

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 78)

Appeal in relation to:

Land north of Droitwich Spa, Hampton Lovett

By Beechcroft Land Ltd

Joanna Ede MA DipLD CMLI

Proof of Evidence on Landscape and Visual Amenity

Local Planning Authority reference: W/22/00201/OUT

Planning Inspectorate reference: APP/H1840/W/22/3305934

November 2022

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Client

Beechcroft Land

Our reference

RIDH3004

November 2022

1. Summary

The Site

- 1.1 The Site lies within the parish of Hampton Lovett on the edge of the town of Droitwich Spa. It falls within an area identified as being a 'settled landscape' between existing areas of residential development along The Forest/A442 and within Doverdale Park. It comprises two irregular shaped fields used for grazing sheep and some areas of mature vegetation around its perimeter.

Landscape Context

- 1.2 Within the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment the Site forms part of the Principal Timbered Farmlands Landscape Type which is a generally undulating area of small- to medium-scale wooded, agricultural landscape characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. It is identified as a settled landscape with a dispersed settlement pattern but also includes a number of small nucleated villages.
- 1.3 The Site has a close relationship with the existing developed areas of Hampton Lovett due to its: central position between Doverdale Park, Hampton Lovett industrial estate and properties and church on The Forest; and visual and physical connection with the historic core of the hamlet on The Forest.
- 1.4 Human influences are present in the landscape surrounding the Site including nearby roads, residential development, industrial estates and railway line. This contrasts with the landscape further north and east which is an extensive area of open countryside of rolling agricultural landscape.
- 1.5 The Appeal Site forms part of an area of ordinary landscape on the edge of Droitwich with no landscape designations and which also lies outside the Green Belt. This contrasts with most of the other areas of landscape which surround Droitwich most of which is either Green Belt, registered historic park or garden, cut off from the town by the M5 or constrained by flood zones. The Site is therefore of notably lower value and sensitivity than most other landscape areas which surround Droitwich.
- 1.6 Within the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment the northern part of the Site (area on which development is proposed) forms part of a Land Cover Parcel which is identified as being of Low landscape sensitivity.
- 1.7 I have undertaken an assessment of the landscape value of the site against the factors identified in the Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note on the assessment of landscape value and concluded that the Site does not demonstrate sufficient qualities for it to be considered a 'Valued Landscape' in the context of NPPF para 174a.

Visual Context

- 1.8 The Appeal Site has a relatively strong sense of enclosure and low level of intervisibility with the wider area due to the presence of surrounding mature woodland blocks and other mature planting, the railway line and existing surrounding development.

- 1.9 The scenic quality of the Site is relatively ordinary, comprising an area of grazed rough grassland with no significant landscape features and enclosed on one side by mobile homes on the Doverdale Park estate. In contrast, the landscape to the north and east of the Site is of higher scenic quality.
- 1.10 The principal publicly accessible viewpoints from which the Appeal Site is visible are: The Forest/public bridleway 537/538 (which forms part of the Monarchs Way long distance footpath), the A442 and the railway line.

The Proposals

- 1.11 Outline planning permission is sought for a proposed residential development of up to 102 units with associated access and landscaping.
- 1.12 The layout and illustrative scheme design has been landscape-led and responds appropriately to the Site's landscape and visual context. In my opinion, the parameters that were relied upon to inform that illustrative scheme provide a framework for the development and landscape to be an attractive and high quality development which would form a positive addition to Hampton Lovett and provide a high quality residential environment.
- 1.13 The appeal submission is accompanied by a detailed Landscape Strategy (**Appendix 2**) which illustrates how the scheme could be delivered in accordance with the identified landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands, would integrate with the landscape structure of the area and would make a positive contribution to local biodiversity by delivering a substantial Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 20%.

Landscape Effects

- 1.14 The Proposed Development would allow the retention and reinforcement of the primary and secondary key landscape characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands.
- 1.15 The Proposed Development would result in a limited and localised adverse effect on landscape character; it would change the Site from a field of rough grazed grassland to a new area of residential development and associated open space with an extensive package of landscape mitigation measures. This would be a change of high magnitude to the site which is a landscape of low sensitivity and is therefore identified as a Moderate/minor landscape effect. Over time, mitigation measures including proposed tree and hedgerow planting would mature and soften the effects of the built form and the level of effect would reduce further.
- 1.16 The impact of the proposals on the character of the wider surrounding landscape would be of Very Low magnitude with very little change to the character or appearance of the surrounding area.
- 1.17 I have reviewed the scheme against the WCC flow diagram for using landscape character assessment as a tool in the development control process. This concluded for the proposed development that 'a positive response could be considered'.

Visual effects

- 1.18 Due to the existing enclosure of the Site by vegetation and existing built development together with the additional enclosure which would be provided by proposed planting, few views or visual receptors would be significantly changed by the Proposed Development. Notably, there would be no significant changes to the views and general visual amenity experienced by people travelling through the areas of open countryside to the north and east of the Site.
- 1.19 The key views and visual receptors that would be significantly changed by the proposed development are: dwellings on Kidderminster Road, The Forest and Doverdale Park; The Forest/public bridleway 537/538; the A442; and the railway line.
- 1.20 Whilst some adverse effects have been identified, I consider these to be generally low magnitude and could be appropriately mitigated through the introduction of new planting and other landscape measures.

Comparison with Previous Planning Appeal

- 1.21 There are five key differences between the current Appeal Scheme and the 2019 Scheme:
- Reduced amount of built development;
 - Retention of northern area as undeveloped land and positioning of development edge set back from the church and public bridlepath and from the A442;
 - Increased southern area of public open space;
 - Further details on landscape strategy which demonstrate how the development can deliver landscape gains and contribute to landscape objectives in the WCC landscape character assessment; and
 - Additional landscape analysis which provides a greater understanding of the landscape value and sensitivity of the Site.
- 1.22 The development which is currently before the inspector (the 'Appeal Scheme') is smaller in scale, set further away from both St Mary's church, Monarch's Way and the A442 and set within a stronger landscape framework. The resultant impacts on character and views would therefore be reduced.

Response to First Reason for Refusal

- 1.23 The first reason for refusal states firstly that the proposed development '*fails to take into account the latest Landscape Character Assessment and its guidelines*'. In this proof I have demonstrated that the application proposals take full account of the landscape character assessment and its guidelines.
- 1.24 Secondly, the reason for refusal states that: '*Development on this site would not be appropriate to, or integrate with, the character of the landscape setting and would*

impact adversely upon a valued landscape'. In this proof I have provided further landscape analysis which demonstrates that the Site is not a valued landscape; I have set out the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposals and identified that there would be some adverse effects on the site and its immediate surroundings. I identify that the proposals can be delivered with a package of landscape mitigation and enhancement measures and conclude that the residual landscape and visual effects would be limited and localised.

- 1.25 Finally, the first reason for refusal concludes by alleging that *'the proposed development would result in adverse visual impacts in the local landscape, including in views from a promoted leisure walking route'*. In this proof I provide further evidence on the visual impacts of the proposals and demonstrate that the level of harm would be low and that, with an appropriate package of landscape mitigation and enhancement measures the residual effects would be limited and localised.

Conclusion

- 1.26 In conclusion, in my opinion, the Site is a good site for development; it is an area of ordinary landscape with strong visual containment and is one of very few accessible areas around Droitwich which is not constrained by designation as registered historic park or Green Belt or other historic designation or cut off from the town by the M5. The landscape of the Appeal Site is thus of significantly lower sensitivity than most of the rest of the landscape which surrounds Droitwich and landscape and visual effects arising from the proposals would be substantially less than would arise from development of a similar scale in other parts of the local area.
- 1.27 The proposals provide the opportunity to create a new, high quality residential development of an appropriate scale in relation to the existing settlement and which would integrate with the existing settlement areas of Hampton Lovett. An illustrative landscape strategy has been prepared which demonstrates how landscape measures could mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals and deliver landscape enhancements in accordance with WCC landscape guidance for the Principal Timbered Farmlands. I consider that the residual landscape and visual impacts of the proposals would therefore be localised and limited.

2. Introduction

Qualifications and Experience

- 2.1 My name is Joanna Mary Ede. I am a Director and Head of Landscape and VIA at Turley planning consultants. I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and Member of the Landscape Institute. I hold a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture, a Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture, and a BA honours degree in Geography. I have 28 years' professional experience as a Landscape Architect and am also a Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design.
- 2.2 I have been an external examiner for the Landscape degree course at the University of Sheffield for four years and following this as an external examiner at Leeds Metropolitan University for four years. I have also presented papers at the annual conference of the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools at the University of Greenwich in 2017 and the Activating Biophilic Cities Conference at the University of Greenwich in 2018. In 2018 I was invited to act as judge at the Landscape Institute Awards in the Landscape Planning Category.
- 2.3 In 2019 I was invited by the Landscape Institute Technical Committee to form part of a small group tasked with producing a Technical Guidance Note (TGN) on Valued Landscapes. The working group considered the meaning of the term 'valued landscapes' within the NPPF and how it should be interpreted in the context of developing appropriate policies as part of development plans for local authorities as well as in the context of making decisions on individual planning applications. The TGN was published by the Landscape Institute in May 2021¹.
- 2.4 I have a wide range of experience in both Landscape Design and Landscape Planning and have worked for both the public and private sector. This has included acting as an expert witness on landscape matters at Public Inquiries and Hearings, often in relation to the suitability of sites for residential development. I recently provided landscape evidence on behalf of developers for appeals in Waverley, Birmingham, Swindon, Stevenage and Manchester. Prior to this I acted on behalf of both Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Borough Council of Wellingborough for six Appeals all of which related to proposed residential developments on the edge of existing settlements.
- 2.5 I have worked on projects across the UK but have particular experience of the landscape of central and southern England having undertaken a large number of projects in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Birmingham, Surrey, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.
- 2.6 Much of my work has involved undertaking Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVAs) and Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVIAs) and my current role focusses on undertaking and reviewing LVAs and LVIAs on sites across the UK. Projects for which I have completed LVIAs include: a 3,500 unit residential development on the edge of Scunthorpe; several residential and mixed use developments around the fringes of Swindon; residential developments on the edge of Tewkesbury and Trowbridge, a

¹ TGN 02-21: Assessing landscape value outside national designations, Landscape Institute, May 2021

residential development on the edge of Wadebridge in Cornwall; a large mixed-use development on the seafront in Southend; and, a residential development on the edge of Arlesey, in Bedfordshire.

- 2.7 All the landscape and visual assessment work I carry out is undertaken in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment' (3rd edition, published by the Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment), hereafter referred to as 'GLVA3'.
- 2.8 My professional experience also includes a major landscape study of sites put forward for housing allocation in the South Wealden Growth Area on behalf of Wealden District Council; a Landscape Character and Green Belt study for Basildon Borough Council; a landscape character assessment for East Hertfordshire District Council; and, the preparation of landscape proposals and landscape statements to support a large number of planning submissions for residential development on behalf of a number of private developers including: Crest Nicholson, Berkeley Homes, Cove Homes and Barratt Homes.

Instructions

- 2.9 In June 2022, I was instructed by Ridge and Partners on behalf of Beechcroft Land (the 'Appellant'), to review the development proposals and supporting documents submitted as a planning application to Wychavon District Council in February 2022 (ref: W/22/00201/OUT) and a previous planning application for the site (17/01631/OUT) which was the subject of a planning appeal in 2019. My work initially included a site visit, review of the submitted proposals (including the Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVA) for the two schemes) and the previous Appeal Decision. I was asked to review the submitted proposals and provide advice on the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals and whether I considered these would provide sufficient grounds for the proposal to be refused planning permission on these matters. I advised that in my professional opinion, the landscape and visual harm arising from the proposals would be at a low level, would be less than would have arisen with the previous appeal scheme and did not justify being a reason for the refusal of planning permission.
- 2.10 When a decision was made to appeal against non-determination of the planning application I was subsequently instructed by the Appellant to represent them at the planning appeal on issues relating to landscape and visual impact.

Statement of Truth

- 2.11 I confirm that the evidence that I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry (Planning Inspectorate Reference: APP/H1840/W/22/3305934), has been prepared, and is given, in accordance with the guidance of my professional institute, The Landscape Institute, and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

Summary description of the proposed development

- 2.12 The proposed scheme was described by the Council at validation as:

“Outline planning application for the erection of up to 102 dwellings, new vehicular and pedestrian access, and associated works. All matters reserved except for access “

Reasons for refusal

- 2.13 This Appeal is against the non-determination by Wychavon District Council of an outline planning application submitted on behalf of Beechcroft Land. On 19th October the Council published a Delegated Officer Report which advised that the Council were minded to refuse the application for three reasons. Of these, the first relates to landscape matters and states:

“1. The application site lies entirely outside the settlement boundary of Droitwich as defined under policy SWDP 2 of the South Worcestershire Development Plan 2016 (SWDP). The site is therefore defined as open countryside where development shall be strictly controlled. The proposed development fails to accord with the provisions of policy SWDP2 part C of the SWDP. The proposed development would go against the SWDP Development Strategy and the principles it is based upon (as set out under policy SWDP2) in that it would not safeguard or enhance the open countryside nor encourage the effective use or re-use of brownfield land. The proposal fails to take into account the latest Landscape Character Assessment and its guidelines. Development on this site would not be appropriate to, or integrate with, the character of the landscape setting and would impact adversely upon a valued landscape. Furthermore, the proposed development would result in adverse visual impacts in the local landscape, including in views from a promoted leisure walking route. The significant and demonstrable landscape and visual harm would not be outweighed by the benefits of the proposal contrary to the provisions of adopted South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016) Policies SWDP1, 2, and 25 as well as guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) including paragraph 174 (a). As such the proposal would not constitute sustainable development”.

Key issues and scope of evidence

- 2.14 On the basis of the above reasons for refusal and the council’s statement of case, I understand that the main issues which relate to landscape and visual impact and which are disputed by the Appellant and Council are:

- whether the proposals take into account the latest Landscape Character Assessment and its guidelines;
- the level of landscape value of the Site and whether it site should be considered as forming part of a Valued Landscape (under the meaning of NPPF para 174a);
- the nature and extent of changes to the character of the site and the surrounding landscape (including the character of Hampton Lovett) and the level of landscape harm that would arise;
- the nature and extent of visual impacts of the proposals (including on views from the promoted leisure walking route – the Wychavon Way);

- the effectiveness of the development parameters, design principles and landscape strategy in mitigating potential landscape and visual effects; and,
- the weight that any identified residual harm to landscape character or visual amenity should be afforded in the planning balance

2.15 To address the above issues, my evidence will cover the following:

- An analysis and evaluation of the Appeal Site and its context (Section 3), including its: contribution to local landscape character; landscape value and sensitivity (including in comparison with other landscape areas around Droitwich/within the District); and, contribution to local views and visual amenity.
- A summary of the key features of the application proposals and landscape strategy (Section 4);
- A review of the landscape and visual effects of the proposed scheme and the proposed outline mitigation measures and the effect of these on the local landscape character, the character of the settlement of Hampton Lovett; and views and visual amenity of the local area (Section 5);
- A consideration of the site and scheme proposals in relation to the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment flow diagram for the use of landscape character assessment in the development control process (Section 6);
- A comparison between the Appeal Scheme and a previous scheme which was considered at appeal in 2019 (appeal ref: APP/H1840/W/18/3218814);
- A consideration of the development in relation to planning policy and the reasons for refusal (Section 8) and a Conclusion (Section 9); and,
- A summary (Section 1).

2.16 My evidence should be read alongside that of the appellant's other witnesses, including in particular that of:

- Mr Guy Wakefield regarding planning policy and the planning balance; and,
- Mr Jonathan Edis regarding Built Heritage issues.

Methodology

2.17 This evidence has been prepared following a review of: the documents and drawings which were submitted with the planning application; consultee responses; the Statements of Case prepared by both the appellant and the Council; the Draft Statement of Common Ground prepared jointly by the Appellant and the Council and a visit to the site and its surroundings, which I carried out in June 2022.

2.18 The LVA submitted with the application was prepared by a chartered landscape architect from The Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP). Whilst I was not involved with the preparation of the LVA and the methodology is not identical to my own, I concur with the general approach and findings of the assessment. Where relevant, I have

provided additional detail and analysis in this proof which is based on my own professional judgement.

- 2.19 The LVA (CD 1.9) submitted with the application provides supporting figures and photographs and further figures and photographs are provided within this proof of evidence.
- 2.20 Best practice in relation to landscape and visual assessment is set out in 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', 3rd edition 2013, published by The Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (CD 5.4). Hereafter I refer to this as GLVIA3.
- 2.21 Quotations within this proof are written in italics. Any parts which are underlined have been done so for the purpose of my own emphasis.

3. Evaluation of the Landscape and Visual Context

- 3.1 A detailed description of the Site and the surrounding landscape and visual context is provided in sections 2 - 5 of the application LVA. This is supported by EDP plans 1 – 5. Reference should be made to the full analysis in the LVA and used to support the summary descriptions which are provided below.

Site Description

- 3.2 Briefly, the Site currently comprises two irregular shaped fields, divided by a wire fenceline and currently in use as grazed pasture. The northern part of the Site is broadly level and the southern part slopes down towards Elmbridge Brook.
- 3.3 The area surrounding the Site comprises: to the north, a line of residential development along The Forest and the church of St Mary’s Hampton Lovett; to the east, a railway line and vegetated embankment; to the south, Elmbridge Brook, a tree-lined tributary of the River Salwarpe and Millgrove Plantation woodland with Berry Hill Industrial Estate beyond; and, to the west, Doverdale Park and the A242, Kidderminster Road, beyond which is a woodland belt and the Hampton Lovett industrial estate.



Photo A: View north from centre of the Site – illustrating Doverdale Park mobile homes to the west, St Mary’s Church and properties along The Forest (set behind boundary vegetation to the north) and the vegetated railway embankment to the east.

- 3.4 An aerial photograph and OS mapping of the Appeal Site and surrounding context are provided at Figure 3.1 and 3.2 below.



Figure 3.1: Aerial photograph of site illustrating relationship between the site and surrounding developed areas (Source: Google Earth, 2022)

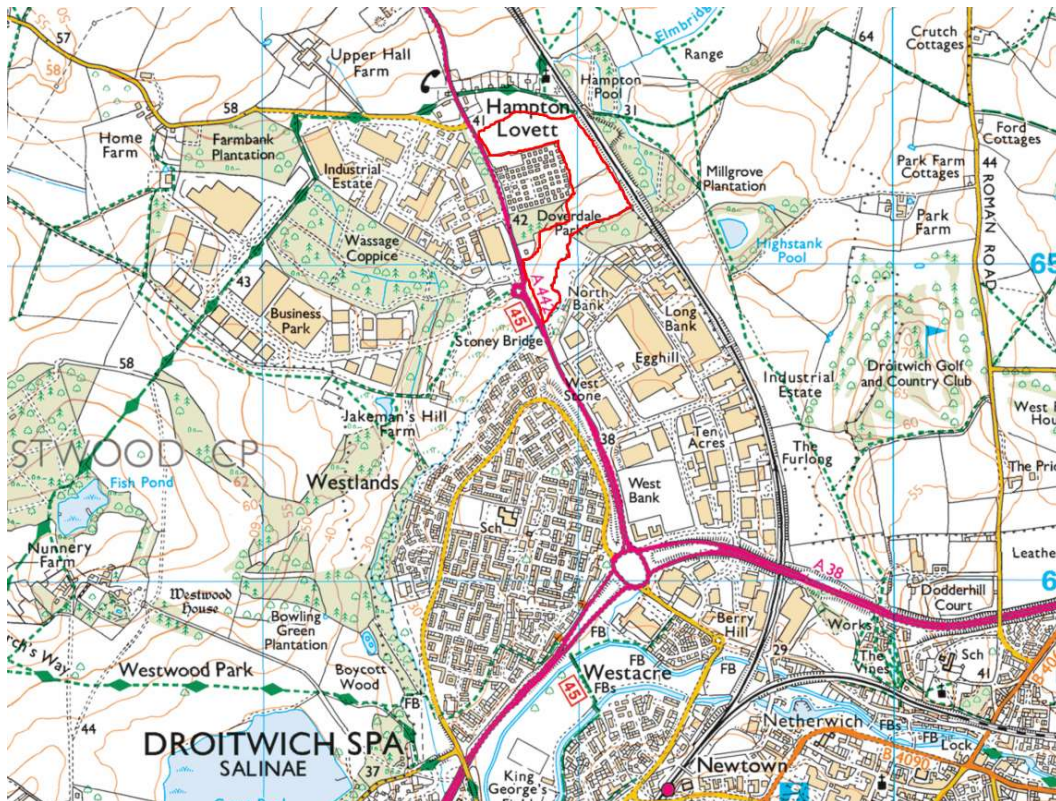


Figure 3.2: OS mapping scale 1:25,000 illustrating relationship between the site and surrounding developed areas

Landscape Character Context

- 3.5 The landscape character assessments, landscape types and character area descriptions of relevance to the Appeal Site are agreed between the Council and the Appellant. These are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 – Landscape Character Context

Landscape Character Assessment	Landscape character area(s) of relevance to the Appeal Site
National Character Areas (NCA) (Natural England, 2010) (CD5.1)	NCA 106: Severn and Avon Vales Landscape
Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment ² (CD5.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Character Area (RCA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid Worcestershire Forests • Landscape Character Type (LCT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Principal Timbered Farmlands • Landscape Description Unit (LDU) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands (MW118.2) • Land Cover Parcel (LCP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MW118.2c and MW118.2f

- 3.6 Of the above, the most relevant is the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment. This provides a detailed analysis of landscape character, condition and sensitivity at both a strategic and a local level. It is supported by guidance for each Landscape Type and the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Supplementary Guidance³ which explains how the Landscape Character Assessment should be used in a range of applications, including when considering new development. A Landscape Character Assessment Technical Handbook (WCC, August 2013)⁴ is also published which provides supplementary guidance on the technical detail of the assessment.

Regional Character Area

- 3.7 In the county scale analysis, the Appeal Site falls within the Mid Worcestershire Forests RCA. This is a large character area covering a large proportion of the County. It comprises a broad, rolling plain most of which is low-lying and underlain with mudstones and clay. The area forms part of a swath of Royal Forests that once extended across the central part of the West Midlands. The existing remnants of these forests and widespread presence of hedgerow trees and small copses give the area a well timbered (wooded)

² https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20014/planning/1006/landscape_character_assessment

³

https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/file/4788/landscape_character_assessment_supplementary_guidance

⁴ https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/file/4789/landscape_character_assessment_technical_handbook

appearance. Due to the large scale of this character area it is of limited use in understanding the local landscape character of the Appeal Site.

Landscape Character Type Analysis and Guidance

3.8 The Mid Worcestershire Forests RCA includes a range of Landscape Types; the Appeal Site falls within an extensive area of the Landscape Type ‘Principal Timbered Farmlands’.

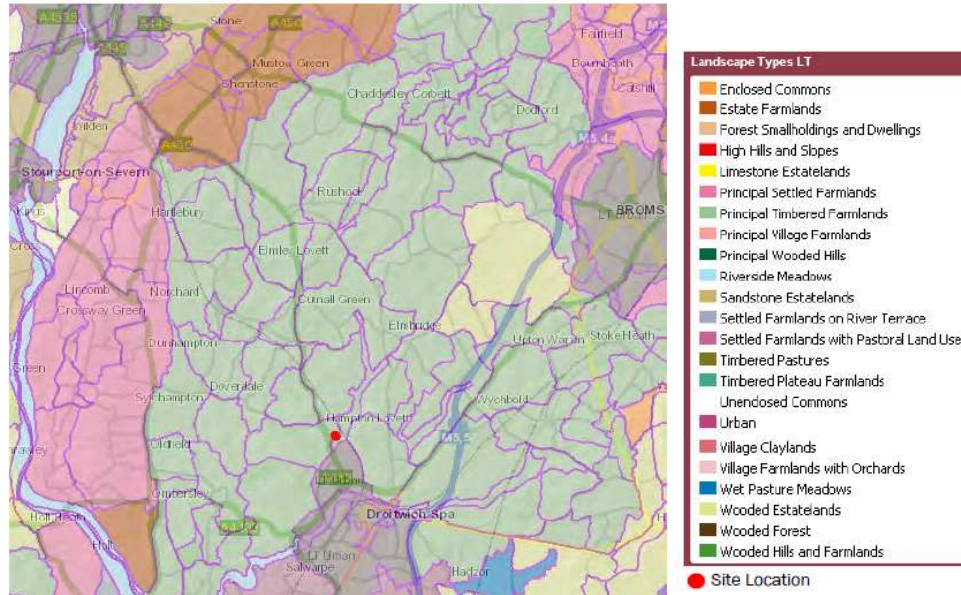
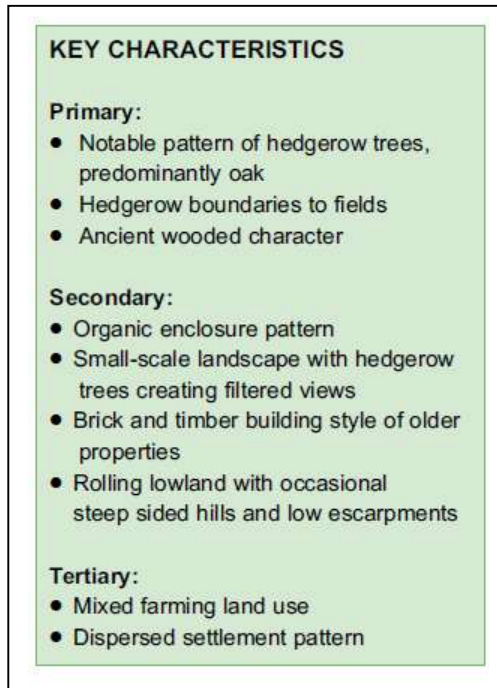


Figure 3.3 Extract from WCC Landscape Character Assessment – Landscape Character Types

- 3.9 The WCC Landscape Type Profile for Principal Timbered Farmlands is provided at **Appendix 1**. In summary the landscape type is described as: ‘A small- to medium-scale wooded, agricultural landscape characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees’.
- 3.10 The LCA Supplementary Guidance⁵ identifies that the Principal Timbered Farmlands is a ‘settled landscape type’ with a ‘dispersed settlement pattern’.
- 3.11 The identified key characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands are provided in Box 3.1 below. Of these, WCC guidance notes that ‘The primary characteristics are those that are most significant in defining landscape character’⁶.

⁵ LCA Supplementary Guidance, p33, Figure 4

⁶ WCC LCA Technical Handbook para 2.3.4.3



Box 3.1: Key characteristics of Principal Timbered Farmlands Landscape Type (Source: WCC Landscape Type Description for Principal Timbered Farmlands)

- 3.12 The WCC Land Management Advice Sheet for the Principal Timbered Farmlands is included at **Appendix 1**. In summary this sets out that a key priority for the area is to increase tree cover and hedgerows and increase the number of hedgerow trees, particularly oak trees. Guidelines include restoring the tree cover pattern, creation of new woodland, conserving and restoring tree cover along watercourses, enhancing tree cover along highways and replanting hedgerows.
- 3.13 The WCC Planning and Development Advice Sheet for the Principal Timbered Farmlands is included at **Appendix 1**. This identifies 'opportunities for landscape gain' for the area including: creation of new woodlands; creating new hedgerows and restoring and strengthening existing hedgerows; planting of new generations of hedgerow and field oak trees; and, reflecting local materials and building style in the design of new buildings.
- 3.14 In Table 4.1 of Section 4 of this proof I set out how the Scheme Proposals could contribute to achieving the objectives and opportunities identified in the WCC advice for the Principal Timbered Farmlands.

Landscape Description Unit Analysis

- 3.15 At a local scale of character analysis, the Appeal Site falls within the Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands LDU. The character area description for this LDU is set out in Box 3.2 below.

LDU MW118.2 Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands

An area of soft rock, comprising mixed mudstones and sandstones producing a rolling, lowland topography and free draining brown soils. The tree cover comprises relic patches of ancient woodland, often associated with densely scattered hedgerow oaks and streamside tree cover. It is an area of mixed farming with farmsteads and groups of wayside dwellings associated with a moderate to high level of dispersal and a small to medium scale field pattern.

- red brick
- localised parkland with associated features – notable area of water

Condition (updated 2010)

- high intensity cropping with a declining field pattern
- boundaries in poor condition
- woodlands poorly represented in eastern half
- hedgerow trees poorly represented in much of the area with a predominately mature age structure
- localised high urban impact along urban fringe also includes separate industrial estate and golf course

Box 3.2: Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands LDU Character Area Description
(Source: <https://gis.worcestershire.gov.uk/website/LandscapeCharacter/>)

Land Cover Parcel Analysis

3.16 A further level of analysis is provided for the seven separate LCPs which are identified within the Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands LDU. Of these, LCP MW118.2c and LCP MW118.2f are relevant to the Site. The location of these is provided in Figure 3.4 below.

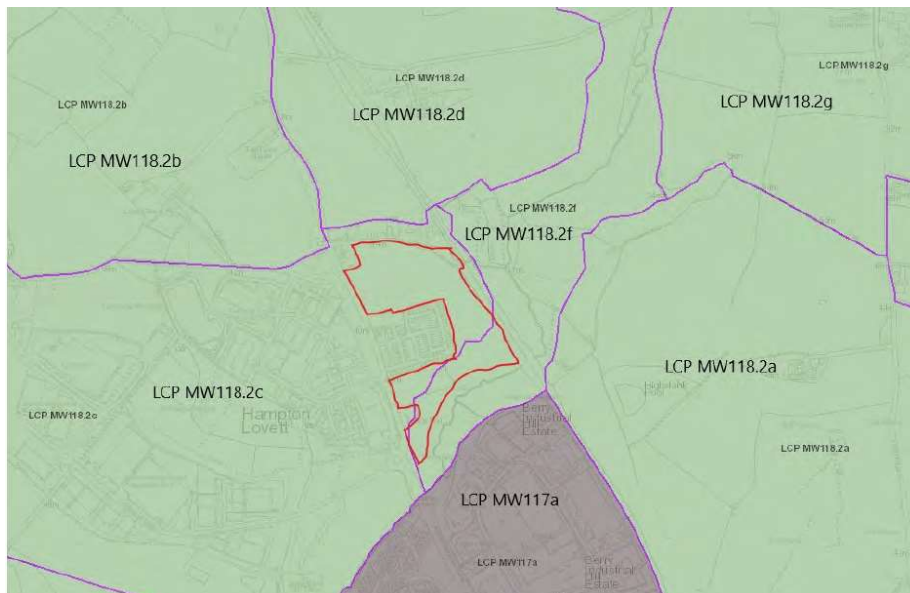


Figure 3.4: Extract from WCC Landscape Character Assessment Interactive Map – Land Cover Parcels

3.17 In summary, the detailed analysis shows clear differences in character between the two parcels. Area 2c is identified as being underlain with mudstone, notes woodland as the

Landscape Evaluation

3.19 An understanding of the landscape value and sensitivity of the Appeal Site is important when coming to a judgement on the significance of any landscape harm that would arise from the Proposed Development and the weight that it should be afforded in the planning balance. I consider that insufficient evidence and analysis was provided at the previous planning appeal on these matters. I have therefore set out below a detailed evaluation of the landscape value and sensitivity of the Appeal Site. I provide analysis below at three levels; firstly, I provide a high level, large scale analysis looking at the Site in the context of the wider landscape area which surrounds Droitwich (the northern part of Wychavon district). Secondly, I consider the WCC analysis of landscape sensitivity which was undertaken at the Land Cover Parcel level. Finally, thirdly, I consider the Appeal Site itself and its immediate surroundings and provide an evaluation of landscape value following the 2021 Landscape Institute guidance on assessing landscape value.

Evaluation of the Appeal Site in relation to the wider Droitwich landscape

3.20 I have reviewed the Appeal Site in relation to the wider landscape which surrounds Droitwich. This included a review of the presence of sensitive landscapes and/or landscape features or other designations such as Green Belt, Ancient Woodlands or historic landscape designations which constrain development opportunities around Droitwich.

3.21 Key constraints to development around Droitwich are illustrated on Figures 3.5 – 3.7 below and include:

- Green Belt – Land to the north, north- east and south of Droitwich forms an extensive area of land which lies within the Green Belt
- M5 – The M5 corridor to the east of Droitwich forms a clearly defined settlement edge and a major barrier to further development to the east
- Westwood Park - A large scale (240ha) area of historic parkland (Grade II Registered Park and Garden) lies to the west of Droitwich and includes listed buildings including Westwood House, tower and gatehouse (all Grade I listed buildings), Ancient Woodland and SSSI (Westwood Great Pool)
- Salwarpe Parish Church and Salwarpe Court – Both grade II* listed buildings lie to the south west of Droitwich together with a large group of other grade II listed buildings



Figure 3.5: Extract from 1:50,000 OS map – illustrating restriction to eastern development edge of Droitwich by M5 (approximate site location identified in red)

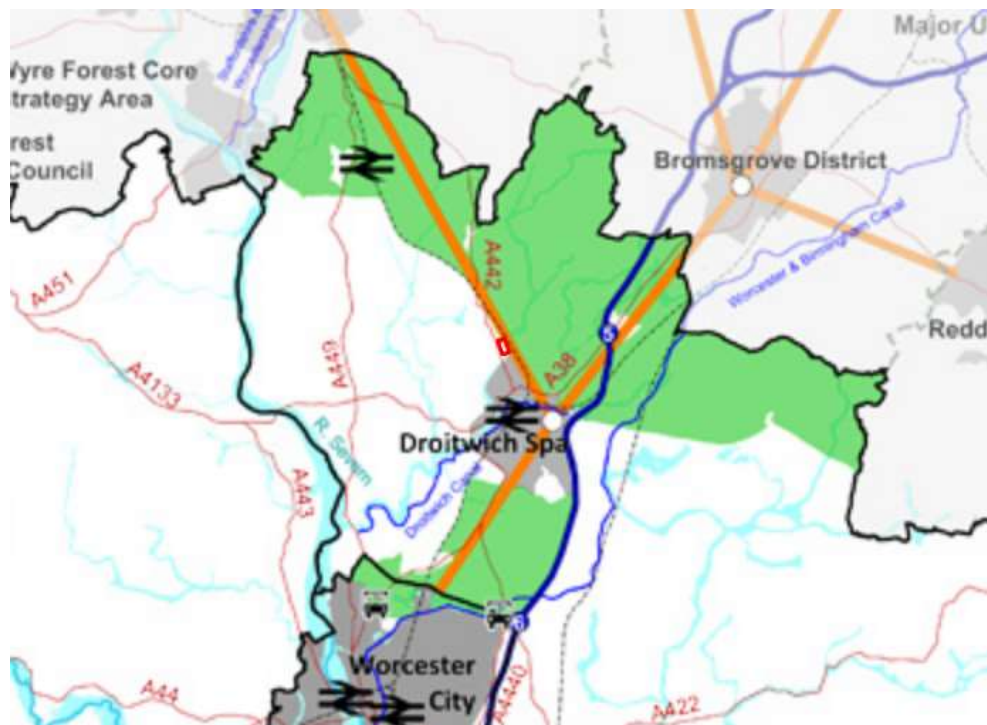


Figure 3.6: Extract from South Worcestershire Development Plan Context Map: illustrating development constraints around Droitwich to the north and south by Green Belt land and to the east by the M5 (approximate site location identified in red)

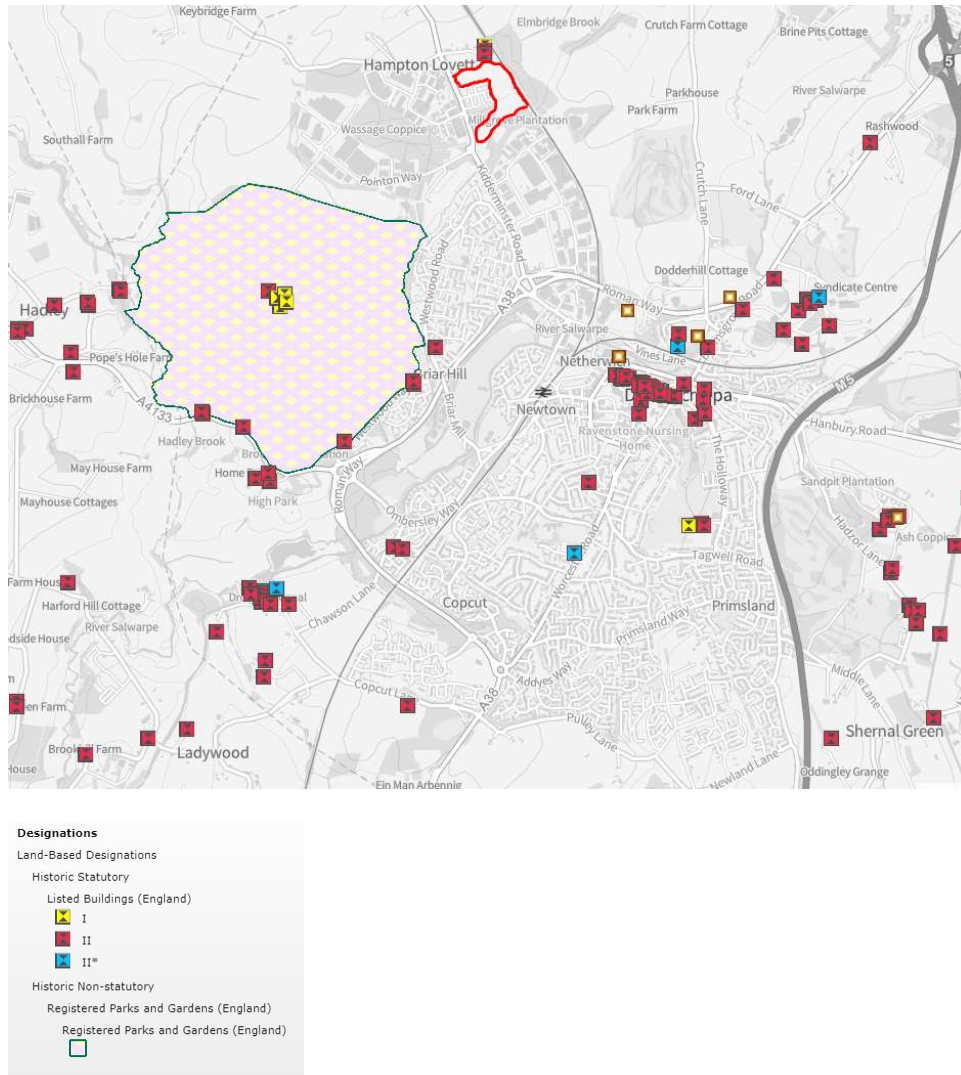


Figure 3.7: Extract from <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>: illustrating development constraints around Droitwich to the west by Westwood Park registered park and garden and cluster of listed buildings around Salwarpe to the south west

3.22 In summary, a very large proportion of the landscape around Droitwich Spa is constrained from development either by Green Belt designation, historic landscape or buildings designation or the M5. As a result, the Borough has very limited areas around Droitwich where new development can be accommodated without resulting in significant landscape or Green Belt harm. The Appeal Site is one of only a few areas which is not of high landscape value and landscape sensitivity and which is also an accessible area for the sustainable settlement of Droitwich.

Evaluation of landscape sensitivity in the WCC Landscape Character Assessment

3.23 The WCC Landscape Character Assessment included an analysis and evaluation of landscape sensitivity across the county. A sensitivity score for each Land Cover Parcel (LCP) was provided by combining the results of an assessment of the condition of each LCP with an assessment of the resilience of the relevant Landscape Type.

- 3.24 The technical handbook notes⁷ that ‘Sites or landscape units that have been classified with high sensitivity would be most sensitive and least accommodating to change, on the basis of loss of landscape character; here presumption would be against development on landscape character grounds...Those with low sensitivity may be regarded as least sensitive to change and therefore most able to accommodate development’.
- 3.25 The results of the condition and sensitivity assessment are provided on Maps 9 and 10 in Appendix A of the LCA Technical handbook; a full size version of these maps is provided in **Appendix 3** to this proof and an enlarged extract showing the area around the Appeal Site is provided in Figures 3.8 - 3.9 below.



Figure 3.8: WCC Landscape Condition Assessment (Extract from LCA Technical Handbook Map 9)

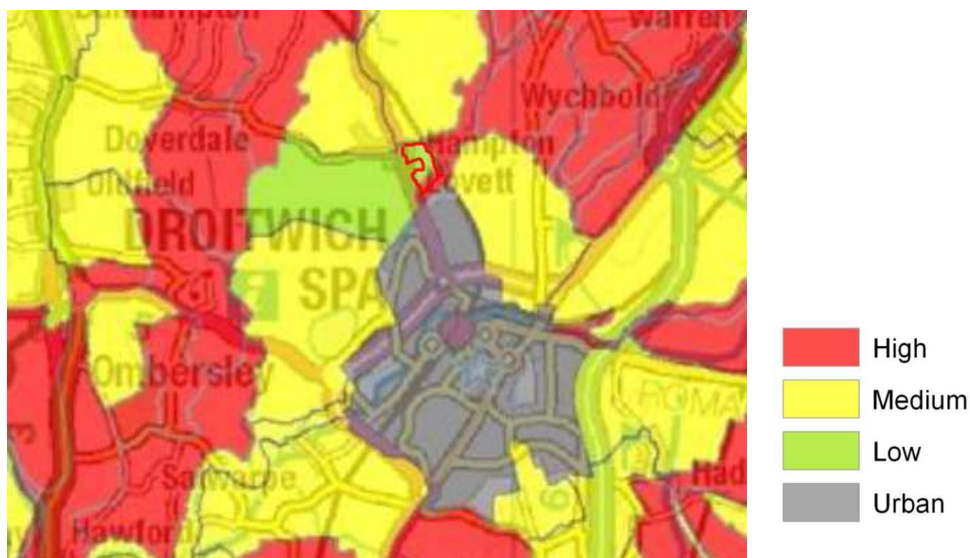


Figure 3.9: WCC Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (Extract from LCA Technical Handbook Map 10)

⁷ LCA Technical handbook para 2.3.9.4

- 3.26 The above maps show that the northern part of the Appeal Site (which formed part of LCP MW118.2c) was assessed as being in poor condition and as having a low landscape sensitivity. This area was therefore identified as being one of the LCPs in the county least sensitive to change and the LCA Technical Handbook at paragraph 2.3.9.4 states that areas '*with low sensitivity may be regarded as least sensitive to change and therefore most able to accommodate development*'. It is within the area of low sensitivity in which the built development of the Appeal Scheme is proposed.
- 3.27 The maps also show the southern edge of the Appeal Site (which formed part of LCP MW118.2f) as being part of an area in good condition and as having high landscape sensitivity. This is the area in which the proposed open space for the Appeal Scheme is concentrated.
- 3.28 I note that the most recent version of the assessment was published in 2013 and includes a condition assessment which used 2005 aerial photography. The assessment is therefore relatively old. Nonetheless, it is the most recent assessment available and forms part of the council's current published evidence on landscape character. Furthermore, I have compared 2005 aerial photography for the LCP with current aerial photography and there is no evidence to suggest that there have been any changes which would result in a different evaluation of landscape condition or sensitivity⁸.

Landscape Evaluation of the Appeal Site

Contribution of the Appeal Site to other areas with Landscape Designations

- 3.29 The Appeal Site is not covered by a Landscape Designation nor does it contribute to any area with a landscape designation.

Assessment of Landscape Value of the Appeal Site

- 3.30 NPPF para 174 includes the requirement that:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

- 3.31 The NPPF and supporting guidance are silent on what exactly is meant by the term 'valued landscape'. However, until 2021 there was general acceptance by landscape professionals that box 5.1 in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment⁹ provided an appropriate framework for the identification of valued landscapes. This was supplemented in February 2021 by the publication of new technical guidance by the Landscape Institute on the assessment of landscape value (TGN 02/21)(CD5.5)¹⁰. Appendix 4 of TGN 02/21 (included at **Appendix 4** to this proof) specifically relates to

⁸ By 2005 the northern part of the Hampton Lovett industrial estate had been completed and the southern part was under construction.

⁹ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition, 2013, published by The Landscape Institute and IEMA

¹⁰ 'Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations' Landscape Institute, Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02/21, 2021.

how para NPPF 174¹¹ should be interpreted and detailed guidance on how landscape professionals should identify ‘valued landscapes’ and, in particular, how the phrase ‘in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan’ should be interpreted.

3.32 In TGN 02/21 the Landscape Institute defines a ‘valued landscape’ as an area ‘having sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes¹²’.

3.33 The guidance states that where a landscape has a statutory status (e.g. National Park or AONB), it is self-evident that it is a valued landscape. This is not the case for the Appeal Site.

3.34 For areas of landscape without a statutory status, The Landscape Institute supports an evidence-based approach using consideration of the factors set out within Table 1 of the guidance. It also sets out key points to note when coming to an overall judgement including:

- *There should be a weight of evidence that supports the recognition of a landscape as valued above more everyday landscapes;*
- *It would be expected that a ‘valued landscape’ would demonstrate the presence of a number of indicators of landscape value*
- *The identification of landscape value needs to be applied proportionately ensuring that identification of ‘valued landscape’ is not overused*

3.35 Table 1 of the guidance identifies the key factors which are considered to contribute to and influence landscape value¹³. In Table 3.1 below I have provided an evaluation of the landscape value of the Appeal Site against the factors identified in Table 1 of TGN 02/21. The evaluation considers the area of landscape which extends to the railway line in the east, The Forest Hampton Lovett Industrial Estate to the west and Berry Hill Industrial Estate in the south.

Table 3.1 – Assessment of landscape value of the Appeal Site and local surroundings

Factor	Commentary in relation to the landscape of the Appeal Site and local surroundings
Natural Heritage	Mature woodland blocks enclose the landscape. These contribute to the local landscape character but are not ancient woodland. No part of the Site is designated as being of Regional or Local Wildlife Importance.
Cultural Heritage	St Mary and All Saints Church (grade I listed) and associated Lych gate and Pakington memorial (grade II listed) all lie to the north of the Site and contribute to the local landscape

¹¹ para 170 of the 2018/19 NPPF

¹² TGN02/21 – para A4.2.11

¹³ Table 1 is similar to, but supersedes Box 5.1 of GLVIA3 which has previously been widely referred to as an acceptable framework for assessing landscape value.

	character. I defer to the evidence of Dr Edis in respect to how the development proposal affects these assets.
Landscape Condition	Landscape condition is average. Boundary hedgerows are gappy and there is a scarcity of hedgerow trees. Fields are managed by grazing. Mobile homes and adjacent boundaries form poor quality edge to the countryside.
Associations	Landscape has no notable connections with well-known literature, poetry, art, TV/film and music that contribute to perceptions of the landscape.
Distinctiveness	Landscape does not have a strong sense of identity or place or make a significant contribution to the gateway/approach to Droitwich. WCC landscape character assessment does not identify the area as being of particular importance to local distinctiveness.
Recreational	Fields have no public access but a public bridleway runs along the northern edge of the area providing a connection to the open countryside to the east and forming part of a promoted recreational route. Views south across the Site are of moderate importance to the enjoyment of the recreational route but views north towards the church are of greater importance.
Perceptual (Scenic)	Scenic quality of the landscape is pleasant but unremarkable and does not contain features or views of particular importance or distinctiveness or with strong aesthetic qualities.
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Landscape does not have a strong perceptual value such as particular: wildness, tranquillity, openness, seclusion, remoteness or dark skies.
Functional	Southern part of the Site is designated as a strategic gap and provides the function of separating Droitwich from Hampton Lovett. (Albeit noting that TGN02/21 notes that <i>'the presence of a spatial designation (e.g. Green Belt or Green Gap) is not in itself an indicator of high landscape value¹⁴</i>)

Conclusions on the Landscape Value of the Appeal Site

3.36 In relation to the key points mentioned earlier in para 3.35 on coming to an overall judgement on landscape value, I note the following:

- on review of the evaluation of landscape attributes of the Site presented in Table 3.1 above, in my opinion there is not sufficient 'weight of evidence' that would support the recognition of the site as a valued landscape;
- it is accepted that the Site contributes to the wider setting of the heritage asset, St Mary's Church and the lynch gate. However, in my opinion, the contribution that it

¹⁴ TGN02/21 para 2.4.5, sixth bullet point

makes is not of such importance on its own that the Site should be considered a Valued Landscape. I also consider that there are insufficient other indicators of landscape value that would warrant giving the landscape this status;

- identification of the Site as a 'valued landscape' would, in my opinion, not be a proportionate or appropriate approach to the use of the term. To identify sites such as the Appeal Site as a 'valued landscape' would, in my opinion, constitute over use of the term and not what was intended by NPPF para 174a.

- 3.37 In conclusion, whilst the Appeal Site demonstrates some positive attributes and has some pleasant scenic qualities, I do not consider that these are present to such an extent as to warrant consideration of the Site as a Valued Landscape

The Council's position on the status of the Appeal Site as a 'Valued Landscape'

- 3.38 Prior to the publication of the council's statement of case and officer's delegated report in October 2022 there was no mention at all that they considered the Site to be a 'Valued Landscape'. It was not raised as an issue in landscape consultation responses to the previous application, nor to the current application nor in the proof of evidence of the council's landscape witness at the previous inquiry, nor in the reasons for refusal of the previous application. The only reference to 'valued landscape' that I can find in the previous appeal is at para 2.4 of Ms McKenzie's landscape evidence where she says: '*To date, there has been no mention by either side that the site might be regarded as a valued landscape and thus paragraph 170(a) is not considered relevant.*' I note that this was not disputed by the Council and that the planning inspector made no statement that she considered the matter relevant or indeed that she considered the Site as being a landscape with a 'degree of excellence'¹⁵.

- 3.39 However, the council's position has now changed and in their statement of case they set out that they now consider that the Site is a 'Valued Landscape'. The only evidence provided to support this position is that the Site forms part of the wider setting of St Mary's Church (grade I heritage asset). The reason given for the council's change in position is that the new Landscape Institute guidance on valued landscapes was not available at the previous inquiry and that 'Cultural Heritage' has been introduced as a new criterion in the evaluation of landscape value. This is untrue. Prior to the publication of TGN 02/21, box 5.1 of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment was the most widely used and accepted framework for assessing landscape value. As illustrated below, conservation interests, including features of historical and cultural interest, were part of the range of factors that helped in the identification of valued landscapes. Cultural Heritage is therefore not a new issue in the consideration of valued landscapes.

¹⁵ As required by TGN02-21 – para A4.2.6

Box 5.1

Range of factors that can help in the identification of valued landscapes

- **Landscape quality (condition):** A measure of the physical state of the landscape. It may include the extent to which typical character is represented in individual areas, the intactness of the landscape and the condition of individual elements.
- **Scenic quality:** The term used to describe landscapes that appeal primarily to the senses (primarily but not wholly the visual senses).
- **Rarity:** The presence of rare elements or features in the landscape or the presence of a rare Landscape Character Type.
- **Representativeness:** Whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features or elements which are considered particularly important examples.
- **Conservation interests:** The presence of features of wildlife, earth science or archaeological or historical and cultural interest can add to the value of the landscape as well as having value in their own right.
- **Recreation value:** Evidence that the landscape is valued for recreational activity where experience of the landscape is important.
- **Perceptual aspects:** A landscape may be valued for its perceptual qualities, notably wildness and/or tranquillity.
- **Associations:** Some landscapes are associated with particular people, such as artists or writers, or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of the area.

Based on Swanwick and Land Use Consultants (2002)

Source: Box 5.1: Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

- 3.40 The council has made no detailed evaluation of the criteria which contribute to landscape value as required by the Landscape Institute guidance. Instead, there is a reliance on just one attribute - the role of the Site in the setting of the church. In my opinion, this falls far short of the weight of evidence that is required for an area to be considered a valued landscape.

Relationship of the Appeal Site with the local settlement pattern

- 3.41 In spatial terms the Appeal Site lies beyond the existing settlement edge of Droitwich Crossways within an area of countryside. However, I note the following five points:
- a) the Appeal Site falls within the Principal Timbered Farmlands landscape type which is identified as a 'settled landscape' i.e. a landscape which has existing human habitation. This is in contrast to the parts of the District which are identified as 'unsettled landscape' which are areas in which the LCA states there 'would be, in landscape terms, a **high presumption against new development**¹⁶'.
 - b) The Principal Timbered Farmlands is identified as having a 'dispersed settlement pattern' of farmsteads and wayside cottages. However, I note also that this is not the only settlement type present; there are also examples of settlement clusters within this landscape type including at: Cutnall Green (c. 3.2km north of the site – see **Figure 3.10** below), Wychbold (c. 2.9km east of the site), Chaddesley Corbett and Lower Broadheath.

¹⁶ LCA Supplementary guidance, p17, para 4.3.1, second bullet point

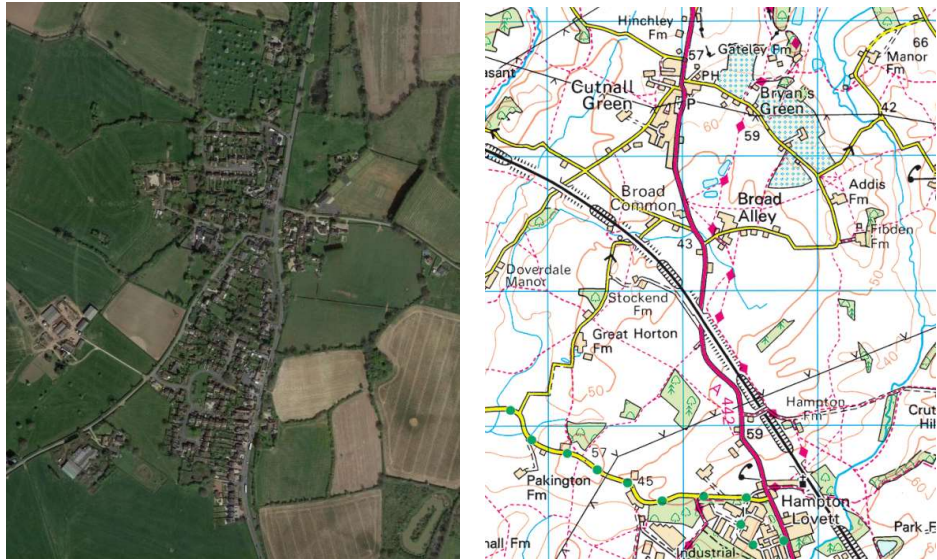


Figure 3.10: Aerial photograph and OS mapping of Cutnall Green c. 2.7km north of the Appeal Site: an example of a settlement cluster within the Principal Timbered Farmlands

- c) the Appeal Site lies between two existing settled parts of Hampton Lovett; to the north is linear development along The Forest which forms the historic core of the hamlet of Hampton Lovett and to the south is Doverdale Park, a twentieth century cluster of development comprising mobile park homes (on the site of a former Prisoner of War camp).
- d) the two principal existing areas of settlement in Hampton Lovett are on low, level land and are contained between the A442/Kidderminster Road to the west and the railway line to the east. The Appeal Site shares the same characteristics as these existing developed areas.
- e) there is a close visual relationship between the Appeal Site and the existing settlement edge of Doverdale Park. From viewpoints in the surrounding area the Site is seen in the context of the existing developed area of Doverdale Park.

Contribution of the Appeal Site to the setting and character of Hampton Lovett

3.42 In terms of its contribution to the setting and character of Hampton Lovett, the Appeal Site only contributes to the setting of the southern side of the village. It is not visually prominent and the Site is ordinary in both its character and appearance and contains no significant landscape features. As a result of this I consider that the contribution of the Site to both the setting and character of Hampton Lovett is limited.



Photo B: View towards edge of Hampton Lovett from A442 when approaching from the north – the Appeal Site is screened from view and does not contribute to the setting of the northern side of Hampton Lovett

3.43 In my opinion, areas which play a much more significant role in the setting of Hampton Lovett are the areas of undulating arable, pastoral and woodland landscape to the north and east of the hamlet.



Photos C and D: Views of open landscape to the north and east of Hampton Lovett – these areas make a more significant contribution to the setting of Hampton Lovett than the Appeal Site

Visual Amenity Evaluation

3.44 When considering the importance of the Site in views and the contribution these make to local visual amenity, a number of things are relevant including the visual influence of the Site in terms of the extent of its visibility, the number of visual receptors and views affected and the scenic quality of these views. The submitted LVA provides an assessment of representative views towards the Appeal Site and I provide further detail below.

Extent of visibility and visual influence of the Appeal Site

- 3.45 The Appeal Site is well contained by surrounding mature vegetation and existing built form. To the east, views are screened by the railway embankment and trees along the railway together with a large block of woodland to the east of the railway. To the south, the Site is enclosed by mature vegetation along the Elmbridge Brook. To the west, a mature tree belt and the Hampton Lovett Industrial Estate provide strong enclosure and to the north, properties and associated garden vegetation along The Forest prevent views of the Site from the open countryside further north.



Photo E: View west across the Site towards Doverdale Park – mobile homes influence the character and appearance of the Site

- 3.46 As a result of the above, despite its relatively large size, the visibility of the Site from the surrounding area is surprisingly low. This is evident when visiting the Site and walking the local roads and public rights of way.
- 3.47 The principal publicly accessible viewpoints from which the Appeal Site is visible are: the A442 – glimpsed views through breaks in the hedgerow from the road as it passes the Site; The Forest and public bridleway ref 537/538 - open and glimpsed views for a c. 300m stretch of the route; and the railway line – glimpsed views as the track passes adjacent to the Site. In each of these, the Appeal Site is visible in the middle distance of these views, seen as an open field of rough grazing land, with properties on The Forest or Doverdale Park seen beyond.
- 3.48 The largest receptor group of people experiencing views of the Site are road users travelling along the A442 and passengers travelling on the railway line. However, both of these would generally be experienced when travelling at speed and views are fleeting.
- 3.49 The scenic quality of the Site is also relatively low, comprising just an open field of rough grass with perimeter vegetation and no significant landscape features on the Site.

Summary Evaluation

- 3.50 I have undertaken an appraisal of the Site, its landscape context and views to and from the Site and evaluated the existing role and importance of the Site. I consider the Site to be part of a relatively ordinary landscape and of notably lower value and sensitivity than most other landscape areas which surround Droitwich. I note that WCC came to a similar conclusion in the County Landscape Character Assessment when they identified the Site and area to the west as being an area of Low Landscape Sensitivity. Again, this seems at odds with the Council's current contention for the purposes of this appeal that the Site is a valued landscape.
- 3.51 The Site forms part of an area of Settled Landscape Type. Its position in between two existing settled areas of Hampton Lovett and enclosure and separation from the wider countryside by built development, dense mature planting and roads and railway give the Site good capacity to accommodate development of the type proposed.

4. Key features of the Application Design and Landscape Strategy

- 4.1 Outline planning permission is sought for a proposed residential development of up to 102 units with associated access and landscaping.
- 4.2 The development of the scheme proposals has been landscape-led, initially through the involvement of EDP landscape architects in the development of proposals and more recently by Turley Landscape during the appeal preparation process and the preparation of a revised landscape strategy for the site.
- 4.3 The drawings and documents submitted with the planning application include a: Design and Access Statement; Plotted Site Plan; and, Rendered Site Plan. An updated Landscape Strategy has also been prepared and is included as **Appendix 2** to this proof. Particular reference should be made to the Landscape Strategy as this provides information on the proposed approach to the landscape masterplan for the Site including demonstrating how the landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands as set out in the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment have been followed.
- 4.4 Whilst the scheme application is in outline form and detailed proposals for the scheme would be the subject of a reserved matters application, the application documents and drawings do set out clearly the key design principles for the proposals. These include:
- Development area is located to the north-east part of the Site, integrating it with the Doverdale Park area and maintaining **substantial set backs** from The Forest and Hampton Lovett church to the north, the land along Elmbridge Brook designated as 'Significant Gap' to the south and the A442 to the west;
 - **Building design, scale, materials and detailing** would be influenced by local precedent including **vernacular forms and materials** used in either a traditional or contemporary manner;
 - **Development edges would face outwards** to create a positive frontage to the adjoining open spaces. On the northern edge properties would look towards the church and existing properties on The Forest forming a positive relationship between the historic core of Hampton Lovett and the new proposed area of residential development;
 - **New footpath link** from south western corner of the Site connecting to Hampton Lovett church – reintroducing a historic footpath route which appears to have been lost when the former PoW camp on the Doverdale Park site was constructed;
 - Set-back of development edge around the entrance from the A442 creates an **attractive entrance area** when viewed by road users moving along the A442;
 - Incorporation of **substantial tree planting** throughout the development area and proposed open spaces; and

- Introduction of planting and species rich meadows and grassland would result in significant **increase (over 20%) in biodiversity value** of the site.

4.5 Of particular note in the above list is the approach to tree planting in the proposals; importantly, the illustrative scheme incorporates a large amount of new trees including street trees, feature trees and trees in the amenity green spaces within and around the development area. The illustrative proposals demonstrate that the development can comfortably meet the requirements of the 2021 revised NPPF para 131 which requires streets in new developments to be tree-lined and also provides opportunities for trees to be accommodated elsewhere on the site. As a result, I consider that the proposed development parameters and design objectives would allow the creation of a well-treed setting for the development which would create an attractive leafy character for the area which would endure in the long term.

Revised Landscape Strategy

4.6 In addition to the design principles and landscape mitigation measures described above, which were included within the landscape strategy that was submitted with the application, I have proposed some further amendments to the Landscape Strategy. These are intended to demonstrate how the landscape proposals for the development could be further developed to enhance the local landscape character and create a high quality landscape setting for the proposed development. This has included the development of illustrative landscape proposals for the open space area to the north of the Proposed Development area which falls outside the Application Site boundary but is within the Applicant’s ownership. Public access to this area and the implementation of landscape enhancements would be secured as part of the S106 agreement for the site.

4.7 A key part of the revised landscape strategy was to demonstrate how the Proposed Development could follow the landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands which are set out within the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment. Table 4.1 below sets out the landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands and explains how the Proposed Development could meet these guidelines.

Table 4.1 – Analysis of how the Proposed Development could contribute to the identified landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands

Principal Timbered Farmlands Landscape Guidelines ¹⁷	Response to Guideline within the Revised Landscape Strategy for the Appeal Scheme
General – the <i>‘key element’</i> of the Principal Timbered Farmlands areas is noted as being <i>‘the strong unifying presence of tree cover’</i>	The proposed development would be designed to reinforce this key characteristic of a strong unifying presence of tree cover. Proposed dwellings would be set within a strong framework of trees (including street

¹⁷ Landscape Type Information Sheet for Principal Timbered Farmlands (Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment)

	trees, garden trees, hedgerow trees, small copses and tree planting within the open space areas).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>maintain the tree cover character of hedgerow oaks, and enhance the age structure of the hedgerow oak population</i> 	New hedgerow trees (predominantly oak) are proposed within the existing and proposed hedgerows
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>conserve all ancient woodland sites and restock with locally occurring native species</i> 	No ancient woodlands present on site but existing woodland blocks within the Site (and adjacent land owned by the applicant) would be retained and reinforced with new planting of locally occurring native species. Copses of new woodland planting are also proposed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>seek to bring about coalescence of fragmented relic ancient woodlands</i> 	Increased tree cover across the site due to introduction of small woodland copses, new hedgerow trees and other tree planting across the Site would contribute to improved connectivity between the existing areas of Ancient Woodland/Ancient Replanted Woodland to the east and west of the Site.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>encourage the planting of new woodlands, reflecting the scale, shape and composition of the existing ancient woodland character, favouring oak as the major species</i> 	Planting of several small field corner copses with irregular outlines is proposed (these are identified in the guidelines as a key component of the existing woodland character and overall organic character of the landscape). Oak would be the dominant species
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>conserve and restore tree cover along water courses and streamlines</i> 	Existing tree cover along Elmbridge Brook would be retained and reinforced with new planting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>seek opportunities to enhance tree cover along highways and other non-farmed locations</i> 	Substantial number of new hedgerow trees within the hedgerow adjacent to the A442 is proposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>conserve and restore the pattern and composition of the hedgerow structure through appropriate management, and replanting</i> 	New hedgerow planting is proposed and existing hedgerows would be retained and improved. Includes replanting of a hedgerow along field boundary adjacent to The Forest. All hedgerows would be regularly managed as part of the landscape management regime for the Site.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>conserve the organic pattern and character of the lane networks</i> 	Existing lane network would be maintained and new road layout would be designed with an organic pattern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>maintain the historic dispersed settlement pattern</i> 	Proposed development would not be a dispersed settlement pattern. However, this guideline is of less importance as the settlement pattern is not a key characteristic of primary or secondary significance for the Principal Timbered Farmlands landscape type. (This point is discussed further below.)

Conclusions on Design Approach

- 4.8 Overall, in summary, the development parameters and illustrative scheme design have clearly been landscape-led and respond appropriately to the Site’s landscape and visual context. In my opinion, the development parameters and design principles set out within the DAS and Revised Landscape Strategy provide the framework for the delivery of a well-designed, attractive and high quality development which would form a high quality residential environment. The proposed revised landscape strategy would provide a strong landscape framework for the development which would integrate with the local landscape structure of the area and contribute to the identified landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands.

5. Landscape and Visual Effects of the Proposed Scheme and Mitigation Measures

5.1 In this section I summarise the likely landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. Further commentary and analysis is provided in the LVA.

Landscape Effects

5.2 Landscape effects include the effects on individual landscape features and on the landscape character at different scales (i.e. the site itself, the local settlement and the local character area). I discuss each of these below in turn, drawing on the findings of the LVA where relevant and adding further detail and my own professional judgement where appropriate.

Impact on Primary and Secondary Key Characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands

5.3 The key characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands were set out in Box 3.1 of this proof. Of these, the primary and secondary characteristics are the most important and Table 5.1 below provides an analysis of how these would be affected by the Proposed Development.

Table 5.1 Impact of the Proposed Development on the Key Characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands

Characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands	Effect of the Proposed Development on the Characteristic
<i>Primary Characteristic</i>	
Notable pattern of hedgerow trees, predominantly oak	Existing pattern of hedgerow trees around the Site is weak but would be strengthened by the Proposed Development with the introduction of new hedgerow trees (predominantly oak) to existing and new hedgerows.
Hedgerow boundaries to fields	Existing hedgerows around the Site would be retained and reinforced and further new hedgerows introduced (e.g. along The Forest) to reinforce the hedgerow pattern
Ancient wooded character	Ancient wooded character of the landscape would be reinforced by the extensive proposed tree planting around and within the Proposed Development

	which would substantially increase the tree cover of the area
Secondary	
Organic enclosure pattern	The Proposed Development would sit within the existing organic enclosure pattern. Further planting would be introduced (including small, irregular shaped copses and organic hedgerow alignments) which would reinforce this organic enclosure pattern.
Small-scale landscape with hedgerow trees creating filtered views	Proposed Development would respect the existing scale of the landscape with no removal of hedgerow lines or belts of vegetation. New planting could reinforce the sense and scale of landscape enclosure and the introduction of new hedgerow trees would strengthen the characteristic of filtered views.
Brick and timber building style of older properties	Proposed Development would not affect any existing buildings. This characteristic could be reinforced by the building style of proposed buildings which could reflect the materiality and style of older buildings in the area (as is proposed in the DAS).
Rolling lowland with occasional steep sided hills and low escarpments	Proposed Development would respect and integrate with the rolling topography of the Site and surrounding local area.

- 5.4 Table 5.1 demonstrates that the primary and secondary characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands would not be adversely affected by the proposals and in most cases would be preserved and reinforced.

Impact on the character of the Site and proposed mitigation measures

- 5.5 The Proposed Development would change the central part of the Site from an area of rough grazed grass to a new area of residential development and associated open space and the northern and southern parts of the Site to areas of informal open space. The effect of this would be that the central part of the Site would change from having an open, semi-rural character to a developed and residential character but set within a strong tree cover. The northern and southern parts of the Site would retain an open character albeit proposed planting (mainly around the edges) would provide an increased level of tree cover and create an increased sense of enclosure.

- 5.6 In my opinion, the landscape and visual impacts of this change in character could be substantially reduced through the detailed design of the proposals and detailed landscape proposals (at reserved matters stage). Key mitigation measures already included in the proposals or which could be incorporated at detailed design stage include the following:
- 5.7 Firstly, the location of the proposed dwellings in the centre of the Site would set it between two existing settled areas of Hampton Lovett and create a more cohesive and organic settlement pattern than currently with the new development providing a transition between the geometric settlement pattern of Doverdale Park and the linear settlement pattern of properties along The Forest.
- 5.8 Secondly, the incorporation of an appropriate set back of the new development edge from The Forest and St Mary's Church, would ensure that the sense of openness of the landscape around the church and The Forest would be preserved. At the same time it would also allow the creation of a new area of informal open space between the two parts of the settlement which would be of improved character, appearance and biodiversity value compared with the existing rough grassland.
- 5.9 Thirdly, the retention and enhancement of existing hedgerows and introduction of new hedgerow trees and woodland copses on the Site would preserve and reinforce the primary key landscape characteristics of the area.
- 5.10 Fourthly, the key characteristic of the Principal Timbered Farmland landscape type of having a '*strong unifying presence of tree cover*' could be reinforced by the introduction of new tree and shrub planting across the development area. This would be beneficial to the character, appearance and biodiversity value of the Site and surrounding local landscape. The illustrative masterplan and landscape principles set out in the landscape strategy indicate that extensive planting could be delivered across the Site. Once established, this planting would provide a strong level of tree cover across the Site which would create an attractive leafy character, integrate the proposed built development with the landscape and reinforce the existing landscape features around the site perimeter. In addition to the landscape benefits the proposed planting strategy would also bring a substantial gain (over 20%) in the biodiversity value of the Site.
- 5.11 Finally, fifthly, the outline development parameters and design principles set out in the DAS provide the framework for development of good quality design, using traditional materials (in a traditional or contemporary style) and designed with outward-facing edges to provide a positive frontage to the surrounding open areas (replacing existing poor quality edges formed by the mobile homes in Doverdale Park and rear elevations and garden fences of other surrounding properties).
- 5.12 Overall, the LVA concludes that the impact of the Proposed Development on the character of the Site would be a moderate/minor adverse effect ¹⁸. I agree with this judgement but would also add that by year 15, proposed mitigation measures, including tree and hedgerow planting, would have established and softened the impact of the

¹⁸ Moderate/minor level of effect in the LVA is based on the assessment of the Site as being of low sensitivity and the proposed development resulting in a high magnitude of change.

proposals and the level of effect would reduce further. In my opinion therefore there would be a limited and localised adverse impact on the character of the Site.

Impact on the character of the wider landscape

- 5.13 In the wider landscape, the proposed development would be predominantly screened from view by the adjoining mature vegetation, railway embankment, existing buildings on The Forest and substantial areas of mature woodland in the local surrounding landscape. The impact of the proposals on the character of the wider surrounding landscape would therefore be very limited.
- 5.14 The proposals would introduce a new area of residential development on land which is currently undeveloped. This would result in a permanent change to a very small part of the Westwood Principal Timbered Farmlands character area. The development would sit between the A442 and the railway line within an area which already contains the residential developments of Doverdale Park and The Forest and, importantly, it would not encroach upon the wider landscape of open countryside which lies to the east of the railway line and north of The Forest. The identified key characteristics of the local landscape character would also be preserved and enhanced (as demonstrated in Table 5.1) and the proposed landscape framework would introduce some beneficial changes to the landscape character as noted above.
- 5.15 Overall, I consider that the impact of the proposals on the wider landscape would be of very low magnitude.

Visual Effects

- 5.16 A detailed assessment of the likely visual effects of the proposed development is provided in section 5 of the LVA. I do not therefore present them again here in detail.
- 5.17 However, in summary, due to the existing enclosure of the Site by vegetation and existing built development together with the additional visual enclosure which would be provided by proposed planting, few views or visual receptors would be significantly changed by the proposed development. Notably, there would be no significant changes to the views and general visual amenity experienced by people travelling through the areas of open countryside to the north and east of the Site.
- 5.18 The council's principal concerns about visual impacts of the development are set out in para 5.15 of their Statement of Case and relate to potential effects on views from:
- dwellings on Kidderminster Road, The Forest and Doverdale Park
 - The Forest/public bridleway 537/538 (part of Monarch's Way long distance footpath)
 - the A442
 - the railway line
- 5.19 My evidence below therefore focuses on these visual receptors and is supported by **Figure 5.1** below which provides some key dimensions on separation distances.



Figure 5.1: Key dimensions (in meters) between the proposed development and The Forest/St Mary's Church

- 5.20 *Private residential properties on Kidderminster Road, The Forest and Doverdale Park* – Residents of surrounding properties would have views towards the proposed development, mainly from upper floor windows and some garden areas. The outlook from these properties would therefore change. However, these are private viewpoints and individuals do not have a right to a view¹⁹; the change to views from residential properties is not a material planning consideration, unless the changes are so great that they would harm the residential amenity of the properties. Whilst the current application is in outline form, it is clear to me that there is sufficient space available for a layout to be agreed with acceptable separation distances such that the residential amenity of surrounding properties could be preserved. I note that the inspector at the previous inquiry came to a similar conclusion in para 51 of her decision letter noting that: *'I am satisfied that there would be adequate space to provide for a scheme which would meet normal requirements for privacy, outlook and daylight. I note that there is no right to a private view.'*
- 5.21 *The Forest/public bridleway 537/538* – From this route, views south would change with the introduction of the Proposed Development. The foreground of views would remain as open grassland (either grazed or maintained as informal grassland) with the proposed houses seen behind and replacing the existing views of mobile homes in Doverdale Park. The views would become more urban in character due to the increased amount of

¹⁹ Principle established by Aldred's Law in 1610.

development that would be visible in the view. This more urbanising influence would be an adverse effect. However, the set back of the development edge c.80m away from the route and the introduction of new hedgerow planting with hedgerow trees adjacent to the route together with a further line of planting on the northern edge of the development area, would provide effective mitigation and soften the effects of the built form. I consider that (subject to sensitive detailed design at reserved matters stage), a pleasant outlook from the route to the south could be maintained and note also that the views north towards the church (which I consider to be of higher value and importance) would be preserved.

5.22 Furthermore, I note that the proposed new footpath route through the site from St Mary's Church in the north to the roundabout junction of the A442 and Pointon Way in the south provides the opportunity for an alternative route for the Monarch's Way which would avoid views of the Hampton Lovett Industrial Estate and provide opportunities for the enjoyment of views along the Elmbridge Brook valley (as indicated on **Figure 5.2** below).

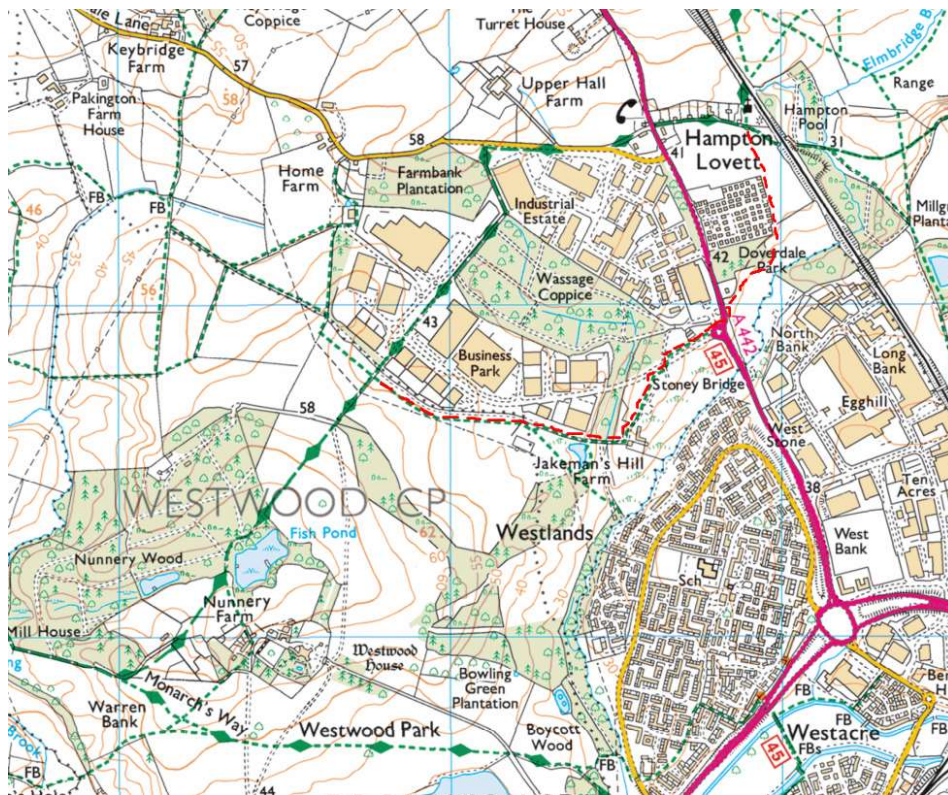


Figure 5.2: OS map illustrating potential alternative route (in red) for Monarch's Way – new route through the site could create improved alternative route for pedestrians by connecting with existing footpaths west of A442 and avoiding Hampton Lovett industrial estate and 500m stretch along road (Doverdale Lane) (also potential to form a circular walking loop)

5.23 *The A442 – From the A442, views of the Proposed Development would be predominantly screened, due to the presence of a dense roadside hedgerow (which it is proposed to further reinforce with additional planting and hedgerow trees) and the set back of the development edge from the road by 60 – 90m, behind a green space. Whilst there would be some views from the A442 in which the proposed development would*

be visible, most of these would be glimpsed views from vehicles travelling at a relatively fast speed and the development would be a background feature, filtered by trees (both existing and proposed). Furthermore, the stretch of the A442 which would be affected would be between The Forest in the north and Elmbridge Brook in the south. Along this part of the A442, there are already views from the road of existing development, for example in views west along Doverdale Lane and Wassage Way and views east towards Doverdale Park and The Forest plus open views to the west of the Hampton Lovett industrial estate. The addition of new residential development in the background of these views would therefore not appear incongruent and, in my opinion, the visual amenity of road users would not be significantly harmed. (In contrast, views from the A442 north of The Forest are notably more rural in character with little built development visible other than occasional scattered farmsteads. If the development had been visible from this part of the A442 it would have been more incongruent and had a more significant effect on visual amenity.)

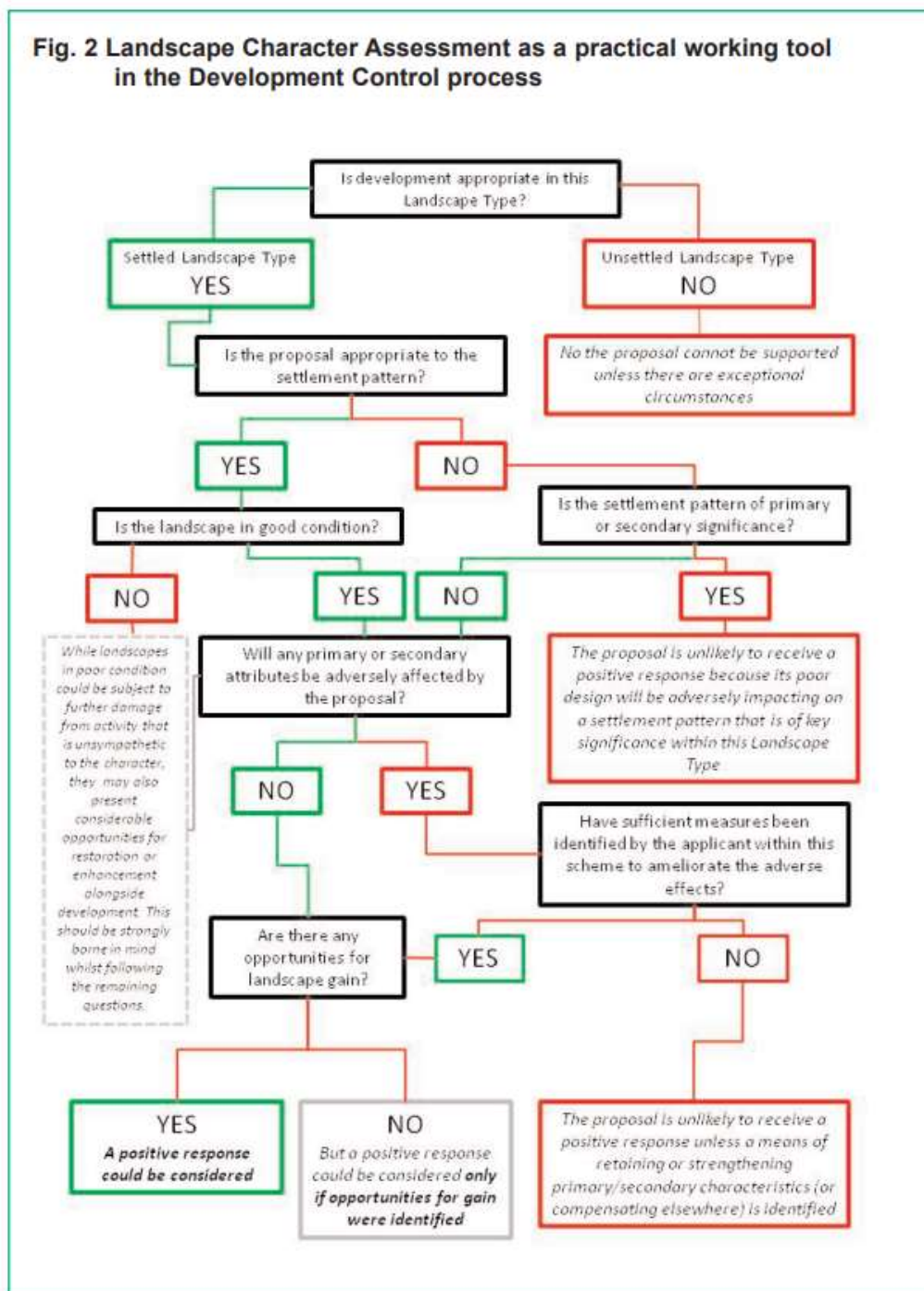
5.24 *The railway line* – There would be glimpsed views of the Proposed Development from passing trains on the railway line. In summer, these would be partially screened by existing and proposed vegetation along the railway line embankment but in winter they would be more open. However, trains would be passing at speed and views would be of relatively short duration.

5.25 *Conclusions on visual effects* – The LVA sets out the visual receptors which would be principally affected by the proposed development and the magnitude and nature of effect likely to be experienced. Whilst some adverse effects have been identified, I regard the harm considered in the round to be limited for the following reasons:

- the Proposed Development would be visible from a localised area in the immediate vicinity of the Site and only a limited number of views would be affected;
- the residential amenity of surrounding existing residential properties would be maintained;
- existing views are already characterised by visibility of the settlement edge of Doverdale Park and other built development and the presence of additional residential development in views would not appear incongruent or uncharacteristic for the area;
- proposed planting would mitigate the effects and, once matured would have a positive effect on local visual amenity;
- existing views which would be affected are not of particular scenic importance and are of ordinary value (the views of higher scenic value across the open countryside to the north of The Forest would not be affected);
- creation of new permissive routes across the northern open space area would provide opportunities for new views north towards the church to be experienced and enjoyed.

6. Review of the Appeal Scheme against LCA Flow Diagram for Development Control Process

6.1 Section 4.0 of the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Guidance (August 2012) provides guidance on the application of landscape character assessment in the development control process. Figure 2 from the guidance shows the process in detail and is reproduced below.



- 6.2 I set out below how the Appeal Site and development proposals should be considered against each stage of this process following the flow diagram set out in the diagram above.
- 6.3 Q1. *Is development appropriate in this Landscape Type?* – YES – The Site falls within the Principal Timbered Farmland Landscape Type which is identified as a ‘Settled Landscape Type’²⁰
- 6.4 Q2. *Is the proposal appropriate to the settlement pattern?* – NO – The Site falls within a landscape type that has a dispersed settlement pattern and the proposed development would be a departure from this.
- 6.5 Q3. *Is the settlement pattern of primary or secondary significance?* – NO – The dispersed settlement pattern for the Principal Timbered Farmland is identified as being of only tertiary significance and indeed, the supporting narrative notes that *‘the settlement pattern is a variable one’*²¹ for this landscape type.
- 6.6 Q4. *Will any primary or secondary attributes be adversely affected by the proposals?* - NO - Table 5.1 of this proof demonstrates that the primary and secondary characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands would not be adversely affected by the proposals and in most cases would be preserved and reinforced.
- 6.7 Q5. *Are there any opportunities for landscape gain?* – YES – The scheme proposals offer significant opportunities for landscape gain in the form of landscape enhancements which would contribute to the specific landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands (as demonstrated in Table 4.1 of this proof) and delivering significant biodiversity net gain.
- 6.8 The conclusion of the above process for the Proposed Development is **‘YES - a positive response could be considered’** i.e. that the development would not lead to the destruction of the inherent landscape character and that it could provide opportunities to strengthen character.
- 6.9 The above evaluation demonstrates that, when the council’s own guidance on landscape character assessment is followed and used as a tool in the development control process, the scheme proposals could be considered acceptable in landscape terms.
- 6.10 I have found no evidence that the above exercise was carried out by the council’s landscape officer when considering the planning application and providing her response to the scheme nor has it been considered in the officer’s report when considering the determination of the planning application. Similarly, I have found no evidence that the inspector at the previous appeal was taken through this process of landscape evaluation.

²⁰ Figure 4 on page 33 of the LCA Supplementary Guidance confirms which landscape types are settled and which are unsettled.

²¹ Line 10 and 11, P83, LCA Supplementary Guidance

7. Comparison with Previous Planning Appeal

7.1 In October 2019 a planning appeal (ref APP/H1840/W/18/3218814), for a proposed development on a similar Site as the current Appeal Site, was considered at a Public Inquiry and the appeal was dismissed (referred to hereafter as the “2019 Scheme”). In this section I briefly outline the main differences between the 2019 Scheme and the current Appeal Scheme; I provide commentary on how the landscape and visual impacts of the two schemes differ and additional commentary on a number of key omissions from the landscape evidence which was presented at the previous appeal.

Comparison between the 2019 scheme and the current Appeal Scheme

7.2 From a landscape perspective there are four key differences to note between the 2019 Scheme and the current Appeal Scheme.

- **Reduced amount of built development** - the number of residential units has been substantially reduced from 144 to 102 – a reduction of c.29%.
- **Retention of northern area as undeveloped land** – the site boundary has been located southwards to provide a minimum c.80m wide area of undeveloped land between the edge of the development and The Forest. Most of this would be informal open space which could be used for informal recreation and/or retained as grazing pasture.
- **Increased southern area of public open space** – The southern site boundary has been moved southwards to create a larger area of public open space which would be improved with landscape, ecological and recreational enhancements.
- **Further details on proposed landscape strategy** – Further details on the proposed landscape strategy have been developed for the current Appeal Scheme. These demonstrate how the proposals would comply with and contribute to the landscape objectives for the local landscape character of the Principal Timbered Farmlands as set out in the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment.

Implications of the scheme changes on identified landscape and visual effects

7.3 In summary, the new proposals for the Site would result in the following key changes to the previously identified landscape and visual effects:

- Reduced visibility and prominence of proposed houses when seen from The Forest, A442, public bridleway 537/8 and St Mary’s Church;
- Increased sense of openness and separation between the proposed houses and the church and properties on The Forest (with associated reductions in impacts on the setting of the church and properties);
- Reduction in urbanising effect of development (due to reductions in: area of development, number of units, number of residents and general movement and activity levels and also increases in the area of landscape and tree cover

proposed) and associated reduction in the impact of the development on the character of Hampton Lovett;

- Scale of proposed development area is more appropriate to the scale and character of existing settlement in Hampton Lovett (in Doverdale Park and on The Forest);
- Increased reinforcement of local landscape characteristics – tree/woodland cover, hedgerow trees and hedgerows (in accordance with landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands in the Worcestershire LCA);

7.4 In my opinion, whilst I accept that the current Appeal scheme would still result in some adverse landscape and visual impacts (as is inevitable for any greenfield development) I consider that the revised proposals would have a notably lesser impact on the character and appearance of the area than would have arisen with the 2019 scheme.

Omissions from landscape evidence presented at previous Appeal

7.5 I have reviewed the landscape evidence presented at the previous inquiry and have noted that there were some significant omissions which I consider meant that the presentation and discussion of landscape issues was incomplete. In particular, I note that the following was not included:

- Analysis of Landscape Condition and Sensitivity from the 2013 WCC Landscape Character Assessment - this is discussed in section 3 of this proof and demonstrates that the Council's assessment identifies the Site is part of an area of poor landscape condition and low landscape sensitivity.
- Acknowledgement that the Site falls within a 'Settled Landscape Type' – this is discussed in section 3 of this proof and identifies that settled landscape types are most suitable for accommodating development and that, in contrast, in the unsettled landscapes there is a high presumption against new development.
- Review of the site and proposal against the flow diagram for using the WCC Landscape Character Assessment as a practical working tool in the Development Control Process – I provide this in section 5 of this proof and demonstrate that if this process is followed then the scheme proposals could be considered acceptable in landscape terms.
- Detailed analysis of the landscape value of the site – this is provided in Table 3.1 of this proof and demonstrates that the site should not be considered as forming a valued landscape.
- Analysis of the landscape sensitivity of the Site in comparison with that of the wider landscapes surrounding Droitwich – I provide this in section 4 of this proof and demonstrate that most of the other landscape areas surrounding Droitwich are of higher value and/or sensitivity.

7.6 As a result of the above, I consider that the inspector at the previous inquiry was given an incomplete picture of the value and sensitivity of the Site and its capacity to accommodate development.

8. Consideration of the Development in relation to Planning Policy and the Reasons for Refusal

8.1 The planning policy context is set out in detail in the proof of evidence of Mr Guy Wakefield and the Statement of Common Ground. In this section I review the policies and guidance which relate specifically to landscape and visual matters and I provide an assessment on whether, and to what extent, the proposed scheme conflicts with landscape policy. Further detail on other planning matters, and the weight which should be given in the planning balance in the case of any conflict with policy, is provided in the proof of evidence of Mr Wakefield.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2021

8.2 Section 15 of the NPPF sets out details for requirements for conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Within this, paragraph 174a relates to the protection and enhancement of 'valued landscapes' and 174b relates to '*recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*'.

8.3 I have demonstrated in Section two that the Site does not form part of a valued landscape and should not therefore be afforded special protection under part a) of paragraph 174.

8.4 However, in the event that the inspector comes to a different opinion and concludes that the Site should be considered a valued landscape, then attention should be given to the second part of NPPF para 174a which states that protection and enhancing valued landscapes should be '*in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan*'

8.5 As the Site has neither a statutory status or identified quality in the development plan, then, even if it were judged to be a Valued Landscape, the level of additional protection and enhancement afforded to it by para 174a, should be at the lowest level.

8.6 In relation to part b) of paragraph 174, I have identified that the proposals would result in some harm to the character and appearance of the countryside. However, I consider that the proposals respect the sensitivities of the site and that this harm would be limited; I say this for five reasons.

8.7 Firstly, the development proposals have, from the start, been fully informed by landscape analysis and the LVA process. This has identified the sensitivities of the surrounding countryside and guided the development of the scheme proposals and supporting landscape strategy.

8.8 Secondly, the key primary and secondary characteristics of the landscape character type which the site forms part of – Principal Timbered Farmlands, have been recognised and the scheme proposals and supporting landscape strategy were developed to ensure that these were preserved.

8.9 Thirdly, the proposed development is located on a site which has few landscape features and is enclosed by vegetation, existing development which together limit its visibility. As

a result, it does not significantly contribute to the landscape character or the beauty of the wider surrounding countryside.

- 8.10 Fourthly, the proposal recognises the intrinsic character of the Site by securing the retention and protection of the existing positive landscape features on the Site and protecting and enhancing a large proportion of the Site as open space.
- 8.11 Finally, fifthly I have demonstrated that landscape proposals for the Site could contribute to the landscape objectives for the Principal Timbered Farmlands identified in the WCC landscape character assessment.

South Worcestershire Development Plan

- 8.12 The Council's SoC and RfR 1 identify conflict with policy SWDP25. Part A of the policy sets out three criteria that development proposals and associated landscape schemes must demonstrate. I discuss each of these below.
- 8.13 Criterion i) is that the latest Landscape Character Assessment and its guidelines must be taken account of. Footnote 52 of the policy directs us to the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment (online version) and para 2 of the supporting text notes that this includes the Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Guidance (August 2012).
- 8.14 The application LVA references the Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment and I have given further information in Section 4, Table 4.1 of this proof and in the Landscape Strategy demonstrating how the guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands have been followed. I have also taken account of the condition and sensitivity analysis for Land Cover Parcels contained within the Supplementary Guidance and also the flow diagram within that guidance which provides a process for using the WCC Landscape Character Assessment to inform the development control process. To me, the scheme clearly complies with criterion i).
- 8.15 Criterion ii) is that proposals should be appropriate to, and integrate with, the character of the landscape setting. I have identified that the proposals would result in some adverse landscape and visual effects and there would therefore be some conflict with this criterion. However, I consider that this conflict would be limited due to the following:
- The development is within a 'settled landscape type' i.e. an area in which settlement is not inappropriate;
 - At a local level the Site lies between the A442 and the railway line which is an area already characterised by two areas of residential development (forming parts of Hampton Lovett) and the proposals would integrate with these;
 - The Site forms part of an area which the Council's own landscape study identifies as being of Low landscape sensitivity and therefore '*may be regarded as least sensitive to change and therefore most able to accommodate development*²²';

²² Para 2.3.9.4 WCC LCA Technical Handbook

- The extensive areas of proposed undeveloped land within the Site and adjacent land owned by the applicant provide extensive areas for delivering landscape enhancements which would mitigate potential adverse effects of the proposals, integrate them with the surrounding landscape and contribute to the identified landscape guidelines for the Principal Timbered Farmlands;
- 8.16 Criterion iii) is that proposals should conserve and enhance the primary characteristics defined in the landscape character assessment and important features of the LCP and have taken available opportunities to enhance the landscape. As I have already demonstrated, the defined primary characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands would be both preserved and enhanced by the proposed development. Similarly, the Landscape Strategy demonstrates the substantial opportunities for landscape enhancement which the proposals offer due to the extensive areas of open space associated with the proposals.
- 8.17 Part B of policy SWDP25 requires that an LVIA should be undertaken for all major development. The planning application was submitted with an LVIA and this part of the policy is therefore clearly complied with.

Reasons for Refusal

First Reason for Refusal

- 8.18 The first reason for refusal has four parts to it which are of relevance to landscape and visual matters. I deal with each of these in turn.
- 8.19 Firstly, the Council alleges that the proposed development *'fails to take into account the latest Landscape Character Assessment and its guidelines'*. My response to this is provided in para 8.14 above.
- 8.20 Secondly, the Council alleges that *'Development on this site would not be appropriate to, or integrate with, the character of the landscape setting'*. My response to this is provided in para 8.15 above.
- 8.21 Thirdly, the Council alleges that the proposals *'would impact adversely upon a valued landscape.'* As I have demonstrated, I do not consider that the Appeal Sites meets the criteria set out in the Landscape Institute technical guidance note for identifying valued landscapes. However, I agree that there would be some adverse landscape impacts arising from the proposals but in my opinion the level of harm would be low and the weight afforded to this harm should be moderated accordingly.
- 8.22 My judgement on the low level of landscape harm that would arise is based on the following factors:
- a) The Site does not form part of a designated landscape and is part of an area identified by the Council as being of Low landscape sensitivity; it is of lower landscape sensitivity than most of the rest of the Borough;
 - b) The scale of development proposed is modest and is appropriate to its context;

- c) No key landscape features would be lost as a result of the proposed development and the proposed development would strengthen and enhance the local landscape framework by introducing new hedgerows and increased tree cover (according with the WCC landscape guidelines);
- d) The primary and secondary landscape characteristics of the Principal Timbered Farmlands landscape type would be preserved;
- e) Whilst the character of the Site would change from an agricultural field to residential development and amenity space, the new character would sit alongside other existing residential development and would be appropriate to the context and character of the settled landscape in and around Hampton Lovett;
- f) The development would integrate with the existing built form of Hampton Lovett and would not appear incongruent or 'out of place'; and,
- g) The proposed mitigation measures of green spaces and new tree and shrub planting would soften the new built form, create an improved edge to the countryside (compared with Doverdale Park) and has the potential to create a high quality residential environment (subject to good quality design at the reserved matters stage).

8.23 In light of the above, in my opinion the low level and localised landscape impact should be weighed accordingly in the planning balance.

8.24 Finally, fourthly, the Council alleges that *'the proposed development would result in adverse visual impacts in the local landscape, including in views from a promoted leisure walking route'*. I agree that there would be some adverse visual impacts arising from visibility of the new built development, including in views from the Monarch's Way promoted walking group. However, I consider that the level of harm would be low and the weight afforded to this harm should therefore be moderated accordingly. I say this for the same reasons as set out above in relation to landscape impacts and also for the following additional reasons:

- a) Firstly, existing features within and adjacent to the Site which contribute to visual amenity would be retained and substantial areas of new planting are proposed which would create new landscape features in the long term and contribute to the local visual amenity;
- b) Secondly, most views from the surrounding local roads and rights of way would be unaffected and, from those where it would be visible, the development edge would be set well back from viewpoints and open space and integrated with new and existing planting. The proposed development would be visible from some public viewpoints but it would replace, or be seen in conjunction with, existing views of the properties in Doverdale Park and/or on The Forest and A442 and would not appear incongruent or 'out of place';
- c) Thirdly, in views from The Forest/Monarch's Way, the most important views are northwards towards Hampton Lovett church and Lychgate; these would be

unaffected by the proposals. Furthermore, the creation of new publicly accessible open space to the north of the development area and the re-introduction of a footpath route across the Site to the church would provide new opportunities for views of the church and Lych gate to be enjoyed;

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 In conclusion, in my opinion, the Site is a good site for development; it is an area of ordinary landscape with strong visual containment and one of very few accessible areas around Droitwich which is not constrained by designation as registered historic park or Green Belt or other historic designation or cut off from the town by the M5. The landscape of the Appeal Site is thus of significantly lower sensitivity than most of the rest of the landscape which surrounds Droitwich and landscape and visual effects arising from the proposals would be substantially less than would arise from development of a similar scale in other parts of the local area.
- 9.2 The proposals provide the opportunity to create a new, high quality residential development of an appropriate scale in relation to the existing settlement and which would: integrate with the existing settlement areas of Hampton Lovett; make a positive contribution to the local landscape character of the Principal Timbered Farmlands; protect and reinforce existing landscape features; and, deliver a significant biodiversity net gain. An illustrative landscape strategy has been prepared which demonstrates how landscape measures could mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the proposals and deliver landscape enhancements in accordance with WCC landscape guidance for the Principal Timbered Farmlands. I consider that the residual landscape and visual impacts of the proposals would therefore be localised and limited.