

# Land East of Posbrook Lane, Titchfield, Fareham

## Summary Landscape Proof of Evidence

**Ben Croot BSc (Hons), MSc, CMLI**

**Of LDA Design Consulting**

**On behalf of**

**Fareham Borough Council**

08.11.21

LPA Ref. P/19/1193/OA

App Ref. APP/A1720/W/20/3254389

A Worton Rectory Park  
Oxford  
OX29 4SX  
United Kingdom  
T 01865 887 050

W [www.lda-design.co.uk](http://www.lda-design.co.uk)

LDA Design Consulting Ltd  
Registered No. 09312403  
17 Minster Precincts, Peterborough, PE1 1XX

---



**Contents**

1.0 Introduction, Qualifications and Experience, and Scope of Evidence ..... 1

2.0 The Value of the Meon Valley ..... 2

3.0 The Influence of the Existing Settlement Edge ..... 4

4.0 Landscape Sensitivity and the Magnitude of Change from the Proposed  
Development ..... 5

5.0 The Impacts of the Proposed Development ..... 8

6.0 Conclusions ..... 10

7306\_PoE

Version: 1.1  
Version date: 08.11.21  
Comment Final

*This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015.*

## **1.0 Introduction, Qualifications and Experience, and Scope of Evidence**

1.1.1. My name is Ben Croot. My qualifications and experience are set out in **Section 1.0** of my main Proof of Evidence ('Proof').

1.1.2. My evidence has been prepared on behalf of Fareham Borough Council ('FBC') in relation to the appeal by Foreman Homes ('the Appellant') against the non-determination of planning application reference P/19/1193/OA for outline planning permission (with all matters reserved apart from access) for the erection of up to 57 dwellings, together with associated parking, landscaping and access from Posbrook Lane ('the Proposed Development') at land east of Posbrook Lane, Titchfield ('the Appeal Site').

1.1.3. My evidence addresses putative Reason for Refusal (b), concerning landscape and visual matters, focussing on the main areas of disagreement which I consider to be:

- The influence of the settlement edge on the Appeal Site.
- The value, susceptibility, and consequently, the sensitivity of the Appeal Site.
- The impact of the Proposed Development on the character and visual amenity of the Lower Meon Valley.

## 2.0 The Value of the Meon Valley

### 2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. It is common ground that the Appeal Site forms part of a valued landscape (under paragraph 174 (a) of the NPPF) which extends from the edge of Bellfield and includes the Lower Meon Valley (LSoCG paragraph 13).

### 2.2. The Meon Valley

2.2.1. The River Meon rises near East Meon (at the highest chalk stream source in the UK) within the South Downs National Park, some 26 kms upstream of Titchfield. It flows principally southwards along a relatively narrow channel but through a major river valley, which is divided into upper, middle and lower reaches associated with changing geology and landform of the downs, lowland clay and coastal plain respectively. It finally meets the Solent at Titchfield Haven and Hill Head, some 34 kms from source to mouth. It is, therefore, a significant and distinct landscape feature within South Hampshire, passing through two Boroughs (Winchester and Fareham), linking the South Downs to the coast and embracing a variety of landscapes along its course.

2.2.2. At the County level, the Hampshire Integrated Character Assessment ('HICA') [**Core Document CDG.3**] recognises the Meon Valley as a distinct landscape character area (3e).

2.2.3. In addition to the detailed description of the Meon Valley LCA, the Fareham Landscape Assessment 2017 [**Core Document CDG.2**] emphasises the role of the Meon Valley as one of the defining, structural landscape features of the Borough.

### **2.3. Designations and Value**

2.3.1. Given the abundance of the highest level of ecological designations (SPA, Ramsar, SSSI, NNR, LNR), along with its scenic quality, distinctiveness (and rarity), intact and unspoilt condition, abundance of cultural heritage and recreational assets, and its important functional role hydrologically as a flood plain, it is my view that the Meon Valley is at the higher end of the undesignated valued landscape category.

### **2.4. Protecting the Meon Valley and the Value of High-Quality Local Greenspace**

2.4.1. The importance of local natural green space has been brought into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic. Objections from local community groups and locals including The Meon Ramblers, The Fareham Society and Titchfield Village Trust demonstrate this is clearly a development that local communities do not want.

2.4.2. FBC and Inspectors have a consistent history of rightly defending the Lower Meon Valley from incremental, harmful development.

2.4.3. It is the intention of FBC to strengthen the protection of the Meon Valley by designating it as an 'Area of Special Landscape Quality', including the Appeal site, under Policy DS3 in the emerging Local Plan [**Core Document CDF.5**].

### 3.0 The Influence of the Existing Settlement Edge

- 3.1.1. The settlement edge comprises existing established boundary vegetation of scrubby hedgerow and mature trees, along with the soft natural space of Bellfield play area, communal amenity grassed areas (with low level communal garages) and vegetated private residential gardens.
- 3.1.2. It is approximately 299m in length along the southern edge of Bellfield. Of this, approximately 35m is rear residential garden fencing or gates; and 264m is scrubby hedgerow or hedgerow with trees. Buildings are typically set back from the boundary by approximately 8m in the south to up to 50m in the north. At no point along this boundary does built form front directly onto the Appeal Site nor create a hard urban edge to it.
- 3.1.3. I consider it to be a 'soft' definitive edge to Bellfield, providing a clear demarcation between urban settlement and the natural environment of the Meon Valley.
- 3.1.4. I consider that the Appellant has again overemphasised the influence of the existing settlement edge. It provides a 'soft' yet distinct boundary between existing settlement and the Meon Valley. With utmost respect to the previous Inspector, I do not believe it to now be "*harsh and readily visible*", which it may very well have been back in 2018. In my view, built form is visible, but it has little influence over the Appeal Site, a view with which the previous Inspector also concurred.

## **4.0 Landscape Sensitivity and the Magnitude of Change from the Proposed Development**

### **4.1. The Value of the Appeal Site**

4.1.1. I agree with the Appellant that the Appeal Site is assessed as 'Local Authority' value as part of the Appellant's LVIA (Table B2) [Core Document CDA.14]. However, the Appellant has, erroneously in my view, reduced the value of the northern edge of the Appeal Site to 'Community Value' on the basis of the influence of the settlement edge. It is my view that this influence has been overstated by the Appellant and it is the whole of the Appeal Site, as a recognised valued landscape, that should be assessed as 'Local Authority' value.

4.1.2. The approach taken by the Appellant was much debated at the previous appeal with appeal decisions and a High Court Judgment presented by FBC as evidence this was not the correct approach, a view which the previous Inspector accepted.

### **4.2. The Susceptibility of the Appeal Site**

4.2.1. The Appellant takes a similar approach for susceptibility, reducing it from 'High' to 'Medium' for the 'north of the application site', again on account of the settlement edge.

4.2.2. Whilst I accept that susceptibility can in principle be considered in relation to smaller parcels of land within larger areas, including valued landscapes, where there are logical and justifiable reasons for doing so, I do not believe given the physical circumstances here that it is justified.

4.2.3. It is my view that the influence of the settlement edge does not warrant a reduction in susceptibility of the 'north' part of the Appeal Site. Furthermore, the way the

'low' susceptible area has been identified (which the Appellant has not attempted to spatially map) has no justified rationale in my view - there is no physical on the ground boundary, be it a distinct change of slope, change of land use or vegetative boundary, for it to follow and consequently it is a notional, arbitrary area adjacent to the settlement edge.

4.2.4. The susceptibility of the whole Appeal Site, including the northern part, is in my view 'High' - as the Appellant has assessed for the Lower Meon Valley Open Valley Side character type.

### **4.3. The Sensitivity of the Appeal Site**

4.3.1. For the reasons set out above, I consider the Appellant has been wrong to downplay both the value and susceptibility for the northern part of the Appeal Site. Moreover, in so doing, the Appellant has, in effect 'double counted' for the alleged influence of the settlement edge, reducing both the value of part of the Appeal Site (from 'Local Authority' to 'Community') **and** the susceptibility (from 'High' to 'Medium') to produce an artificially reduced sensitivity of 'Medium' (as opposed to 'High / Medium') as assessed for the majority of the Lower Meon Valley: Open Valley Side Character Area.

### **4.4. The Magnitude of Change**

4.4.1. In addition to the underestimation of the sensitivity of the Appeal Site, it is my view that the Appellant has also underestimated the potential Magnitude of Change both landscape and visual receptors would experience as a result of the Proposed Development. This underestimation appears to be founded on two components:

- The underestimation of the visibility of the Proposed Development; and

- The underestimation of the numbers of visual receptors affected by the Proposed Development.

4.4.2. Consequently, I am led to the view that the Appellant's LVIA has not assessed a 'worst case' assessment scenario as advocated by GLVIA3 [**Core Document CDH.40**]. Given the sensitivities of the receiving landscape, it is my view that a 'worst case' assessment is appropriate in this situation.

## 5.0 The Impacts of the Proposed Development

5.1.1. The result of reducing the sensitivity of part of the Appeal Site is that impacts to landscape character of the Lower Meon Valley: Open Valley Side as identified in the Fareham Landscape Assessment 2017 [Core Document CDG.2] are understated in Table B4 of the Appellant's LVIA [Core Document CDA.14], which concludes effects of Moderate, Negative significance in the short term. It is my view that a more accurate assessment would be that they are **Major / Moderate, Negative** significance in the short-term. Whilst the Proposed Development is a non-EIA development and therefore significant effects are not required to be identified within the LVIA for compliance with the EIA Regulations, the Appellant's LVIA states at Section 1.1 effects of 'Substantial' or 'Substantial/Medium' [i.e. 'Major' or Major/Moderate] "*can be considered to have additional weight in the planning balance*".

5.1.2. The underestimation of impacts is further compounded in my view by the underestimation of the magnitude of change both landscape and visual receptors would experience as a result of the Proposed Development.

5.1.3. **Tables 1 and 2** in my main Proof summarise the difference in assessment outcomes between the Appellant's judgements and my judgements using the Appellant's methodology and terminology, but correcting for the matters identified above.

5.1.5. Whilst I accept the reduction in size from the previous scheme would reduce the physical land take the Proposed Development would have, it is important to note the relationship between development size and resultant landscape and visual impacts does not follow a linear negative correlation.

5.1.6. Given the Proposed Development's location on the crest of the valley side it would 'skyline' and break the horizon, even with mitigation planting. Looking up from

the valley floor or across from the eastern valley side, the prominence and awareness of new development breaking the horizon, extending built silhouette and intruding into undeveloped valued countryside would be more apparent in my view than development that was situated away from the sensitive Meon Valley sides and did not result in skylining.

5.1.7. I also have concerns regarding the efficacy of the planting. This concern relates to the alignment of a main sewer across the Site. Such utilities are subject to strict controls on planting to protect the operational function of the asset. It appears the Appellant has not taken these constraints fully into consideration as part of the LVIA and consequently has overestimated the screening effect of proposed mitigation planting.

5.1.8. There may also be landscape and visual implications if public open space is provided to the south of the proposed dwellings (see paragraph 6.1.14 of my main Proof).

5.1.9. I accept that the Proposed Development would result in some beneficial enhancement to the settlement edge as a result of proposed new planting but in my view this has been overestimated and does not outweigh the harm the Proposed Development would have to both the character and visual amenity of the Meon Valley. This harm would, in my view, remain negative and for landscape and visual receptors within the Site and its local context *“can be considered to have additional weight in the planning balance”* despite the mitigation proposed.

## 6.0 Conclusions

6.1.1. As set out in paragraph 8.1.2 of my main Proof, I consider the Appellant has fallen into various errors, as a result of which it has understated the landscape and visual impacts of the Proposed Development, which as I have explained would cause permanent harm to landscape character and visual amenity and would harm a valued landscape, and which would fail to minimise the impacts of the Proposed Development on the Countryside.

6.1.2. For the reasons set out above and in my main Proof, the Proposed Development fails, in my view, to meet requirements of paragraph 174 (a) of the NPPF, policies CS14 and CS17 of the Core Strategy, policies DSP6 and DSP40(iii) of the Development Sites and Policies, and policies DS1, DS3 and HP4(c) of the emerging Local Plan.