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## **Position Paper in Respect of Land East of East Hanney Ecological, Landscape and Archaeological Circumstances**

### **Introduction and Key Conclusions**

1. Barwood has appointed the Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) to undertake a series of preliminary environmental appraisals on a site to the east of East Hanney, Oxon. The location and boundaries of the site are illustrated on **Plan EDP 1**, attached to this paper and the site is located in the administrative district of the Vale of White Horse (VoWH).
2. To date, the purpose of EDP's work has been to gain an early understanding of the environmental issues likely to affect the site's 'in principle' suitability for development and its potential capacity. To this end, the following specific work items have been undertaken:
  - Data trawl of relevant landscape designations and review of the site's landscape character and theoretical visual envelope;
  - Preliminary heritage desk-based assessment; and
  - Preliminary review of local ecological designations and site circumstances.
3. EDP is an independent environmental consultancy providing advice to landowner and property development clients in the public and private sectors in the fields of landscape, ecology, heritage, arboriculture and masterplanning. The Practice operates throughout the UK from offices in Cirencester and Shrewsbury. Details of the Practice can be obtained at [www.edp-uk.co.uk](http://www.edp-uk.co.uk).

### **Key Findings of EDP's Assessments to Date**

4. EDP has not found any 'in principle' issue which would preclude the site's allocation for built development; indeed, it is not especially constrained in environmental terms.
5. In landscape terms, the site does not form part of any area designated for its landscape value or sensitivity; it is physically very well related to East Hanney, being bounded on two sides by built development and main roads and would not result in development notably extending the settlement into the open countryside.

6. Accordingly, the site is very visually contained and its visual and sensory character is substantially affected by the surrounding land uses; this is not a site that feels or reads as part of the wider agricultural landscape.
7. A review of the VoWH Landscape Capacity Study (2014) has been undertaken. A comparison of the site against the preferred site 55 to the south of East Hanney finds that site 55 is more harmful in terms of both visual and landscape character terms. This is acknowledged in the VoWH strategic sites paper, Topic Paper 3. Furthermore, Topic Paper 3 raises serious concerns about potential ecological harm as a consequence of development on site 55.
8. The existing agricultural management of the site has no doubt constrained the ecological potential. The 'gappy' condition of existing hedgerows in the area is published in relevant landscape character assessments whilst desk-based analysis has found that the pattern of continuous hedgerow links in the vicinity of the site has been degraded.
9. The site lies adjacent to a Roman Road which passes through East Hanney and provides links to other settlements along its route, but otherwise, the heritage data trawl suggests that there will prove to be little heritage interest within the site. It is recognised that the proximity to the Roman Road and Grade II\* listed church will necessitate further examination at later stages of the planning process, but should not preclude the site's allocation.
10. For the above reasons, EDP's overall conclusion at this stage is that land east of East Hanney is eminently suited to accommodate development to help meet the Council's housing need and is capable of being developed in accordance with relevant environmental policy at local and national levels.
11. Further detail of EDP's desk and field assessments can be found on the following pages.

*EDP 18 December 2014*

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## Landscape

12. This appraisal has been prepared with reference to a desk-based analysis of local landscape-related planning policy, designations and published landscape character assessments. Theoretical modelling of visibility combined with a local understanding of the surrounding landscape has informed preliminary commentary on the potential visual context.

### ***Planning Policy and Landscape-related Designations***

13. **Plan EDP 1** shows the environmental context of the site and, with regard to landscape and visual issues, those planning or landscape designations that would impose various levels of constraint on new development:
- The site is not located within or in proximity to any national landscape designations or designed, and otherwise particularly sensitive, landscapes.
  - The plan shows that the site lies c. 4km to the north of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and it does not lie within the Oxford Green Belt;
  - There are no public rights of way extending through the site;
  - Relevant over-arching policies of the adopted Local Plan are NE2 – in which intervisibility with the AONB should be tested. However as noted above, this may be scoped out of further assessment if it is barely visible; Policy NE9 which relates to development in the Lowland Vale to the north, beyond the AONB; Policy DC6 requires that hard and soft ‘measures’ are designed into proposals to address landscape and visual sensitivities.
  - Policies DC1 and DC4 are principally architectural design policies which should be considered as part of any scheme proposal.
14. With regard to local rights of way, there is a right of way adjacent to the southern edge of the site, which is a local route that provides a link from the village to the wider area and countryside. We note that this right of way falls with the same landowner’s control and consideration could be given to extending this through the site and make improvements to the route which could encourage greater use and access to the wider countryside.

### **Emerging Local Plan Evidence Base**

15. The Council has commissioned the ‘Vale Landscape Capacity Study – Final Report’ (Kirkham Associates, February 2014). This has been used to inform the VoWH strategic site selection process. The site for which allocation is sought is identified as the ‘Potential contingency

site' located within the larger study area defined as Site 45 in the Capacity. Site 45 was assessed in the Capacity study as having 'medium' overall landscape capacity.

16. However, the findings of the Capacity study apply to the far wider 50ha site. Unlike the larger study area, the smaller contingency site is well related to East Hanney where it would contribute to its nucleated form. This is confirmed by the Capacity study which state that it would *"relate most strongly with East Hanney"* and *"responds to existing edge of village on opposite side of road"*.
17. Through the Strategic Sites Allocation process, Site 45 was dropped in favour of Site 55, a land area to the south of East Hanney. An analysis of Site 55 potential is found in the VoWH Topic Paper 3. It is notable however that it states that:
  - Development restricted to northern edge; elsewhere would result in harm to the wider landscape, the settlement pattern and its landscape setting and in a visual impact on the southern approach to East Hanney.
18. Further preliminary desk-study identifies several key differences between site 45 and the contingency area for site 55:
  - Site 45 shares only one boundary with the existing settlement and would clearly extend the settlement southwards, introducing new built form along the A388 where-as the smaller Site 55 contingency area will reflect the existing built form character along the adjacent roads;
  - Site 45 development footprint area will be substantially constrained by root protection areas of large trees alongside adjacent watercourse;
  - Site 55 access is consistent with existing access points off adjacent road routes which extent into East Hanney;
19. Clearly, development along the 'edge' would not satisfy the Council's housing requirements in this part of the settlement. Site 55 would result in harm in landscape and visual terms; it does not offer a pedestrian link to the centre of the settlement; it would result in an obvious extension to the settlement which would not retain its nucleated form; and, the range of other notable constraints in terms of proximity to a substantial watercourse, mature trees and potential harm to ecological habitats would substantially constrain development within this area.
20. Whilst the VoWH draft Local Plan now proposes the alternative allocation to the south of the village, it is also important to note that the District Council's Topic Paper 3 concludes in its summary of the assessment of the land south of East Hanney that, *"The Landscape*

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*Capacity Study (2014) indicates that there is some very limited potential for development."* (emboldened for emphasis).

21. The District Council's evidence base that underpins the Local Plan therefore concludes that, not only is the land east of East Hanney less sensitive and could be suitable for an allocation, development on the land to the south of East Hanney is unlikely to be suitable for development and could give rise to unacceptable impacts on landscape character.

### ***Landscape Character***

22. The site is located within the Alluvial Lowlands landscape character type, as defined in the Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (2004). The findings of the desk study are broadly consistent with the landscape Alluvial Lowlands, with some differences – chiefly the variation in field pattern and size and the degraded condition of hedgerows resulting in a less obvious enclosure.
23. The site sits in a broadly flat landscape with a mixture of irregular and regular shaped fields ranging from small to large in size. The hedgerow pattern is found to be degraded, the result of which is that the fields do not read as a 'geometric pattern of the enclosed hedged fields'.
24. At a more local level, the site is associated with the 'East and West Hanney' landscape character area (WH/27). This description is notable in that it identifies that there are only "a few hedges" and these are "generally gappy". There are no notable features within the site which could constrain development of it.
25. The site itself is located within an irregularly shaped field adjacent to the settlement of East Hanney. Mixed agricultural farmland extends to the east and in all other directions around the settlement. Residential dwellings form the edge character to the settlement and these extend beyond the site to the south along the A388 and to the north along Steventon Road. In this respect the site is well related to the existing settlement. Consequently, the aspiration of the published Landscape Strategy for the Alluvial Lowlands to "*maintain the tranquil nature of the landscape*" is less distinct for this site location so close to the settlement core, at the junction of two roads, where the influences of the settlement, traffic and associated day-to-day activities make this site more urbanised than land further away from village centre.
26. There are however several opportunities for development to enable delivery of the published landscape guidelines. In particular, strengthening and maintaining the field

pattern hedgerows, and softening the settlement edge with new tree planting utilising native species will all combine to enhance the landscape character of the Alluvial Lowlands.

## **Visual**

27. The above-mentioned landscape capacity study produced for the Council by Kirkham Associates states that the larger Site 45 has 'medium' visual sensitivity, due to the potential for 'panoramic views, views into/out of the AONB, open landscape, busy road and visually prominent site'. However the substantially smaller proposed site benefits from several attributes of the local landscape character which inform its potential intervisibility with surrounding visual amenity receptors:

- It is well-related to East Hanney with access into it from within the settlement extends and would read as part of the existing settlement character;
- due to a combination of distance and existing strong boundary planting, the site is unlikely to be visible from the AONB, almost 4km to the south;
- the site is partially screened in views from the A388 in which traffic is already passing through the settlement;
- existing field boundary vegetation provides screening of longer distance views within the lowland areas; and
- consequently, the substantially smaller contingency site would not be 'visually prominent' or extend into the more open landscape to the south and east unlike promoted land to the south of East Hanney;
- the very limited visual envelope of the site, resulting largely from the relative abundance and proximity of tall hedgerows and woodland copses alongside the A388 as well as the dense vegetation alongside the disused canal to the east;
- in addition, the number of very sensitive receptors is very limited;
- there are relatively few public rights of way in the area, and those that are close to the site would have very limited intervisibility with it, except, for example, the footpath which passes close to the site;
- views of the site from housing in East Hanney are limited to those chiefly on the eastern edge of the village, although existing roadside vegetation and copses limit the number of individual properties with open views;
- any glimpsed views from residential receptors would be in the context of built development within the settlement and a main transport route along the A388 with high level of traffic including cars and HGVs.

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### ***Conclusions in respect of Landscape***

- From a landscape and visual perspective, it is EDP's opinion that there are no 'in-principle' constraints with regard to future development of the site.
- Due to a combination of existing field boundary vegetation, a broadly flat landscape and few sensitive receptors (in either landscape or visual terms), the potential effects resulting from development of the site would be confined to the site itself and the immediate local area; being largely defined by the local main road network and the adjacent limited number of residential dwellings.
- The site is well related to centre of East Hanney; it benefits from potential access along two existing routes adjacent to the site and within the existing extends of the settlement.
- The site is in a sustainable location with obvious road and footpath links into the settlement and to the wider countryside and development of it would retain the nucleated form of East Hanney.
- Further landscaping measures included within any proposed development would be able to provide targeted mitigation where necessary and address the published landscape character guidelines for the area.

## Archaeology and Heritage

28. The following represents an initial desktop appraisal of the potential for archaeological and heritage issues, based on readily available sources which comprise:

- The National Heritage List for England, curated by English Heritage;
- Vale of White Horse adopted Local Plan.

### ***Designated Heritage Assets (Plan EDP 1)***

29. There are no designated heritage assets (as defined in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) such as world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens or registered battlefields, within the site.

30. In the wider area, the National Heritage List for England identifies a cluster of listed buildings within East Hanney. Consideration of the Grade II\* listed church in the settlement can be addressed via consultation and appropriate design within a future masterplan for the site. Indeed, this presents opportunities to enhance the legibility of the building and present it as a more recognisable focal point within the settlement.

31. None of the listed buildings identified are considered to present 'in principle' constraint to the allocation and future development of the site. Given the physical distance of these buildings to the nearest site boundary and the separation of them by the surrounding road network, any potential effects on setting – in the unlikely event that they arise – can be addressed by sensitive masterplanning and design.

### ***Non-Designated Heritage Assets***

32. There are no records relating to the site itself. In the wider area, records exist for the fields to the north and evidence of prehistoric and Romano-British activity has been recorded. This too can be addressed via consultation and appropriate design within a future masterplan for the site.

33. Given the proximity of the Roman Road it is possible that as yet unidentified archaeological remains may survive within the site associated with this. However, at this stage there is no evidence to suggest that these deposits, if present, will be of such rarity, extent or complexity to prevent the development of the site.

### ***Conclusions in respect of Archaeology and Heritage***



34. This initial appraisal of the heritage context of the site has demonstrated that:

- There are no 'in principle' constraints, in respect of archaeological and heritage assets, with regard to the future development of this site, even if further detailed studies will need to be undertaken to inform and support the preparation and submission of an outline planning application.
- The setting of the listed buildings identified is unlikely to be a constraint to development in this location and there are opportunities to enhance the legibility of the listed church building;
- The site does not contain any previously recorded undesignated archaeological sites, monuments or remains, where preservation *in situ* could be a potential requirement. Further investigation may be required at the outline application stage, but for now there is no reason to believe that undesignated archaeology should constrain the site's deliverability or capacity for development.

35. As a result it is considered that this is a reasonable and appropriate location for development in archaeology/heritage terms

## Ecology

36. The site on land east of East Hanney is not considered to be directly constrained by any statutory or non-statutory ecological designations, although consultation with the LPA will be required prior to the submission of any planning application

37. In accordance with acknowledged best practice, and in order to comply with legal requirements and the circumstances of the site and local context, a Phase 1 survey and subsequent appropriately timed Phase 2 protected species surveys for water vole may be undertaken. Additional surveys will be subject to Phase 1 findings and consultation. The results of these ongoing surveys would be being used to inform the masterplanning process prior to the submission of any planning application.

38. Given the relatively low intrinsic value of the on-site habitats, coupled with the scope for habitat enhancement/ diversification, EDP's overall conclusion is that the development of the application site offers the opportunity to deliver a net overall enhancement to the biodiversity of the area in the medium to long term. It will thus comply with all relevant policy and guidance at local and national level.

39. The VoWH Topic Paper 3, in respect of ecology on its preferred land at Site 55, notes:

*“Serious concerns about impact on ecology. The Letcombe Brook (an important habitat corridor for species such as Water Vole and Otter), adjoins and is partly within the site. The Cowslip Meadows Local Wildlife Site is adjacent to the proposed site and contains UK Priority Habitat. The proposed site itself also contains potential UK Priority Habitat.”*

40. Even if it is possible to mitigate this, it is likely to substantially reduce the developable area that can be achieved on the site to the south. Conversely, the only negative referred to in respect of the land east of East Hanney is the presence of water voles. However, it is our opinion that the presence of water voles will not preclude development and can be effectively mitigated (with enhanced habitat creation) through a sensitive design.



