

Land south of Green Road, Wivelsfield Green

Summary Proof of Evidence: Landscape & Visual Matters

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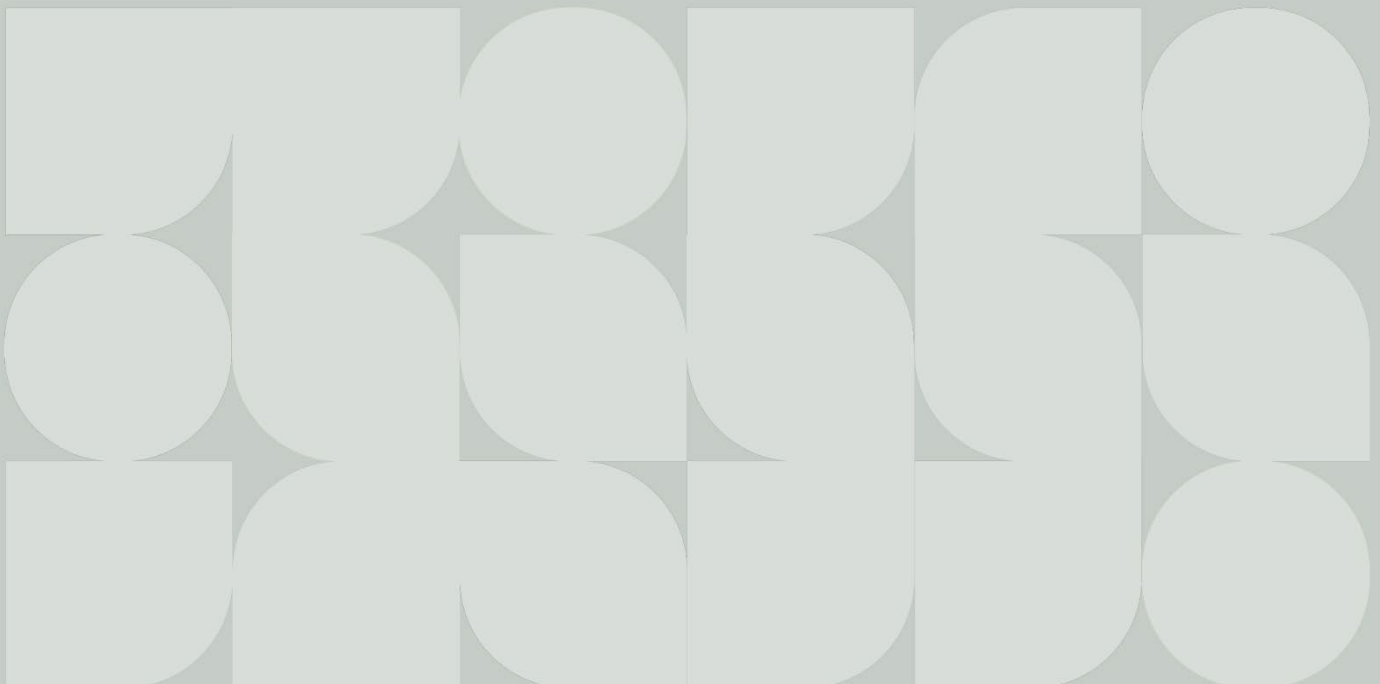
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1. My name is James Atkin and I am a Director at G+L Landscape Architects (G+L). I have over 25 years professional experience specialising in feasibility, landscape and visual impact assessment, and expert witness services. I am also a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (2005).
- 1.1.2. This evidence addresses landscape and visual matters in respect of land to the south of Green Road, Wivelsfield Green, Haywards Heath (the appeal site) and relates to a decision by Lewes District Council (LDC) to indicate it would have refused outline permission for residential development of up to 150 dwellings, with associated works, parking, landscaping, publicly accessible open space, land for education or community use, with access from Green Road and Eastern Road (LPA reference LW/24/0820).
- 1.1.3. My professional judgements, which are presented in this evidence for the forthcoming inquiry (PINS reference 6005671) have been prepared in full accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions, irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

2. THE APPEAL SITE

- 2.1.1. The appeal site comprises ca. 21 hectares (ha) of land, located adjacent to the existing residential edge off Green Road and Eastern Road, extending south to West Wood, and east across the to the settlement edge of Wivelsfield Green. Proposed residential development is concentrated in the western part of the appeal site, contiguous with the existing settlement area of Wivelsfield. In the eastern part of the appeal site (an area included in a designated Local Green Space) (LGS), other than the site access, no development is proposed, and this open landscape between Wivelsfield and Wivelsfield Green will be maintained.
- 2.1.2. The surrounding landscape context to the appeal site comprises a rolling landscape characterised by small scale hills and ridgelines which, together with agricultural uses and prevalent woodland, forms a complex and often small-scale mosaic within the landscape.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE APPEAL

- 3.1.1. The planning application was submitted in December 2024, and included a detailed LVIA prepared by PG (CD-1.7), with a subsequent appeal for non-determination submitted in February 2026.
- 3.1.2. During the determination period, a consultation response was received from the ESCC Landscape Architect (CD-3.26) (dated 28.01.2025, but received August 2025). The consultation response recommended refusal, referencing matters of scale, the rural setting of the village, and the extent that the proposed development would extend into the countryside.

- 3.1.3. LDC have sought further consultation on landscape matters from the external consultant, Terra Firma, who are commissioned as independent advisors to the Council across several projects/application sites. The subsequent consultation note includes various criticisms of the submitted LVIA (**CD-1.7**) and concerns over landscape and visual impact (**CD-3.29**). The consultation response does not raise matters in relation to valued landscapes.
- 3.1.4. LDC's Statement of Case raises matters of character and appearance, setting out their consideration of the harms that the appeal scheme would give rise to, including reference to 'harm to the landscape character and countryside setting'.
- 3.1.5. With further detail in the SoC stating that the Appellant's LVIA accepts that the appeal scheme will give rise to adverse landscape effects, the Council suggesting that at least some have the potential to be 'major adverse' and subsequently quoting part of the ESCC Landscape Architects consultation response and recommendation for refusal.

4. THE APPEAL PROPOSALS

- 4.1.1. The LVIA has informed the design process iteratively, and the appeal proposals adopt a positive approach to landscape and visual matters on this basis.
- 4.1.2. Early input to the design process influenced the masterplan, recognising the appeal site's existing landscape elements and features, together with those of its local context. The resulting proposals respond positively to these characteristics and reflect the area's intrinsic character.
- 4.1.3. Any required greenfield development in the district will inevitably have some form of landscape and visual effects. What is important is the approach has taken the opportunity to include a comprehensive scheme of mitigation which has either avoided impacts where possible or minimised the impacts and effects overall, which the appeal proposals do.
- 4.1.4. It is also important to note the constraint on the district as a whole of the South Downs National Park (SDNP), which represents over half of the district area. Consequently, the locations where new housing can be accommodated without directly affecting these statutory designated and nationally valued areas of landscape are notably limited in the district.

5. RESPONSE TO LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL MATTERS RAISED

- 5.1.1. The submitted LVIA concluded that landscape and visual effects would not be significant overall and that the appeal site has capacity to accommodate the proposed development. While identifying landscape and visual constraints, it noted these could be addressed through an appropriately considered masterplan (**CD-1.7**, pdf page 74, paragraph 7.24). The Development Framework Plan (DFP) submitted with the application

and appeal (**CD-1.33**) therefore incorporates a landscape mitigation strategy to avoid, reduce and remedy adverse effects.

- 5.1.2. Having reviewed the appeal proposals, including the amended DFP, I see no reason to alter my conclusions on landscape and visual matters. The appeal site remains well suited to the type of development proposed.
- 5.1.3. In respect of the perceived rurality of Green Road, it functions primarily as a route through Wivelsfield, connecting to Wivelsfield Green. Although part of the road adjacent to the eastern parcel currently overlooks agricultural land, the route itself is not inherently rural. Its character reflects the adjoining settlement and contrasts with more distinctly rural roads in the area, such as Slugworth Lane.
- 5.1.4. The settlement pattern of Wivelsfield exhibits some linearity along Green Road and Eastern Road, although there is existing depth to the settlement off Blackmores and Green Park Corner. The Cala Homes site (currently under construction) has added considerable depth, but this is not readily perceived, and the linear character of Green Road remains intact. The appeal proposals will likewise be contained by the existing settlement and green infrastructure, with no apparent increase in perceived depth from Green Road or Eastern Road. Assessing settlement pattern solely in 'plan form' is not a credible basis for judging effects on local character. More relevant is the need to maintain the physical and perceived separation between Wivelsfield and Wivelsfield Green (including its western and eastern parts), consistent with the LGS designation, which the appeal proposals will achieve.
- 5.1.5. The Sussex Border Path passes through the area and, in relation to the appeal site, already lies within the settlement. The rural approaches to the route from the north and south would remain unaffected by the proposals. While there may be some partially screened views and limited visual effects along the section adjacent to the appeal site, these would occur where the route already relates to the settlement rather than the wider landscape.
- 5.1.6. An Area of Established Character (Policy DM34) lies to the north of the western parcel and includes only two narrow strips within the appeal site boundary. Notwithstanding the policy's heritage focus, any changes within the Area of Established Character would not be harmful to its significance or character.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1.1. In the wider district, Lewes is heavily constrained by landscape designations at the highest level, with approximately 56% of the district falling within the SDNP.
- 6.1.2. Opportunities for accommodating new housing in the district without directly affecting these statutorily designated and nationally valued landscapes are notably limited. Outside these designated landscapes, the remaining areas of the district comprise more extensive areas of typical countryside, together with transitional landscapes located at the edges of towns and villages. At the interface between countryside

and urban areas, there will invariably be a distinction between the character of the landscape and that of the settlements within them.

- 6.1.3. Where greenfield development is required to deliver housing within the district, there will inevitably be some residual landscape and visual effects arising from most, if not all, development sites.
- 6.1.4. Where located adjacent to a settlement edge, the key consideration is therefore whether changes to the interface between landscape and settlement are extensive or localised, and, in either case, whether mitigation measures can avoid or minimise resulting effects.
- 6.1.5. There would be no direct physical impacts beyond the appeal site itself. Consequent changes in landscape character would also be limited, with no perceptible or material changes in character from areas of the landscape around Wivelsfield and Wivelsfield Green.
- 6.1.6. The appeal site does not display any attributes that are particularly out of the ordinary in relation to the surrounding landscape context of Wivelsfield. Furthermore, the impacts and effects are, whilst relatively typical in their nature in respect of the type of development proposed, limited in scale and extent.
- 6.1.7. On balance, I consider that the appeal site can accommodate the appeal proposals, both in the context of the existing landscape character, and through the ability to deliver effective mitigation by way of a well-considered scheme that recognises and responds to the character and appearance of the local landscape.

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