

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

of

DAVID HUSKISSON, Dip LA, CMLI

relating to

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

on behalf of

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

Planning Appeal by CALA Homes (Midlands) Ltd

**against the decision of Cherwell District Council
to refuse**

**Outline planning permission for
up to 200 residential units, access, amenity space and new village shop / hall
on
Land at Fringford Road, Caversfield, Bicester, Oxfordshire**

**PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY
Commencing 25th March 2014**

**LOCAL AUTHORITY REF: 13/01056/OUT
PINS REF: APP/C3105/A/13/2208385**

Date of Issue: 24/02/2014
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David Huskisson will say:

- 1 In Section 1 of my proof, I set out my qualifications and experience.
- 2 In Section 2 I outline the background to my appointment and application ref 13/01056/OUT "for up to 200 residential units, access, amenity space and associated works including a new village shop /hall". The application was in outline but with access, appearance and layout for determination. It was subsequently agreed that only access should be determined. The application was refused, the two reasons for refusal which my evidence supports also being set out in this part of my proof.
- 3 In Section 3 I set out the scope of my evidence and the main documents that I have referred to.
- 4 In Section 4 I set out some relevant guidance from the NPPF and refer to the policies referenced in the reasons for refusal in the Cherwell District Council (CDC) Cherwell Local Plan (Adopted 1996) and the Submission Cherwell Local Plan 2006 - 2031 (October 2013). This most recent plan was submitted for examination in January 2014.
- 5 In Section 5 I consider the landscape character at the regional, county and local level as well as referencing SPG. In this regard I identify some inconsistencies or oversights in the LVA submitted on behalf of the applicant, noting that it did not reference either the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) 2004, or Countryside Design Summary Supplementary Planning Guidance (June 1998). It also appears to have misconstrued the local landscape type in which the site lies.
- 6 It can be agreed however that the site lies within the Oxfordshire Estate Farmlands character area in the CDC landscape assessment (1995). The most notable feature of this is considered to be the "*eighteenth century parklands*".
- 7 The report identifies four enhancement strategies for the landscape of the district, these are; Conservation, Repair, Restoration and Reconstruction. The appeal site lies in an area identified for Repair, this being the second highest ranking considered in the assessment.
- 8 In Section 6 I describe the features of the appeal site and its local setting and context. I highlight the presence of the parkland estate of Caversfield House, a defining characteristic of the local landscape character area immediately to the west of the appeal site and, to the east, the proximity to the RAF Bicester conservation area.
- 9 I describe the subtle landform on the site and the surrounding area and the generally limited visibility of the site. I note that there is intervisibility across it which gives a

depth and visual interest both to the landscape and local views and the setting of the village and Caversfield House. I note the limited on-site vegetation of landscape and visual significance and describe the offsite vegetation, particularly that at the site's road frontages.

- 10 I describe the limited detracting features but note, to the south, the northern edge of Bicester is an unfortunate insidious skyline feature with residential blocks rather starkly profiled behind a thin tree screen, at least in winter. Road lighting on the A4095 adds to this background perception of urban fringe south of the site. I note that this type of effect is also to be anticipated in time with the proposed Bicester Eco-town which would also block the currently open south western prospect the appeal site benefits from. It seems to me that these unattractive features give added value to the landscape of the appeal site and the flanking open countryside to north and south.
- 11 I reference the inclusion of the appeal site as a core part of the proposed Caversfield Green Buffer, proposed both to safeguard the setting of Caversfield and the conservation area from the Bicester Eco-town. The Bicester Green buffer report notes the narrowness of the gap being in the order of 300m, this essentially equating to the position in which the appeal site lies.
- 12 I conclude section 6 by setting out my consideration of the landscape condition of the local area, which is generally good, and the value of the landscape, which I consider to be high at the local and district level.
- 13 In Section 7 I make some comments on what I consider are inadequacies and contradictions in the masterplan. I believe a particular concern relates to the means of access and the implications for the appearance and character of Fringford Road and the adjacent conservation area and the lack of clear detail provided, given that means of access is to be determined. This is an odd oversight. Examination of the originally submitted proposals shows that little frontage vegetation could be kept, contrary to the impression created by the masterplan and DAS. The recently submitted but still "preliminary" amended access proposals would introduce additional urbanising features, more extensive hard surfacing, localised road widening, loss of verges, and might involve further hedgerow loss along Fringford Road.
- 14 In Sections 8 and 9 I set out the landscape and visual assessment methodology. I set out the rankings of landscape and visual receptor susceptibility I believe to be appropriate in this instance, together with the sensitivity I consider should apply. I make some observations on the LVA that supported the application, noting general areas of disagreement. I give consideration to the range of landscape and visual effects that I believe would arise from the appeal proposal.

- 15 I rank the overall sensitivity of the landscape as **high** at a local and district level. This, together with a **high** magnitude of landscape effect that would arise from the appeal proposal, would give a significance of landscape effect that I consider would be **substantial adverse** at Day 1. I would categorise this as broadly equating to the situation *“where the proposal would cause a very significant deterioration in the landscape resource”* at a local and district scale.
- 16 The loss of agricultural land and part of the rural setting to both the village and the Caversfield House parkland would be permanent. Over time, although new planting, if more appropriate and robust than that suggested by the appellant's LVA together with a substantially reduced footprint of development, might soften the new settlement edge and may help to visually contain the built form, the adverse impacts arising from the introduction of new roads and buildings and their encroachment into the countryside would persist. However, none of this is proposed on the appeal scheme.
- 17 The permanent loss of green field land and the creation of an arbitrary line of new settlement and increased built form into this locally valued countryside would always outweigh any landscape benefit that would arise from new planting in the longer term.
- 18 I consider that by Year 10, the magnitude of effect would still be **high adverse**. The significance of landscape effect would be unlikely to have reduced, remaining **substantial adverse** at both the local and district scale.
- 19 The visual effects of the scheme, though limited in extent are nonetheless significant, being ranked as **substantial adverse** and **moderate /substantial adverse** at Day 1 for several receptors, in particular from the public right of way to the north, and from the appeal site's road frontages. I also consider the effects from the western end of Skimmingdish Lane and two properties in the conservation area would be detrimentally affected, together with harmful effects noted on the northbound approach on Fringford Road and in views from the B4100. Furthermore I do not consider that meaningful mitigation of the effects that I have identified could be achieved by Year 10 on the basis of the submitted masterplan.
- 20 In terms of the Green Buffer, my assessment is that the loss of the appeal site to development would render the balance of the proposed Caversfield Green Buffer worthless. It would physically block the "window" of open countryside that radiates out from Bicester between Fringford Road in the east and the B4100 in the west as well as detrimentally erode the open setting both of the RAF Bicester conservation area and Caversfield House parkland.
- 21 In my opinion, the reasons for refusal are sound and justified in landscape and visual terms.