

Summary Proof Of Evidence: Landscape Character and Visual Amenity Matters.

Evidence of Katharine Ellinsfield BSc(Hons) PGDipLA FLI PISEP

In respect of land off School Road, Elmswell, Suffolk

On behalf of Christchurch Land & Estates (Elmswell South) Ltd.

Date: 06/08/2025 | Pegasus Ref: P22-1167

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/25/3364061 | LPA Ref: DC/23/05651

Author: KMSE



1. Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Katharine Morgan Schofield Ellinsfield. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree with dual honours in Landscape Design and Ecology and a Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture, both awarded by the University of Sheffield. I am a Fellow of the Landscape Institute (FLI) and have been a Chartered Landscape Architect since 2011. I also hold an Associate Certificate in Environmental Management and am a Practitioner member of the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (PISEP). I am an Approved Building with Nature (BwN) Assessor.
- 1.2. The evidence contained within my proof related to this appeal is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that I understand that my duty as an expert witness overrides my duty to those instructing me and requires me to give my evidence impartially and objectively. The opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.
- 1.3. This appeal relates to an outline application (planning ref: DC/23/05651) on land to the west of School Road, Elmswell (hereby referred to as the “Appeal Site”). The development proposals (the “Appeal Scheme”) comprises a care village with associated access and green infrastructure. The application was refused by MSDC in June 2024 with 6 Reasons for Refusal.
- 1.4. The planning submission included a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (within which the Appeal Site, its context, relevant landscape character publication and visual resources are described in detail) and accompanying figures and montages which were prepared in support of this application in accordance with recognised guidance, detailing the careful design team’s approach, the Landscape Strategy and varied green infrastructure proposals, and providing an assessment of the effects upon the landscape and visual resources as a result of the proposed development.
- 1.5. This Proof of Evidence relates specifically to matters pertaining to landscape character and visual amenity. In this capacity, I shall be seeking in particular to demonstrate:
 - That while there are likely to be some impacts upon the character of the landscape and visual receptors, these would be limited both in level of effect and geographical scope;
 - The degree to which the proposed landscape strategy delivers effective mitigation in terms of addressing adverse impacts upon the character of the landscape and views;
 - The response of both the built form and green infrastructure with regard to identified important views around Elmswell as defined in the Neighbourhood Plan, and the resulting extent to which these important views can be successfully retained; and
 - The limited role of the Appeal Site itself in terms of its contribution to the character and experience on the approach towards, and entrance to the village of Elmswell.

2. The Reason for Refusal

- 2.1. The report to planning committee (CD 3/1) referenced no objections to the Appeal Scheme from Natural England or the Rights of Way Department.
- 2.2. Comments received from Place Services as summarised within the Committee Report noted the “commendable approach” taken in the development of the scheme’s design and acknowledged the limited impacts. However, the landscape officer was unable to support the Appeal Scheme, as although effects would be limited there will still be harmful adverse effects to the fabric of the landscape of the Appeal Site, and to a limited extent the district level landscape character, as well as some adverse visual effects.
- 2.3. Matters relating specifically to landscape character and visual amenity within the fourth RfR comprise, in summary:
 - the sensitivity and openness of the landscape to the edge of Elmswell of which the Site forms part;
 - The area that creates the entrance to the village through the urban – rural transition and through views of the church from the surrounding area as recognised within ENP Policy ELM2, and the role of the Appeal Site;
 - The impacts upon the landscape of the Appeal Site and a district level and the performance of the proposed landscape strategy and mitigation.

Elmswell’s western Settlement Edge

- 2.4. In terms of sensitivity, the Appeal Site and surrounding area does not comprise a valued landscape for the purposes of paragraph 180 (a) of the NPPF, nor does the Appeal Site lie within any formal designations of relevance to landscape and visual matters.
- 2.5. The LVIA judged the sensitivity of the Appeal Site to be ‘medium’. It recognised notable features in the vicinity as part of its overall consideration of contributing factors, such as St John’s Church, and while attractive (as is virtually every green field development site) the Appeal Site is unremarkable.
- 2.6. With regard to openness, the Appeal Site’s western boundary is currently open to adjoining agricultural land beyond the defining ditch. However, the Appeal Site benefits from some visual and physical enclosure due a combination of features within the local landscape.
- 2.7. In published landscape character assessment terms, the BMSDLG describes the character of the ‘Ancient Plateau Claylands’ LCA (encompassing the Appeal Site) as including some areas which *“have experienced large losses of hedgerow due to changing agricultural practices resulting in the creation of open “prairie” landscapes”*.
- 2.8. Therefore, while at the more immediate scale the Appeal Site itself has an open western boundary to adjoining land, it forms part of a segment of farmland in the south of the character area with a relative sense of enclosure and separation from the wider comparatively more open and elevated landscape to the north of the railway line.

- 2.9. In terms of the Appeal Scheme's response, built form is to be focused towards existing proximate residential development and rail infrastructure (where there is both a relative sense of enclosure and physical and visual separation from the wider landscape to the north) and the southern half of the Site is to remain undeveloped as meadow grassland, preserving the agricultural context of Elmswell right up to School Road.
- 2.10. Furthermore, the appeal scheme incorporates new hedgerows both to the western boundary and along the east, responding to the aims and objectives of the Ancient Plateau Claylands in reference to the open "prairie landscape" and reinforcement of field boundaries.
- 2.11. Consequently, the extent to which the Appeal Scheme would influence the rural edge of Elmswell is very limited.

Impacts upon Important Views

- 2.12. Important Views (IVs) addressed within Policy ELM2 are identified and described within the ENP's accompanying 'Appraisal of Views' document (ENPAV) published in April 2022. The IVs comprise public vantage points within the built up area of Elmswell or across the surrounding countryside to or from the village within which proposed development should not have a detrimental impact upon key landscape and built features.
- 2.13. For the relevant IVs 1, 2 and 4 the specific nature of the view varies, but in all cases the identified key feature is considered to be St John's Church.
- 2.14. As previously identified in the submitted montages and LVIA, the Appeal Scheme would not be apparent within Views 1 and 2 primarily due to intervening topography and vegetation. No discernible effects were therefore reported to occur within views for receptors at these locations or impacting the factors contributing to the importance of the views themselves.
- 2.15. In IV4 the Appeal Site forms part of the Church's setting to the north and occupies the foreground of the view, with the wider rural landscape seen beyond. The layout and design of the Appeal Scheme would allow the retention of a field of view including the church and the landscape beyond towards Woolpit, as well as an appreciation of the church's position above the valley.

The Entrance to the Village

- 2.16. The RfR would appear to imply that the countryside landscape within the Appeal Site *"creates the entrance to the village itself through the transition from a rural area to an urban area"*.
- 2.17. In Section 3 'Neighbourhood Plan Policies' of the ENP it is noted at paragraph 3.6 that *"land rises noticeably from junction 47 of the A14 north-east to that plateau where St John's Church commands a prominent position as a gateway to the village"*.
- 2.18. There is also no mention within IV4's description to suggest that the view illustrates a 'village gateway' or that Appeal Site or land in its immediate context is at or constitutes a key entrance to Elmswell.
- 2.19. The nature of the approach and arrival into Elmswell has been considered in detail as part of this evidence and is illustrated through a series of 'Gateway View' photographs, provided at Appendix B to this Proof. Overall, it appears, including in MSDC's own development plan documents, that it is the church that defines the recognised entrance to Elmswell, both in

terms of its presence on the approach to the village and in marking arrival itself, and reinforced on passing the cemetery, allotments and welcome signage. Additionally, from this approach, given the pattern of existing tree cover and topography the relationship between the Appeal Site and St John's Church is not apparent as the Appeal Site is predominantly screened from view.

- 2.20. Furthermore, the photomontages (original and updated), gateway views and LVIA Viewpoints demonstrate there would be marginal, if any, views of the Appeal Scheme on the approach to the village from Woolpit right up until receptors along Heath Road and Church Road meet the Appeal Site's southern boundary at the junction with School Road, including at IV2.
- 2.21. The Appeal Site is not considered to make any notable contribution to the visual experience on approaching or at the point of arrival in Elmswell from Woolpit to the south-west.
- 2.22. Consequently, there appears to be limited – if any – evidence to support the assertion in the Committee Report that the Appeal Scheme would result in '*a harmful impact on the landscape approaching Elmswell*', particularly as the Appeal Site currently does not form a consistent or readily identifiable element of existing views, nor would the Appeal Scheme on completion.

Landscape and Visual effects

- 2.23. The perception of change and related impacts upon landscape and visual receptors arising from the Appeal Scheme are considered to be retained within a relatively limited scope due to both physical and visual containment of the Appeal Site within the local landscape.
- 2.24. MSDC are generally in agreement with both the limited extent of impacts upon the contextual landscape (CD3/2) and the assessed level of effects on the Appeal Site and District level LCAs at completion of the proposed development ((Place Services (landscape) consultee response, 12th December 2023).
- 2.25. With regard to the visual effects, while there also appears to be broad agreement, no details are set out defining to which receptors this refers (in terms of agreement or disagreement) or how these levels of effects relate to the assessed visual impacts presented in the LVIA.
- 2.26. The landscape officer disagreed with assessed long term impacts "*due to the permanent nature of the built development from agricultural to developed land*" and the 'deviation' of the southern open space to meadow and other structural landscape features. This judgement would therefore appear to reflect the opinion that the proposed mitigation measures would be insufficient to reduce the adverse effects, even with some implication at various points within the Committee Report and RfR that a degree of harm may be derived from both the open space and structural planting proposals.
- 2.27. Not only does this opinion overlook the increasing degrees of screening to be derived into the long term of both the Appeal Scheme and recent development to the east of Parnell Lane, it does not recognise the demonstrable positive impacts in terms of reinforcement of and enhancements to the Appeal Site's landscape structure and contextual GI asset connectivity.
- 2.28. Through careful consideration of the constraints and opportunities presented by the Appeal Site, iterative design (including following pre-application consultation) and the development of a responsive landscape strategy with an extensive retained area of open space as meadow,

the Appeal Scheme demonstrates a carefully developed layout and well integrated effective mitigation that delivers long-term landscape, biodiversity and recreational benefits.

- 2.29. Both the planning and landscape officers recognise within the consultee response and referenced within the committee report on numerous occasions the positive initiatives taken in the design and landscape strategy of the Appeal Scheme.

Policy compliance

- 2.30. In accordance with Policy LP17 the planning application was supported by an LVIA, produced in accordance with industry guidance. The assessment demonstrated the limited extents of the likely effects (in scope and significance) upon identified landscape and receptors.
- 2.31. Policy LP24 is focused on design matters. However, the Policy also references the need to respond to and safeguard existing character, important natural features, the wider landscape context and natural built features of merit, and shall incorporate high levels of soft landscaping, trees and public open space that creates, and connects to, green infrastructure networks.
- 2.32. The Appeal Scheme carefully considered the existing features including woodland extending into the Appeal Site from along the railway embankment, tree specimens and the boundary ditch, utilising new green infrastructure elements to connect these and other peripheral landscape features, offering a reinforced structural landscaping framework within the landscape local to the Appeal Site. It also clearly demonstrated response to the requirements for high levels of well connected soft landscaping and open space, with over half the Appeal Site comprising Green Infrastructure, although the extent of (blocks of) tree planting was carefully focused to locations that reflected existing tree cover (in close proximity to the rail embankment and adjoining the Church grounds on lower ground) so as to minimise interruption of views or the open character of land immediately north of St John's Church.
- 2.33. Regarding ELM2, the LVIA presented assessment of views at the three relevant IV locations, as well as supporting photomontages both at the time of the landscape and visual assessment work and updated more recently. The LVIA concluded that at two of the three IVs there was not considered to be any perceived effects upon these IVs. with the design seeking to preserve and respond proactively to the qualities of IV4.

3. Summary and Conclusions

- 3.1. On the basis of the Reasons for Refusal, the main issues of relevance to landscape and visual matters are considered to comprise the landscape to the western edge of Elmswell including its sensitivity, openness, and the entrance to the village as approached from Woolpit, the levels of impacts upon the landscape of the Appeal Site, at district level, and upon visual receptors and the performance of the proposed landscape strategy and mitigation.
- 3.2. In terms of sensitivity, the Appeal Site and surrounding area does not comprise a valued landscape for the purposes of paragraph 180 (a) of the NPPF, nor does the Appeal Site lie within any formal designations of relevance to landscape and visual matters.
- 3.3. The LVIA, produced in accordance with “GIVIA3”, and TGN 06, assessed the overall sensitivity of the Appeal Site to be ‘medium’. This appraisal recognised notable features in the vicinity as part of its overall consideration of factors contributing to sensitivity, such as St John’s Church, and while attractive (as is virtually every green field development site) the Appeal Site is unremarkable.
- 3.4. Beyond the Appeal Site and its immediate context, the perception of change and related impacts upon both the landscape and visual receptors arising from the development of the Appeal Site are considered to be retained within a relatively limited scope due to both physical and visual containment of the Appeal Site within the local landscape.
- 3.5. MSDC are generally in agreement with the sensitivity judgements, limited extent of impacts upon the contextual landscape and the assessed level of effects on the Appeal Site and District level LCAs at completion of the proposed development, and some of the visual effects. However no further detail or assessment has been provided where there is disagreement with the precise levels of effects as assessed in the LVIA.
- 3.6. The opinion of MSDC appears to be that the proposed mitigation measures would be insufficient to reduce the adverse effects, or even that a degree of harm may be derived from both the open space and structural planting proposals. Not only does this overlook the increasing degrees of screening to be derived into the long term of both the Appeal Scheme and recent development to the east of Parnell Lane (including as shown in the photomontages) but it additionally it does not recognise the demonstrable positive impacts in terms of reinforcement of and enhancements to the Appeal Site’s landscape structure and contextual GI asset connectivity.
- 3.7. However, there are points of apparent contradiction between and within the landscape consultee response and committee report, and both the planning and landscape officers recognise on numerous occasions the positive initiatives taken in the design and landscape strategy of the Appeal Scheme.
- 3.8. The LVIA set out how the landscape strategy had been developed in response to the Appeal Site’s features, setting and surroundings, incorporating and reinforcing features that reflect its character and pattern, and in order to directly respond to the landscape character area’s guidance and design principles. As identified above, the assessment demonstrated the limited extents of the likely effects (in scope and significance) upon identified landscape and receptors.

- 3.9. The landscape strategy for the Appeal Scheme also positively responded to the requirements for high levels of well connected soft landscaping and open space, with over half the Appeal Site comprising Green Infrastructure, and woodland planting carefully focused in locations that reflected existing tree cover so as to minimise interruption of views or the open character of land immediately north of St John's Church.
- 3.10. The extent to which the Appeal Scheme would influence the rural edge of Elmswell is very limited and is related to matters of comparative openness between the Site's local context and that of the surrounding landscape.
- 3.11. A detailed analysis of the relevant Important Views has been undertaken, considering the key contributing factors and features to the IVs, the Appeal Site's contribution to each and the visual relationship with St John's Church, and the potential impacts upon the views. The Appeal Scheme would not be apparent within Views 1 and 2 primarily due to intervening topography and vegetation. No discernible effects are therefore considered to occur within views for receptors at these locations or impacting the factors contributing to the importance of the views themselves. At IV4, the layout and design of the Appeal Scheme would allow the retention of a field of view including the church and the landscape beyond towards Woolpit, as well as an appreciation of the church's position above the valley.
- 3.12. The nature of the approach and arrival into Elmswell has been considered as part of this evidence and is illustrated through a series of 'gateway' photographs. From this approach, given the pattern of existing tree cover and topography, the relationship between the Appeal Site and St John's Church is not readily apparent as the Appeal Site is predominantly screened from view.
- 3.13. Overall, it is my view that it is the church that defines the recognised entrance to Elmswell, both in terms of its presence on the approach to the village and in marking arrival itself.
- 3.14. Therefore, the Appeal Site is not considered to constitute the key 'gateway' to the village, it does not make any notable contribution to the visual experience on approaching or at the point of arrival in Elmswell, nor would the Appeal Scheme result in a harmful impact on the landscape approaching from the A14 and Woolpit as suggested in the Reason for Refusal.
- 3.15. In conclusion, through careful consideration of the constraints and opportunities presented by the Appeal Site, iterative design and the development of a responsive landscape strategy, the Appeal Scheme demonstrates a carefully developed layout and effective mitigation that reflects landscape character objectives, helps to integrate the development proposals into the landscape and delivers long-term landscape, biodiversity and recreational benefits.

Lichfield Office

Central House, Queen Street, Lichfield, WS13 6QD

T 0121 308 9570

Lichfield@pegasusgroup.co.uk

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