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LANDSCAPE SUMMARY NOTE – HIGH ROAD, CHIGWELL, ESSEX

Brief

M Scott Properties Ltd (MSP) has requested that Lockhart Garratt assess the 13.5-acre site located within Chigwell, Essex. Specifically, MSP have requested a judgement from LG as to whether the approach taken within the Emerging Local Plan (eLP) to dissect the Garden Centre and exclude the remaining built form from the eLP is justified.

It is understood that part of the Garden Centre is allocated for development within the Emerging Local Plan (eLP) and that this is specified as CHIG.R5. The remaining area within the same ownership, which contains an area of the Garden Centre and undeveloped land, is currently excluded from the eLP. MSP have informed LG that as a result of the adjoining site (CHIG.R5) being redeveloped with the allocation in its current form, would cause the remaining built form to go into disrepair as a result of it no longer being required for the operation of the Garden Centre.

MSP and Signature Senior Lifestyle have submitted a planning application (23rd November 2018) for the redevelopment of the demolition and removal of existing Site structures, and the erection of a 100-bedroom care home with associated access, parking and landscaped areas, on the built form which is currently excluded from the eLP. This Planning Application is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, as well as a Green Belt Assessment, which has informed this initial note and the following report.

The Site

The Site is located to the north-west of High Road within the settlement of Chigwell in Essex. The Site is irregular in shape and occupies an approximate total area of 13.5 acres. The site is dissected by a brook, with the built form associated with the Garden Centre occupying the land to the south-west of the brook, with the area to the north of the brook being undeveloped.

The site is currently washed over by the Metropolitan Green Belt, despite parts of the site containing a significant amount of built form.

The Proposals

LG have been informed that MSP support the allocation of 65 dwellings on the site, but seek an amendment to the CHIG.R5 allocation boundary so that it includes the remaining built form associated with the Garden Centre. This would then allow the current undeveloped area to be opened up as public open space, and a more appropriate scheme to be delivered.

Landscape Character

The Site lies within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (NCA) and is sub-categorised within the Epping Forest Landscape Character Assessment as lying within the Wooded Ridges and Valleys Landscape Character Area (LCA).

The Site lies within a transitional sub-urban location on the edge of the settlement of Chigwell and is currently used as a Garden Centre and Plant Nursery, with views of the settlement to the south and north-east. As a result, the Site is read as part of the settlement and is not considered to be representative of the Thames Basin NCA or the Wooded Ridges and Valleys Landscape Character Area (LCA).

The Site has a strong existing vegetation structure, with mature trees and hedgerows along the Site's western and northern boundaries, and sections of the Site's southern boundary. There are also mature trees within the Site itself throughout the outdoor sections of the Garden Centre.

The eastern adjacent pasture land outside of the Site is comprised of a large triangular pasture field, separated from the Site by a stream lined with willow trees. A mature area of woodland lies in the eastern corner of the pasture field. The presence of a strong existing vegetation structure creates a well contained Site.

Visual Environment

Whilst the Site is screened to views from the west and north by the strong vegetation structure, some filtered views from High Road to the immediate south are possible through the steel palisade fence, particularly at the existing access point and in places where the boundary vegetation is weaker.

Potential views are also possible from Tudor Close and Lyndhurst Rise to the north-east of the Site as a result of weaker vegetation along the boundary separating these residential dwellings from the adjacent pasture land. This has been assessed in detail as part of the Care Home application.

The Site sits within a dip in the landform associated with a small tributary of the River Roding, with the land rising to the east and to a lesser extent to the west, resulting in longer distance views of the Site becoming unlikely.

Summary and Conclusions

We agree with the findings contained within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Green Belt Assessment that accompany the Care Home Planning Application that redevelopment of the currently excluded built form would represent a slightly beneficial impact upon the Green Belt compared to that which currently exists. It is of our own view that the overall site represents a well enclosed parcel that has limited landscape and visual impact due to limited views into the site being achievable from the assessed receptors.

On the contrary, should development proceed in accordance with CHIG.R5 (as currently shown in the Emerging Local Plan), the excluded built form would not serve a purpose without the Garden Centre and as a result would fall into disrepair. It is our view that this would result in a negative impact upon the Green Belt compared to what currently exists, and would negatively affect the visual amenities of future residents of the site and those that currently overlook the site (Tudor Close and Lyndhurst Rise). It should be noted that this level of impact upon the new and existing residents would steadily increase over time as the buildings and their surroundings deteriorate.

In terms of the overall Site proposed for allocation (as shown on the accompanying landscape plan), it is believed development can be successfully accommodated with a negligible impact upon the Green Belt, due to the significant presence of existing built form.

In LG's professional opinion, the eLP is incorrect in its allocation to the Garden Centre Site. Whilst the western section of the Site has been allocated as a residential site, the remainder of the Garden Centre has been left unallocated. This eastern section of the Garden Centre is currently comprised of significant areas of built form, with numerous large glasshouses, polytunnels and areas of hardstanding, particularly within the northern section of this area.

The eLP Site Allocations Map for Chigwell shows the Green Belt boundary extending south from the Site towards and including the Chigwell Golf Club. However, in reality there is continuous built form along the southern section of High Road including residential dwellings and Chigwell Golf Clubhouse. Therefore, it is considered that the Green Belt boundary is misleading within this location, and whilst this map indicates the loss of an existing settlement gap would occur through the development of the care home, this would in fact not be the case.

At present, the majority of the built form within the Garden Centre lies within the northern part of the Site, however the proposed care home would lie further south than the existing built form, pushing development closer to the road, which would be more in keeping with the existing built form along High Road.

The glasshouses and other associated built form would be removed, returning this section of the Site to greenfield land, characteristic of the surrounding area. Therefore, in LG's opinion, both the care home and residential sites within the Garden Centre can be allocated for development without unacceptable harm to the local landscape character, visual environment and Green Belt.

It is therefore our view, that the artificial separation of the previously developed land within the eLP is not justified, and that an amendment should be sought to the allocation boundary in accordance with the landscape plan supplied.

Recommendations

- Retain and enhance the existing mature woodland belt along the Site's western boundary to maintain the degree of visual containment afforded to the Site within views from the west;
- Retain and enhance all boundary vegetation, to ensure that the Site is seen within an existing green infrastructure
- Retain adjacent eastern parcel of land within Applicant's control outside of Site as pasture with areas of enhanced woodland to improve its existing contribution to the Metropolitan Green Belt;
- Enhance the stream corridor between the proposed residential site and retained meadow with pockets of willow and minor mixed broadleaves;
- Include good quality tree, hedgerow and shrub planting within the development to help integrate the development into the receiving environment; and
- Promote the use of locally native plant species, where appropriate, to ensure that the proposals are in keeping with the character of the Site, its setting and the wider landscape context.

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