



Land at Lower Road, Milton Malsor

Summary Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

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June 2021

LPA reference S/2020/0599/MAO

On behalf of Hollins Strategic Land





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Project no. 2738

June 2021

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	1.1 PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT	1
	1.2 COMMISSION AND PLANNING APPLICATION	1
2	POLICY CONTEXT.....	2
	2.1 PLANNING POLICY.....	2
3	LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT	4
	3.1 SCOPE OF THE LVIA	4
4	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER	5
	4.1 PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER.....	5
	4.2 CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND ITS SETTING.....	5
	4.3 VILLAGE EDGE	6
	4.4 CHARACTER OF VILLAGE AND THE CONSERVATION AREA	6
	4.5 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE.....	7
	4.6 APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE	8
5	LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND ENHANCEMENT	9
6	POLICY TEST.....	10
	6.1 INTRODUCTION	10
7	CONCLUSIONS.....	11
	7.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES.....	11
	7.2 DESIGN ISSUES.....	11
	7.3 DETERMINATION	11



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT

1.1.1 My name is Nigel Evers. From October 2013 until April 2017, I was Director of Landscape at Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA) and before that a Director at Cooper Partnership Limited. I have been a Director of Viridian Landscape Planning Ltd (VLP), an independent landscape consultancy, since its formation in October 2017.

1.2 COMMISSION AND PLANNING APPLICATION

1.2.1 This **Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence** has been prepared on behalf of Hollins Strategic Land (HSL) in support of its appeal against the decision of West Northamptonshire Council to refuse planning permission for outline application S/2020/0599/MAO.

1.2.2 I have been involved with the project since March 2019, when VLP was commissioned to undertake a baseline study of the site and its context, and the subsequent production of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the proposals.



2 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 PLANNING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 Section 2 of my evidence considers changes in policy and the policies cited by the Council in both the Reasons for Refusal and their Statement of Case of April 2021.

ADOPTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN: RELEVANT POLICIES FROM REASON FOR REFUSAL

2.1.2 The parts of R1 that are cited in the reason for refusal require residential development in rural areas to, inter alia:

b) not affect open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village..

e) be of an appropriate scale to the existing settlement...

g) be within the existing confines of the village.

2.1.3 There is not protection of all open land in R1b), but the requirement to avoid adverse effects on land that is of particular significance to form and character.

2.1.4 The proposals have been designed to integrate with the existing settlement pattern in a number of ways:

- As a result of the relationship of the development to the existing edge of Milton Malsor, aligning the eastern and western edges of the development with the late C20th development in the village;
- The development of a network of open spaces both within and along the perimeters of the proposals, providing a green setting; and
- Providing a strong boundary along the northern edge of the site, clearly defining the new settlement edge.

2.1.5 The proposal would also integrate the development into the wider landscape and provide a strong enhancement of the interface with the countryside in this area.

2.1.6 Policy SS2 1a requires development to maintain:

the individual identity of towns and villages and their distinct parts, does not result in physical coalescence that would harm this identity and does not result in the unacceptable loss of undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement.

2.1.7 The Council does not specifically cite any issues of coalescence from 1a, nor has any been alleged.



- 2.1.8 There has been no study prepared by the Council that has included the site as:
undeveloped land, open spaces and locally important views of particular significance to the form and character of a settlement.
- 2.1.9 In my view, the site does not display any characteristics that are of particular significance to the form and character of Milton Malsor.
- 2.1.10 It is common ground (2.3.1) that the site is largely featureless. It is an ordinary field adjacent to existing development. There is no positive relationship between the houses to the south and the site.
- 2.1.11 It is common ground (2.5.1) that no key views have been identified in the area in any study and (2.5.2) that the LVIA identified representative viewpoints.
- 2.1.12 The test in the policy is that features have to be of particular significance. There is nothing in published studies or my assessment that identifies any particularly significant role that the site plays in the form or character of Milton Malsor.
- 2.1.13 It is common ground (2.2.12) that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape.



3 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1 SCOPE OF THE LVIA

- 3.1.1 The LVIA can be read in full in the application documents.
- 3.1.2 The LVIA and the Addendum present the methodology, context and results of the landscape and visual appraisal process and the Landscape and Visual Effects Tables, including aims and objectives of the proposed landscape strategy.
- 3.1.3 It is common ground that appropriate representative viewpoints have been selected for the LVIA (2.5.2). The Council confirmed in the report to committee at 9.23 that:

visual impacts are likely to be restricted to the immediate locality and not prominent within the wider landscape.
- 3.1.4 The only publicly available views of the site comprise a number of local views (which are views under 0.5km away from the site boundary) and one medium distance view (0.5km to 1km away). No long-distance views (more than 1km away) were found.
- 3.1.5 The LVIA concluded that the indicative development would have a limited impact in landscape terms, as it would be viewed against the existing backdrop of dwellings on Stockwell Road and would be screened from the surrounding area by the railway line and farm buildings, and that the site is typical of any undeveloped land on the edge of a village.
- 3.1.6 Full details of the landscape and visual effects are set out in the **Landscape and Visual Effects Tables** in **Appendix C**, which is the only full assessment before the inquiry which is guided by GLVIA3.



4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1.1 The published landscape character assessments relevant to the site and its setting are considered in 2.7 of the LVIA. It is common ground (2.4.1 and 2.4.2) that the key characteristics set out in the LVIA are correct.

4.1.2 On Figure 24 of the Northamptonshire Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study, Milton Malsor village is shown as of medium Landscape and Visual Sensitivity within Area 3, whereas the land just outside the north-eastern side of the village, where the site is located, is of low sensitivity.

4.1.3 The Northamptonshire Urban Fringe Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study (NUFLCSS):

encompasses rural landscapes within the neighbouring authority areas of [inter alia]... South Northamptonshire District

4.1.4 It is therefore a recent independent professional study, published by a predecessor authority within West Northamptonshire, which is of relevance to the site.

4.1.5 Milton Malsor is in Local Landscape Character Area 13g, Milton Malsor (i.e. the eastern part of County LCT 13: Undulating Hills and Valleys), which is given medium-high Landscape Sensitivity to development-led change, defined as:

a landscape that has some important components or is an area that is of medium-high value, and has some limited tolerance of the changes that would result from development without undue negative consequences.

4.2 CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

4.2.1 The site is not within any national designation or local designation, and it is common ground that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape (2.2.12).

4.2.2 Paragraph 7.2 of the Council's Statement of Case reads as follows:

The appeal site...has particular value in emphasising the rural character of the village. Open spaces at the settlement edge of Milton Malsor contribute to the special character of the village and help to define its setting. The village's open-countryside setting takes on a particularly expansive quality in the environs of the appeal site, i.e. where the village's rural context is most easily appreciated.

4.2.3 Given that there is already continuous development along the western side of Lower Road and that the developed edge of Milton Malsor is clearly visible along the



southern boundary of the site, the extension of the village would be in a largely developed context, bringing the development edge part way across the field.

- 4.2.4 It is not clear how the Council identifies the site as a significant part of the village's rural setting. There are far more satisfactory and rural edges to the village, which I consider below.

4.3 VILLAGE EDGE

- 4.3.1 Described fully in my Proof of Evidence is an additional photographic survey considering other edges to the village and the relationship to its setting, included in **Appendix E**, and the locations of which are shown on **Figure L9** in **Appendix D**.

- 4.3.2 In all of those cases, the relationship between the village and its rural setting is clear, with the buildings, walls and trees defining the village edge, sometimes strongly with brick or stone walls as an element, but more often by the softening effect of trees and hedges, and the organic and irregular arrangement of buildings.

4.4 CHARACTER OF VILLAGE AND THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 4.4.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (South Northamptonshire Council, undated) explains at 1.1 that the Conservation Area:

incorporates the historic core of the village, along with the paddocks, the church and the larger houses on Rectory Lane.

- 4.4.2 Key characteristics are identified at 1.2:

- *Large open paddocks which create a rural atmosphere.*
- *Closed and intimate views in the core of the village.*
- *High stone and brick boundary walls.*
- *Vernacular style buildings fronting the road, which in the majority of cases are parallel to the highway. This creates a feeling of enclosure.*
- *A consistency in the materials of the buildings, primarily ironstone, which creates an attractive street scene.*
- *An informal arrangement of highways which gives the village a more intimate atmosphere.*

- 4.4.3 The boundary has been carefully drawn to exclude C20th cul de sacs and other similar development.



- 4.4.4 Figure 13 is titled 'Important Spatial Features in Milton Malsor'. The site does not include any of those features nor does it appear as an important open space, despite Figure 13 identifying important open spaces which are outside of the Conservation Area.
- 4.4.5 Further into the village, the character at the historic core is relatively rural because the disposition of paddocks provides a setting for the buildings which create spaces, reinforced by walls, hedges and trees, with grazing stock and modest agricultural buildings.
- 4.4.6 I have undertaken a photographic survey of some of the open spaces within the village, most of which have been identified as Important Open Spaces in the Conservation Area Appraisal and are shown on the Location Plan for Additional Viewpoints (L9).
- 4.4.7 The larger open spaces give the core of the village its rural character as they are managed for agriculture and set within the historic settlement. The site does not play any meaningful role in identifying the character of the village or in helping to define its setting.

4.5 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE

- 4.5.1 The site comprises a largely featureless rectilinear and sloping field, with mainly trimmed boundary hedges to the north and west (as shown on **Viewpoint 3**) and sections of outgrown hedge along the eastern parts of the northern and southern boundaries (as shown on **Site Character Photograph A and B**).
- 4.5.2 The rear gardens and elevations of residential properties on the northern edge of Milton Malsor are partially screened by mature garden trees and shrubs. The site has no trees within it, and there are few trees in the boundary hedges.
- 4.5.3 In the view of the local authority the site:
...forms a significant part of Milton Malsor's rural setting.
- 4.5.4 It is not clear how the Council arrives at that significance or what is the degree of significance, but this is explored in my Proof of Evidence.
- 4.5.5 The Council's Statement of Case quotes from 5.3 of the CAA:
Open spaces, trees, hedges and other natural features represent essential elements which help us understand the development and significance of the settlement, contribute to its special character and help define its setting.
- 4.5.6 There is no doubt that the spaces at the core of the Conservation Area are essential elements of the village and accord with the attributes in 5.3. In my view, the site is part



of the ordinary countryside at the edge of the village and cannot be compared with the strong character of the open spaces at the heart of the village.

4.6 APPROACH TO THE VILLAGE

4.6.1 Paragraph 7.2 of the Statement of Case states that:

The site is entirely open and elevated above a main thoroughfare into/out of the village...

4.6.2 I have produced a series of photographs taken in May 2021 that demonstrate the point, and how Lower Road is part of the settlement, as described in my Proof of Evidence.

4.6.3 They start with **LR 1** which is taken from Towcester Road at its junction with Lower Road. The remaining photographs show the entirely developed character of the southern side of Lower Road with development in depth.

4.6.4 Towcester Road is the approach to Milton Malsor from the north and south, and although it does not enter the village, it runs alongside its western edge. When the traveller turns into Lower Road, they have entered the settlement.



5 LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND ENHANCEMENT

- 5.1.1 Landscape design has been an integral part of the proposal from its earliest stages, and the objective has been to provide an improvement to the edge of the village, which would integrate the scheme into the landscape.
- 5.1.2 The landscape proposals sub-divide the open space with hedges and trees to reflect the character of the greens in the centre of the village. The planting would also help break up the development in views from the north-west, providing an informal, organic and more traditional development edge, described further in my Proof of Evidence.
- 5.1.3 The photomontage in **Appendix F** shows how the proposal would be in front of the current rear elevations of houses on Stockwell Road, on the southern boundary of the site, and the mitigation as it matures would integrate the development into the landscape and provide a new, stronger edge to Milton Malsor.
- 5.1.4 In terms of biodiversity, the ecological consultant for the project has shown that the parameters plan can achieve a substantial biodiversity net gain of 25.25% on the site.



6 POLICY TEST

6.1 INTRODUCTION

- 6.1.1 The proposal would achieve the sustainable objectives of the NPPF by producing a well-designed built environment with accessible open spaces, protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
- 6.1.2 It would provide access to high quality open space and new paths, supplementing the rights of way network.
- 6.1.3 It would add to the quality of the area and be visually attractive; it would be sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting; it would establish a strong sense of place, and include public space that is inclusive and accessible.
- 6.1.4 The proposals would contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 6.1.5 The proposals accord with the relevant parts of R1, as the site is not open land which is of particular significance to the form and character of the village, and the development would be perceived as an appropriate scale to the existing village.
- 6.1.6 The proposal accords with SS2 1a as the site is not of particular significance to the form and character of the settlement, and with regard to R1 B), the site is not open land of particular significance to the form and character of the village.



7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ISSUES

- 7.1.1 The landscape and visual aspects of the proposals have been subject to a thorough analysis through the preparation of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, including Landscape and Visual Effects Tables. All those documents have been prepared in accordance with recognised professional guidelines.
- 7.1.2 The site has no unusual or special defining characteristics. It is common ground that the site is not part of a Valued Landscape. The site clearly contrasts with the important open spaces around the village identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 7.1.3 The site is not designated as being of any landscape importance or value, and the Parish Council's 'Options for a Neighbourhood Plan' document does not identify it as being important.
- 7.1.4 The conclusion of the Landscape and Visual Effects Tables was that the development would not have any significant residual adverse effects on any of the assessed landscape receptors, and indeed would have beneficial effects on trees and hedges owing to the ability to manage and monitor those features and ultimately ensure their replacement.
- 7.1.5 Development would only be locally visible, generally only to receptors of low sensitivity, and would not result in adverse visual effects of significance.

7.2 DESIGN ISSUES

- 7.2.1 The design was based on my initial appraisal of the area and the site within it, modified after consultation with the planning officer and other specialists from the Council.
- 7.2.2 With the proposal, large parts of the site become part of the wider green infrastructure of the area. This is achieved not only by the generous open spaces on the site expanding the village's green infrastructure, but also with new public access to and across the site.
- 7.2.3 Those enhancements are important benefits that need to be balanced against the limited harm which I have shown to be, in LVIA terms, not significant.

7.3 DETERMINATION

- 7.3.1 The Appeal Site is suitable for the development proposed, which has evolved through an iterative design process, to take account of landscape and visual parameters from the outset. There are no residual significant adverse effects on landscape or visual



receptors, and indeed benefits have been identified. The proposals respond to the site and its setting. I believe that permission should be granted.