

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The Pegasus Group LVIA which supports the application application sets out a more detailed analysis of the character of the site and its immediate context, so as to understand the role and function of the site in terms of the local landscape character. From this analysis, a summary of the landscape features, character and visual amenity is provided below.

SITE CONTEXT

The Site is influenced by the immediately adjacent settlement of Elmswell to the east which is both physically proximate and has direct intervisibility with the Site. The village edge comprises existing dwellings and under-construction residential development to the east together with St John's Church and associated Alms houses to the south.

To the east, the site boundary is defined by School Road and Parnell Lane along the village's edge. To the north it is bound by the railway embankment of the Bury St Edmunds to Ipswich Line, in parallel with which is a public right of way from Elmswell to Elmswell New Hall passing within the northern site boundary. Together with St John's Church, grounds and Alms houses, these serve to provide containment of the site to the north, east and south.

The wider landscape is largely agricultural with field parcels being predominantly arable, punctuated by scattered strings of villages and hamlets along local roads, including Norton Little Green, Norton, Tostock and Woolpit. There are also the notable features of the A14 and its junction with the A1088 to the south of the Site, and the embanked railway line passing immediately north.

Topography of the landscape surrounding Elmswell is variable, undulating and relatively low-lying. The general pattern of the local landform is primarily influenced by the Black Bourn valley and small tributaries feeding into it; broadly to the west. This includes the minor valley within which the Site sits surrounded by a 'horseshoe' of locally high ground encompassing the village, Norton Little Green around to Norton Wood that provides enclosure to the site and its immediate context. The site sits on the eastern valley side, sloping broadly from east down towards a field ditch

(which defines the site's western boundary) from highest ground in the north-east and north-west.

Structural vegetation within the landscape is focused upon blocks of woodland of varying size (including Norton Wood to the north-east) and tree belts along the railway line and some road corridors. Around the east of Tostock and west of Woolpit (to the north and south of the A14) there is a higher incidence of tree lines, wooded clusters and hedgerows with frequent trees. Vegetation within the Site is limited to an avenue of trees along Purcell Lane to the north-east boundary and occasional single specimens on the boundaries, together with tree belts along the railway embankment, to the north west and the well-treed church grounds to the south.

DESIGNATIONS

The site itself is not subject to any specific landscape and visual designations. There are listed buildings in the vicinity of the Site, comprising St John's Church and the adjacent Almshouses to the south, and Elmswell Hall just to the north of the railway line.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

At a national level, the Site is situated within the south-western fringes of the National Character Area (NCA) 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands (published by National England in March 2014), a large area of Central East Anglia comprising an elevated and predominantly flat clay plateau bound to the north by the Norfolk Broads, to the east by the coastal sandy heathlands and to the south by the undulating South Suffolk Claylands.

At a District level, landscape character is described within the Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance [2015], which identifies a series of character types [or 'Landscape Types'] with distinctive components with accompanying guidance for each. The site is within the 'Ancient Plateau Claylands' Landscape Types within Mid-Suffolk are described as "gently rolling heavy clay plateaux with ancient woodland". Its key characteristics include:

- The top of the plateau is generally flat or only gently undulating, with attractive small valleys. Towards the edges it is more dissected with greater more complex slopes;
- Ancient and plantation woodlands;
- Land cover is predominantly arable farmland retaining much of the older field patterns of irregular partitions along with numerous areas of pasture land with substantial blocks of woodland and established hedgerows;
- Some areas have experienced large losses of hedgerow due to changing agricultural practices resulting in the creation of open arable “prairie” landscapes;
- Many areas of poor draining clay plateaux are covered with former greens and commons ranging in size, some recognised in names with ‘Green’ or ‘Tye’;
- Unlike the ‘Plateau Clayland’ landscape blocks of ancient woodland are visibly present in the landscape.

The guidance for this Landscape Types draws attention to the need to strengthen green infrastructure to reinforce and enhance existing field boundaries and also to safeguard the plantation and ancient woodland areas.



Site Plan as existing showing the contours across the site

VISIBILITY AND CONTAINMENT

The extents of visibility of the site are notably influenced by the enclosing nature of the topography together with the settlement edge and pattern of woodland. Views from the east and immediate south are generally limited to locations along the village's fringes, and to the north there may be some sporadic partial views of the site which are generally otherwise screened by the railway embankment and intervening vegetation. Views from the west and south-west are limited by more subtle variations in landform combined with frequent scattered vegetation and blocks of woodland and typically within the site's local context.

Consequently, views of the site are largely limited to the small valley in which the site sits. To the east and south these would be restricted to locations along the fringes of the village, and to the west from local high ground on the opposite valley side near Elmswell New Hall. To the south-west views are focused along Church Road and roads around the Woolpit Interchange onto the A14. From the north there may be some select opportunities for partial views on locally highest ground where not screened by intervening vegetation.



Aerial Photograph of Site and the Surrounding Village and countryside



SITE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The image on the right shows the opportunities and constraints considered when designing the scheme.

The key views between the Church and the Hall are protected with the proposed scheme stepping away from the 'corridor' created between the two buildings. Careful consideration has also been given to the view across the site looking south-west from the corner of School Road to the church and open fields beyond. Respecting the key views to protect the character of the area has been crucial to design process and has influenced the proposed scheme.

The water course at the lowest point of the site along the eastern boundary is within Flood Zones 2 and 3. This area would not be suitable for development and a landscaped zone is proposed for this part of the site.

There are two surface water paths corresponding to the 1 in 1000 year floods cross the site. One is the existing public footpath to the north and the other will be diverted as required. The proposed scheme considers these factors.

There is also an opportunity to add a connecting footpath along the eastern boundary of the site which would join into the existing network of public footpath in the area.

As previously mentioned there is already a new cycle-path under construction alongside School Road connecting the Church and the Village, the proposed scheme incorporates this path into the design.

Adjacent to the proposed entrance of the site there is an oak tree of importance. The proposed scheme will retain this tree and celebrate it as a way point marking the entrance to the scheme.





Indicative artistic aerial view of the proposed development

PLANNING POLICY

The planning policy context and assessment that is required to be carried out in the decision making process, in particular the extent to which the development complies with the Development Plan, and the importance of other material considerations, in particular the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021) [hereinafter referred to as "the Framework"] paragraphs 60 and 62 are particularly relevant:

60. To support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.

62. Within this context, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes).

And significantly the Planning Policy Guidance (Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 63-001-20190626) which confirms:

The need to provide housing for older people is critical. People are living longer lives and the proportion of older people in the population is increasing.

THE ADOPTED PLAN

The relevant development plan for Mid Suffolk consists of the Core Strategy (2008), the Core Strategy Focused Review (2012) and the saved policies of the Local Plan (1998). The overall housing requirement for Mid Suffolk is set out in the

Core Strategy Focused Review, and is for 6,400 homes over the period 2006-2021, equating to 430 homes per year.

Insofar as addressing the need for specialist elderly housing, the Core Strategy includes a key objective (SO 10) which is:

"To prepare for an ageing population, including the provision and retention of community facilities and suitable housing, including sheltered and assisted accommodation."

However, in setting out the policy position for specific types of housing the Core Strategy does not provide a strategy for meeting the housing needs of 'an ageing population'; Policy CS9 simply states that

'new housing development should provide a mix of house types, sizes and affordability to cater for different accommodation needs.'

No further detail on what the exact need for elderly housing is, or how to address this need [through the provision of sheltered or assisted accommodation] is given. In addition, neither the Core Strategy or the Core Strategy Focused Review specifically mention care homes, or the need for their provision.

In terms of affordable housing the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy adopted in September 2008 states that the guidance provided in the Mid Suffolk Local Plan Alteration (Adopted July 2006) will continue to provide the Council's policies on affordable housing.

The Local Plan Alteration contains the following policy specific to affordable housing provision:

"Altered Policy H4

A proportion of affordable housing in new housing developments

The district planning authority will seek to negotiate an element of affordable housing of up to 35% of the total provision of housing on appropriate sites. Negotiations with developers will take account of the identified local needs, the economics and viability of development and the availability of local services."

The Core Strategy Focused Review [2012] reiterates the policy target of 35% affordable housing on appropriate sites.

THE EMERGING PLAN

One of the key social issues identified in the emerging plan is the increasing age of the population. It acknowledges and reiterates the increasing need for the provision of older people accommodation, as identified in the Part 2 SHMA (see emerging Local Plan Part 1 at para 13.17).

13.17 The SHMA identifies that 1,005 additional specialist units will be needed in Mid Suffolk comprising of 755 sheltered housing, 73 enhanced sheltered housing, and 176 extra care housing units. There is also an additional requirement for registered care (nursing and residential care homes). The SHMA identifies (up to 2036) there will be a requirement from 1,670 people in Mid Suffolk, which means an additional 1,004 registered care accommodation spaces will be required.

This provides the context for Policy LP07 'Supported and Special Needs Housing' which sets out requirements for proposals for supported and special needs housing. Inter alia, it sets out that proposals should be located within a settlement boundary and where there is good access to services and facilities, especially health services and public transport and have access to open space designed to meet the needs of residents.

However, despite recognising the clear and growing need for specialist elderly housing in Mid Suffolk, the emerging plan does not make specific site allocations to meet this need. Nor is there an appreciation of specialist schemes and their land requirements when dealing with the scale of development, the need to achieve open and tranquil settings, areas for recreation and amenity as well as communal facilities for residents. This requires large sites but which are unable to compete against conventional housing schemes in terms of returns or therefore the price that can be paid for land within settlements.

Policy LP06 – Mix and type of composition confirms a target for affordable housing of 35%. There is no requirement for developments to achieve a proportion of accommodation suitable for the needs of the elderly.

Policy LP08 – Affordable, community led and rural exception housing also states the following:

"1. Affordable housing:

- a) Is expected to be delivered on-site, unless it can be demonstrated in exceptional circumstances, that it is not feasible or practical to provide the units on site in which case it may be agreed that a commuted sum could be paid towards off-site affordable housing provision.*
- b) Should be tenure blind when being designed and integrated within a development that contains other types of housing (for example, market housing).*

c) Must be upheld by avoiding proposals that create artificial or contrived subdivision of a site to circumvent requirements. If there is reasonable expectation of adjoining land coming forward for housing development, the Council will take account of the whole contiguous site area when calculating what affordable housing is required. Affordable housing will also be sought where a site is capable of accommodating the stated requirement thresholds.

d) The Local Planning Authority will use planning obligations or legal agreements to secure and deliver affordable housing to ensure the benefit of affordable housing will be enjoyed by successive occupiers. Where affordable housing cannot be secured in perpetuity, it will be expected for the funds to be ringfenced for reinvestment back into affordable housing provision."

The emerging plan is at an early stage and therefore, in any event, is afforded very limited weight in the planning balance.

The site is considered suitable for development and the planning application will be supported by technical reports that confirm that there are no constraints to development. We have thoroughly considered landscape and visual impact and heritage considerations in more detail, together with access and highways.