

**To:** Steven Brown  
Kate Little  
**At:** Woolf Bond  
Foreman Homes  
**From:** Jeremy Smith  
**At:** SLR Consulting  
**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020  
**Ref:** 403.07957.00002  
**Subject:** LAND EAST OF POSBROOK LANE: RESPONSE TO LANDSCAPE COMMENTS

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Planning Application P/19/1193/OA seeks outline permission for up to 57 homes on land to the east of Posbrook Lane, Titchfield. This application follows an application for 150 homes on the same site, which was dismissed at Appeal. The significant reduction in house numbers, and other changes to the proposed layout, aimed to address comments raised by the Inspector in his report. A new Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) was also prepared by prepared by SLR Consulting in October 2019 in order to fully assess the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

Two objections have been received as part of the consultation process, one from Dominic Lyster, Urban Design Officer at Fareham DC (dated 18 December 2019), and one from the Fareham Society (also dated 18 December 2019). This paper seeks to address some of the landscape comments made in these two objections.

## 2.0 URBAN DESIGN COMMENTS

I have set out a summary of Dominc Lyster’s main landscape-related points below, and have also provided my response to each:

- (a) Mr Lyster cites paragraph 28 of the Inspector’s report, which states that *“the site is part of the broad visual envelope of the lower Meon Valley and part of the landscape compartment and therefore should be considered as part of the valued landscape”*. A subtly different, but closely related point made by Mr Lyster is that he feels *“the Inspector makes no distinction as to whether parts of the site are less valuable or that do not share the same physical and scenic attributes such that the site could be disaggregated”*. To support this view he cites paragraph 23 of the Inspector’s report, which states that *“I was firmly of the view that the site was of an open character with little in the way of field boundaries, hedges or other landscape features to different areas of the site...”*

**Response:** At paragraph 22 of the Appeal Decision (APP/A1720/W/18/3199119, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2019) the Inspector refers to the 2017 Fareham Landscape Assessment, which identified this field as being classified as *“Open Coastal Plain: Fringe Character”*. In paragraph 21 he

acknowledges that the urban edge at Bellfield is indeed prominent: *“the urban edge [at Bellfield] is open and harsh with little by way of softening landscape”*. At paragraph 23 he emphasises that this stark edge has an obvious influence on the character of the adjacent land: *“in the context of the urban settlement edge influence it is undeniable that it is there. There is a lack of screening and there is a harsh and readily visible urban edge”*, (my emphasis).

However, the Inspector concluded that in both the Fareham Landscape Assessment, and the appellant’s landscape assessment, *“the urban influence is given too much weight”*. In particular, at paragraph 23 he notes that the Fareham classification of Fringe Character is possibly based on *“historic data”*, where the site was divided by a hedgerow (now removed), and where there may have been slightly different management practices on different parts of the site.

Mr Lyster is therefore not correct when he states that the Inspector *“makes no distinction as to whether parts of the site are less valuable or that do not share the same physical and scenic attributes such that the site could be disaggregated”*. In fact, the Inspector clearly acknowledges that the character of the site is influenced by the settlement edge – but he concludes that this influence does not extend over the whole of the field east of Posbrook Lane as the Fareham Landscape Assessment (and accordingly the appellant’s landscape assessment) indicated.

It is for this reason that the revised, and very much reduced, application for up to 57 homes places development only on the northern edge of this field, within the area which is most strongly influenced by the existing settlement edge. It is also for this reason that the October 2019 SLR LVIA concludes that the effects on landscape character of the revised scheme for the landscape of the application site and its context would be moderate, since the susceptibility of this area is reduced by the prominence of the existing settlement edge, and the proposed development would cause only a small and localised change in the composition of that landscape.

- (b) He cites paragraph 24 of the Inspector’s report which states that *“the proposed development would result in the provision of a suburban housing estate of up to 150 units on an open field that would substantively change the character of the field”*. On this basis Mr Lyster concludes *“that major suburban housing has an unacceptable impact upon the character and appearance of the valued landscape”*.

**Response:** There is no doubt that 150 new homes would have caused a change to the character of the field, and this was acknowledged in the SLR LVIA of February 2018. However, the new application is for only 38% of that number of homes, and as has been noted above these houses would be focused within a part of the site where the influence of the existing settlement edge is *“undeniable”*, (Inspector’s Appeal decision, paragraph 23). As a result, the negative effects on landscape character would be greatly reduced and localised, with positive effects occurring for several landscape receptors in the wider Meon Valley.

- (c) He notes that the Inspector states that *“whilst planting would assist in reducing the direct line of sight of houses in the longer term there would still be effects from noise, activity, illumination in the evening along with localised views that would inevitably and substantively change”* (paragraph 26). Mr Lyster concludes on this basis that *“landscape screening is not overriding mitigation”*.

**Response:** Whilst it is true that the proposed development would still result in some localised negative landscape and visual effects, these would now be focused on a localised area which is already strongly influenced by the character of the settlement edge, including the visual prominence of existing buildings, noise from local roads and homes, and both street and domestic lighting. In addition, the proposed woodland planting, which would extend not only around the proposed new homes but also along the eastern edge of Bellfield, would result in positive landscape and visual effects for receptors to the south and east of the site, an approach which was accepted by the Inspector (that *“additional landscaping along the proposed urban edge would produce an edge that was more screened and in effect a softer edge than present is undeniable and would of itself improve the appearance of the existing urban edge”*, paragraph 26). The revised application thus significantly changes the overall pattern of landscape and visual effects when compared with the 150 home scheme, with lower levels of localised landscape and visual harm balanced by the landscape and visual benefits of the extensive woodland planting.

(d) Dealing specifically with the proposal for 57 homes, Mr Lyster states that:

- i. The proposal would still occupy a *“substantial frontage”* to Posbrook Lane;
- ii. It would also *“descend the natural topography towards the valley floor”*;
- iii. It would *“not incorporate the PROW in a sympathetic rural manner”*;
- iv. The proposed mitigation planting *“while providing a softer edge in the longer term, will not disguise the development from light, noise and general activity”*;
- v. Indeed, the proposed woodland *“could be regarded as inappropriate, taking account of the existing open, pastoral character of the valley side”*.

#### **Responses:**

- i. Five new homes would front on to Posbrook Lane, but importantly this is the part of the lane which is already closest to the settlement edge at Bellfield, has clear views of a large house to the west of Posbrook Lane as well views towards existing homes in Bellfield itself. Equally importantly, the proposed development no longer extends all the way from the existing edge at Bellfield to Great Posbrooke. There would thus be a clear perception of a gap between these two, occupied by open grassland and woodland.
- ii. The proposed new homes would extend from an elevation of over 17m AOD to the east of Posbrook Lane to around 11m AOD at their eastern edge, over a distance of approximately 210 metres (which means a slope gradient of around 1:35). However, it is important to note that the valley slope steepens to the east of the proposed housing, dropping around 5 metres over a distance of just over 100 metres (a slope gradient of around 1:20). The houses are this located on the upper and most gently sloping valley side, and would avoid the steeper part of the valley side. In addition the proposed new homes would not extend as far down the valley slope as the existing housing at Bellfield – there would be over 70 metres between the eastern edge of the new homes and the south eastern corner of Bellfield.
- iii. Footpaths 34 and 39 would only pass through proposed new homes for a short distance (less than 70 metres), and there is space for planting on either side of this path. Once walkers have passed through the new woodland edge planting there would continue to be open views over retained grassland towards the valley floor.

- iv. It is noted that Mr Lyster, like the Inspector, accepts that planting would provide a “softer” settlement edge; this is a very important benefit, since at present the non-vernacular edge of Bellfield is clearly visible from the eastern side of the Meon Valley and from the valley floor (including the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve), and it is a detractive element in views. As has been noted above, new homes are now located only adjacent to the existing settlement edge, an area which is already influenced by light, noise, and general activity. The effects of these are therefore greatly reduced.
- v. Historic maps show clearly that the Bellfield estate actually replaced a large area of woodland, and there are other surviving areas of woodland on the valley side (for example to the south east of the application site). Woodland is therefore characteristic of this area and would be an appropriate treatment to the settlement edge.

(e) Mr Lyster states that the proposed development would leave only “a very minimal gap” between the new settlement edge and the grade II\* listed buildings at Great Posbrooke, which “does not provide the sense of isolation and separateness identified by the Inspector”. Mr Lyster very fairly concedes that “this is an urban design perspective” and that he would advise “that further guidance is sought from specialist landscape and listed building personnel”.

**Response:** it is particularly important to note that the Applicant has consulted with Historic England on this matter and they have confirmed that the proposed layout is acceptable in heritage terms.

In landscape terms the proposal would reinforce existing planting along the northern edge of Great Posbrooke with up to 10 metres of new native planting, and would then provide a swathe of open grassland of up to 35 metres width. The new settlement edge would then be edged by 15 to 20 metres width of new woodland. Consequently, not only is a significant gap maintained between Great Posbrooke and the settlement edge, but also the edges of both areas of development would be far less prominent due to the proposed planting. As a result, the potential for intervisibility between the two edges would be reduced, maintaining a strong sense of separation.

### 3.0 THE FAREHAM SOCIETY

Most of these points have already been addressed in my responses to Mr Lyster’s comments, above. However, I have responded briefly to some issues raised below:

- (a) “the current application, although for fewer dwellings and on a smaller area, would still be a substantial incursion into this part of the Meon Valley”: as noted above, the proposal seeks to place new homes within an area which is already strongly influenced by the existing settlement edge, a fact which is acknowledged in the Inspector’s report. The resultant new settlement edge, and the existing edge, would then be enhanced with woodland planting, which, as the SLR LVIA October 2019 indicates, would create landscape and visual benefits for receptors to the south and east of the site.
- (b) “The proposed development would, especially in the winter months, be clearly seen from footpath 48”: the depth of planting proposed – around 20 metres – would be sufficient to provide an effective screen both in summer and winter, and this fact was accepted by the

Council's landscape witness at the appeal. It is also important to recognise that even before the planting matures the new homes would be viewed against the background of the existing settlement edge, and the gradual softening of this edge as woodland establishes would undoubtedly enhance views of the settlement edge from footpath 48.

- (c) *"The applicant has sought to justify the proposed development by the fact that it in part abuts Bellfield and that it would provide an improved landscape screen to the urban edge. A similar justification was roundly rejected by the Inspector in the previous appeal...":* as I have noted above, the pattern of landscape and visual effects which would result from this much reduced scheme would be very different from that which resulted from the 150 home scheme. This proposal concentrates a much smaller amount of development within the area which is most influenced by the existing prominent settlement edge, but still provides the woodland edge for both the proposed and existing settlement edge. The balance of effects is thus very different, with very localised landscape and visual harm balanced by landscape and visual benefits.

#### **4.0 SUMMARY**

The revised proposal for up to 57 homes offers significant and substantive benefits when compared with the original application for up to 150 homes, and it would be wrong to apply the Inspector's decision as if these changes had not occurred.

In reality, the Inspector's decision has helped to shape the revised proposals, with a much-reduced number of homes now only being located within the area which is already strongly influenced by the *"harsh and readily visible urban edge"*. In the revised proposals there is now also a clear gap between the settlement edge and Great Posbrooke, an arrangement that Historic England has accepted in heritage terms. The woodland edge treatment for the proposed and existing settlement edges - the benefits of which the Inspector in his described in his decision as *"undeniable"* – have been retained, despite the much smaller development area.