from public rights of way that enter the site from the north, west and south-east (including Millennium Way) and from the east/south-east from adjacent properties on Dowling Drive and Defford Road. To the southern arc, the site is open to view in the wider landscape being on prominent, elevated ground.

Millennium Way bisects the site, connecting the River Avon corridor to the south/south-east and Tiddesley Wood to the west. This is a promoted leisure walking route which, across the site, joins two of Pershore's key landscape features. Open views from that footpath within the site are currently enjoyed towards both those features in the local landscape and, in more distant views across the river corridor, towards Bredon Hill approximately 3km distant to the south-east within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB). Notwithstanding the green corridor proposed within the development along the route of Millennium Way, the enjoyment of walking that part of the route and the views enjoyed from it would be negatively impacted by the development of suburban built form and the greater enclosure also created by proposed planting. At Figure 7 for example, Viewpoint 3 within the LVIA, the photograph illustrates the open view towards Bredon Hill that is currently enjoyed from Millennium Way – the LVIA advises '*....It will block views of the lower lying vegetation in the mid-distance, and in part of Tiddesley Wood to the west. In the distance, the ridge of Bredon Hill is still likely to be visible, in part. In the long term, the proposed green infrastructure strategy adjacent south of the Millennium Way will have established and matured to provide more filtered views and a softer setting to the built form*' – illustrating how adversely development and planting to soften that development would erode that open view. Similar adverse visual effects on views towards Bredon Hill across the site would be experienced from the public footpath that enters the site from the north, from Holloway.

The LVIA suggests that in views from Bredon Hill (VP 19 and 20) that '*the proposed development will be visible at great distance and will read as part of the overall south-western settlement edge of Pershore.*' Also that from Wychavon Way, near Pensham (VP 15) and from Millennium Way on the River Avon corridor (VP9) '*In the long term, the proposed development will still be seen, consistent with the composition of the adjacent settlement edge, with the green infrastructure strategy across and around the site providing an established and mature setting to it.*' The submitted Building Heights Parameters plan indicates that up to 2 storey (9m) dwellings are proposed over the majority of the site, with up to 1.5 storey (7.5m) dwellings on the highest contours. Notwithstanding the landscape proposals shown indicatively on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan at Figure 11 of the LVIA, in views from the elevated Cotswolds National Landscape at Bredon Hill (Viewpoint 19 and 20), Pensham (including the Wychavon Way - Viewpoint 15) and the Millennium Way as it follows the River Avon corridor (Viewpoint 9), development as proposed on rising ground would visibly and I suggest unacceptably in those views expand Pershore away from the urban core into open countryside and onto higher contours, also affecting the visual setting of Tiddesley Wood in those wider views as a landscape feature.

It is acknowledged in the LVIA that views from nearby residential properties that overlook the site will change from the open rural views currently enjoyed, with proposed development in close proximity separated by new mitigative planting.

The existing rural character of Defford Road when approaching Pershore from the south-west will also be adversely affected, with the removal of established vegetation to create a new access with associated highway visibility splays – although this adverse effect could reduce over time with a suitable landscape scheme, as new planting on site matures.

Long sections are provided at Figure 9 within the LVIA which considers landform, existing and proposed built form, existing and proposed vegetation and public views - from VP7 from the public footpath to the north of the site near Holloway, and VP9, VP10 and VP11 all from the River Avon corridor. In the view from VP7, the proposed development would sit below the sight line when looking to the south. From the river corridor, the proposed dwellings will clearly be at a higher level

than any existing dwellings and whilst in some views may be softened by vegetation (either existing or proposed as it matures), clearly the illustrative sections do not cover all available views – for example from VP9 and VP10 across the southern development cell and towards Tiddesley Wood. Similarly, a section from VP6 closer to the site might be quite different to that illustrated from VP7 further to the north. The sections are, therefore, only representative of specific sight lines.

With respect to both cumulative landscape and visual effects, the LVIA suggest at paras 6.59 and 7.28 respectively that *'with regard to landscape character and cumulative effects, the site does not lie on close proximity to other similar types of proposed development, and as such there are not likely to be any significant cumulative effects...'* The site does, however, sit immediately adjacent to the existing urban edge of Pershore where there has been expansion in recent years at Dowling Drive/Desjardins Way and roads off those and an extension to Conningsby Drive. The further expansion as proposed does, however, need to be duly considered in combination with that recent development – and how, cumulatively, residential development is creeping westwards from the urban core of Pershore further into open countryside. In my opinion, there would be an adverse cumulative impact of this proposed development when considered in combination with the recent development to the western edge of Pershore – both on the landscape character of the Wooded Estatelands LT which is identified as a wooded agricultural landscape, and with respect to visual effects with the expansion of Pershore away from its urban core into open countryside and onto higher contours, also affecting the visual setting of Tiddesley Wood as a key landscape feature including in more distant views.

I acknowledge that the design of the proposed development includes offsets to the key landscape feature of Tiddesley Wood and the promoted recreational route of Millennium Way – providing areas of public open space between development cells and those features. Also that the proposed landscape measures make reference to the published guidelines for the Wooded Estatelands LT, to include new woodland planting of native broadleaved species and to conserve and restore hedgerow pattern - as well as the creation of new habitat including a small community orchard and wildflower meadows. However, despite this approach, development as proposed and its associated mitigative planting would in my opinion adversely affect the setting of both Tiddesley Wood as a significant landscape feature and of Millennium Way as a promoted leisure walking route – and would adversely impact on views from Millennium Way, and the public footpath that enters the site from the north, towards Tiddesley Wood and the wider landscape to the south across the River Avon corridor towards Bredon Hill within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The Overall Conclusions of the LVIA suggest:

'the proposed development will result in a variety of impacts, generally at a localised level. The scale and form of proposed development is likely to result in impacts which are limited to the site area and its immediate context. In the wider landscape, potential views of the proposals are predominantly from one aspect only, and are seen in the context of the existing settlement of Pershore.

A range of landscape and visual receptors have been tested and impacts have been identified for both landscape character and for visual receptors. This includes an iterative process whereby potential impacts have informed the landscape strategy for the site and mitigation has become embedded in the proposed development. This allows the proposed development to respond to the context of the setting of the local landscape.

The residual impacts identified as part of this process highlight that the greater degree of impact relates to the site and to immediately adjacent areas; the effect on potential receptor groups in the wider landscape context is generally more limited. Furthermore, the proposals for open space and green infrastructure will deliver enhancements in terms of the physical landscape resource.

Given this summary of likely landscape and visual effects, the context of the site adjacent to the existing settlement edge of Pershore, and acknowledging the limited impact on the wider landscape, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in landscape and visual terms...'

Notwithstanding those findings of the LVIA, and the iterative process informing the landscape strategy for the site and mitigation measures, I remain concerned regarding the potential landscape and visual impacts of development on this site and cannot support the proposals in principle.

To conclude, in my professional opinion development on the application site would impact adversely on the character of this part of the Wooded Estatelands Landscape Type by introducing suburban built form into an identified wooded agricultural landscape, and by affecting the setting of Tiddesley Wood which is an important and characteristic feature of the Landscape Type (the woodland component being a critical element in defining the character of the Landscape Type). In addition, in terms of visual impacts, the way in which Tiddesley Wood and its ancient woodland character is perceived in public views would be adversely impacted by development – when viewed both locally and in the wider landscape. The enjoyment of users of the Public Rights of Way across the site, including the promoted leisure walking route Millennium Way, would also be adversely impacted - with development and associated mitigative planting obliterating some views and confining others to defined corridors. Nearby residents whose properties overlook the site would also be adversely affected, as open rural views would be more contained and replaced by views of suburban built form and mitigative planting. Users of Public Rights of Way and residents at home are amongst the visual receptors most susceptible to change (Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third edition 2012 – GLVIA3). Furthermore, being on prominent rising ground, development would be most perceptible in views from the south and south-east in the wider landscape – including in views from promoted leisure walking routes Millennium Way as it follows the River Avon corridor, Wychavon Way in the vicinity of Pensham, and further to the south the elevated Cotswolds National Landscape at Bredon Hill. In those views, development as proposed on rising ground would visibly and unacceptably expand Pershore away from its urban core into open countryside and onto higher contours, combining cumulatively with recently completed residential development at Dowling Drive/Desjardins Way and roads off those and the extension to Conningsby Drive. Development on the site would not properly take into account the County Landscape Character Assessment and the impact on the Wooded Estatelands Landscape Type, nor be appropriate to nor integrate with the character of the landscape setting and would therefore, I suggest, be contrary to Policy SWDP25.

Thank you.

Eileen Marshall (Mrs) BSc (Sp Hons), DipLA, MA, MCIHort
Landscape Officer (Mon, Tues & Thurs all until approx. 2.30pm)

Wychavon District Council
Civic Centre, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, Worcs., WR10 1PT
www.wychavon.gov.uk