

# Technical Note:

## Land off School Road, Elmswell

### Landscape and Visual Response

**REF:** P22-1167

**DATE:** 20 March 2024

- 1.1 This Technical Note has been prepared by Pegasus Group on behalf of Christchurch Land & Estates (Elmswell South) Limited in support of an outline application (ref: DC/23/05651) for a residential care and assisted living scheme on land to the west of School Road, Elmswell. The application is described as:  
  
*"Erection of Care Village comprising 66 bedroom care home (C2 Use), 40 No. Extra Care Bungalows (C2 Use), Management Office (E(g)(I) Use), Club House, Community Growing Area, Orchard, Community Bee hives and Open Space Provision."*
- 1.2 The planning application included an LVIA (Pegasus Group, November 2023), a series of verified view photomontages (LVIA Appendix C, Montages 1-4), and an Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (LVIA Figure 8, drawing ref.: P22-1167-EN-0009, RevC).
- 1.3 This note has been prepared in response to the comments raised by the Council's Landscape Consultant (Kim Howell, Essex County Council - Place Services) primarily focusing upon landscape and visual matters. However, as the Council's comments also reference aspects of the layout and scheme design, this note will provide a response on such matters where appropriate in the context of landscape and visual considerations.
- 1.4 This note provides a response on a number of key points raised by Kim Howell, summarised below under the following themes:
  - The relationship of the Proposed Development with the scheme to the east of Parnell Lane
  - The nature of the green infrastructure proposals within the south of the Site and change to the sense of 'openness'
  - Building scale and visual impacts
  - The Proposed Development's response to landform
  - Consideration of Key Views and St John's Church
- 1.5 Excerpts of the comments received are quoted to contextualise the response.

*"At a high level the proposal has responded to the wider constraints and opportunities of the site. As a result the developed area has been restricted to the northern end of the site to take advantage of the screening provided by the natural and manmade landform, however the visual effect cannot be fully mitigated. The area to the south has been proposed as open space in an effort to retain some of the openness, though we note that hedging is proposed along the boundary with School Lane which will result in the loss of views across the site for users of School Lane, reduce the perception of openness and affect the appreciation of the historic buildings within this local landscape."*

- 1.6 Proposed development is focused within the northern extents of the Site to adjoin the settlement edge and – as acknowledged in the Council's comments– to situate built form so as to take best advantage of the existing landscape elements that provide both visual and physical enclosure within the local landscape.
- 1.7 The Proposed Development incorporates a significant proportion of green infrastructure, including meadow across the southern half of the Site which would therefore remain open in character. New field hedgerows have been proposed along the western and eastern boundaries in response to the guidance set out for the 'Ancient Plateau Claylands' LT in terms of the need to strengthen green infrastructure including by reinforcing and enhancing existing field boundaries, and in order to improve and enhance linear habitat connections north-south via the Site.
- 1.8 Additionally, while the visual impacts are not fully mitigated, the extensive mitigation measures incorporated into the masterplan (including the restricted spatial built footprint as well as the proposed varied framework of green infrastructure) are both responsive and effective in avoiding or minimising impacts to an acceptable level.

*"We have some concerns that the new green space to the north of Parnell Lane, associated with the recently developed housing estate had been designed to provide a strong edge and containment of the settlement, as is noted on the settlement boundary illustrated within the Elmswell NP. While this is yet to mature any development beyond it would be separated by the landscape buffer. This would result in limited opportunities to connect and a disjointed relationship between the two areas of development. Furthermore the proposed scheme layout does not respond well or reflect the local settlement pattern."*

- 1.9 The recent development north of School Road is defined by Parnell Lane along one of its boundaries, as is the Site. Along both sides of the lane is a verge with a line of existing trees. As the layout indicates, it is proposed for built form to be outward-looking adjoining Parnell Lane, fronting onto green space along the Site's north-western edge towards new dwellings which are similarly fronting onto linear green space on the opposite side of the Lane. Existing trees would be retained and incorporated. The proposed landscaping and built frontage to the south-west of the lane (within the Site) is therefore considered to be reflective of the treatment to the north-east along the recently constructed development frontage, retaining its 'avenue' character.

*"While the importance of key views identified within the Elmswell Neighbourhood Plan and the intervisibility of the Church and Elmswell Hall within Heritage and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment have been shown on the Constraints and Opportunities Plan, these have not been fully considered in the proposed scheme. The built form has been placed to retain these views; however areas of proposed planting have been placed in locations, which in time and with maturation, would impinge on these views."*

- 1.10 Although submitted in outline, the built form indicated within the Proposed Development has been carefully designed and considered in relation to key views. Particularly addressing the intervisibility of the Church and Elmswell Hall, considerations have included building alignment and maximum heights as well as proposed planting and the impacts of mitigation. This is demonstrated in the Photomontages (LVIA Appendix C, Montage Viewpoint 3), within which the visual link to Elmswell Hall is retained both on completion and in the long term.

*"The taller buildings have been placed on the western edge of the site to take advantage of the topography to limit their visual influence, however this would result in a single large elevation of the building facing onto the open countryside."*

- 1.11 A series of photo montages have been produced, illustrating the views of the Proposed Development in block form from several key locations including the public footpath extending to the west (LVIA Appendix C, Montage Viewpoint 4). As the Council's response acknowledges, the extent of visual effects is geographically limited, and this Montage Viewpoint 4 represents receptors with the most direct views of the Proposed Development, set at relatively low elevation within the surrounding landscape, and with the taller built elements at short range (i.e. a 'worst-case' view scenario). While the building in the north-west of the Site is the most notable (and indeed the closest), the montage demonstrates the efficacy and careful design of the proposed mitigation and landscape planting to soften and integrate the eastern built edge over time.

*"The agricultural nature of the site plays an important part in the setting and elevates the significance of the Church and Elmswell Hall farm within the landscape, therefore the change of land management practice to orchard and meadow should be more carefully considered. We echo the concerns raised by Historic England on this matter."*

- 1.12 Impacts upon St John's Church and its setting as a heritage asset are considered separately as part of the Heritage Response. However, in landscape and visual terms, the scheme proposes meadow grassland within the south of the Site, which therefore retains the land in agricultural use. Although this land would be publicly accessible (both to new and existing residents and visitors) the new proposed routes through this area are informal only, constituting mown paths. The orchard; as shown on the Illustrative Landscape Masterplan (LVIA Figure 8); is situated close to the developed envelope, both to situate such a community provision nearer residents and to offer some softening of the built form.
- 1.13 Therefore, the southern half of the Site remains primarily open, including the northern aspect of the church yard adjoining the Site, and the western edge of Elmswell along School Road would also retain its agricultural context.

*"...a proposed woodland is located to the west of the church. This would serve to reduce the visibility and prominence of the building within the landscape."*

- 1.14 The church is situated in an elevated position topographically, at just above 65m AOD, upon a local prominence on the edge of the village. The churchyard is already enclosed by established trees and hedgerow sections to its boundaries, which; along with other vegetation along Church Road; provides some intermittent or partial screening of the church building within views towards it in the immediate area.
- 1.15 Some woodland is proposed to the west of the churchyard as part of the scheme. The location of new woodland planting has been carefully considered as part of the overall design and function of the Site's new green infrastructure network. This is intended to provide screening of the Proposed Development from the Site's southern boundary along Church Lane, enhance the existing localised wooded appearance of the south-west of Elmswell including around the church and cemetery, and offer connected habitat opportunities around the Site's boundaries and beyond.
- 1.16 Given this woodland's situation below 60m AOD (on a slope down to 50m AOD) together with the fact that the church tower is identifiable in views within the surrounding landscape beyond peripheral vegetation (demonstrated within many of the LVIA Photoviewpoints including 1-3, 6, 9 and 12), it is not considered that this proposed planting would result materially in the screening of the church's presence within views from the surrounding landscape any further than is already evident.

*"As shown within the submitted documents the site is on a significant slope. We fail to see how this has been accommodated within the development to ensure that the site is suitably accessible nor use by the intended elderly population."*

- 1.17 While this is considered to be a detailed matter and the planning application is submitted in outline, the layout has nevertheless been examined in sufficient detail so as to demonstrate that a practicable scheme can be achieved. This includes consideration of the levels for each footpath across the developable area which ensures that all the buildings, dwellings and their parking are accessible at a 1:20 slope or shallower; as demonstrated on the attached drawing 'Site Plan as Proposed Showing Levels' (dwg. ref: 1661-CAM-XX-XX-DR-A-SK09).

### **Summary**

- 1.18 This Technical Note seeks to provide clarification on a number of points within the comments received from the Council's Landscape Consultant on matters pertaining to landscape character and visual amenity, and the associated impacts.
- 1.19 As the LVIA demonstrates and the comments acknowledge, the proposals have responded to the wider constraints and opportunities of the site, and the predicted effects on landscape and views are well contained both physically (by existing landscape elements and the positioning of proposed built form relative to these elements and the settled edge of Elmswell) and visually.

- 1.20 Although the proposals are in outline, some points relate to more specific aspects of the scheme (e.g., gradients, built form layout and façade design). However, through supporting materials (such as photomontages and the attached levels drawing) the scheme seeks to demonstrate the careful process of analysis and consideration of constraints undertaken, and the manner in which these have been successfully addressed through the layout and overall design.
  
- 1.21 The applicant has sought to positively engage with the LPA, and following a pre-application consultation undertook a review of the scheme in response to feedback received from the Council's Landscape Consultant. The Proposed Development subsequently submitted reflects these amendments, which included a re-design of both the built layout and the green infrastructure proposals around the junction of School Road with Parnell Lane to further accommodate the Important View from the village at this location. The appended Landscape Masterplan (ref. P22-1167-EN-0009, Rev D) has been further revised since the receipt of a number of consultee responses post-submission to reflect sustainable drainage requirements, however this does not alter the principles or distribution of landscape planting, nor the mitigation proposed.
  
- 1.22 Both the layout of the built form and the landscape proposals seek to incorporate a layout and landscape proposals along the north-east boundary of the Site to the new residential development that are outward-looking development and green space incorporating existing trees to reflect the landscape treatment to the south-western edge on the recently implemented housing development on the opposite side of Parnell Lane.
  
- 1.23 Layout of the built form within the development envelope has also been carefully considered in relation to both views within the local landscape and the Site's topography. As noted by the Council's Landscape consultant, taller built form is located towards the lowest relative parts of the Site, and the built envelope benefits from enclosure by existing landscape elements such as the railway embankment and indeed the proximate settled edge. The extents of visual impacts in general are well contained.
  
- 1.24 Highest ground – around the church – is retained as open agricultural land (as is the southern half of the Site in general), and visual connectivity between heritage assets and important views as identified within the Elmswell Neighbourhood Plan are preserved. This has been demonstrated through the inclusion of montages from key locations, which show that either the Proposed Development would not be visible or illustrates how the layout and proposed mitigation have sought to achieve a successful integration of the scheme while retaining key sightlines or nodes of intervisibility.