

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Crouchlands Farm, Plaistow

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10 Summary and mitigation strategy

Mitigation design principles

- 10.1 The LVIA process has been an integral component of the design process, which has been undertaken in an iterative way, so that the layout and design of the development proposals has been shaped by the preliminary findings of the LVIA. The process has been repeated to test alternative design scenarios with the objective of reducing predicted adverse effects and achieving the optimal balance of benefits and constraints.

The design, layout and detailing of the proposed buildings and infrastructure has been repeatedly revised during the LVIA process to ensure that the Proposed Development reflects the scale, materials and pattern of the existing agricultural buildings and the local farmland and woodland landscape context.

Drawing on a detailed site analysis, baseline LVIA assessment and the assessment of predicted landscape and visual effects (Sections 8 and 9) this final section of the LVIA sets out the mitigation design principles that should underpin the layout and design of the Proposed Development in order to integrate the scheme within its wider landscape and minimise any predicted adverse landscape and visual effects.

Mitigating predicted landscape effects

- 10.2 The assessment of predicted landscape effects (Section 8) is based on the assumption that the Proposed Development incorporates the following landscape design principles, which would minimise negative landscape effects on the identified landscape receptors:

- **The extensive network of ancient semi-natural woodlands** – all components of the Proposed Development should be sited beyond a 15m wide ancient woodland buffer zone to ensure that there is no damage to the root protection zones of veteran and ancient woodland trees. The exception is the route through Hardnip's Copse that connects the visitor glamping parking with Hardnip's Barn and the Glamping Fields, which follows an existing track through this ancient woodland.
- **The strong network of mature woodland, copses, shaws and hedgerows** – The layout of the proposals has been designed to integrate with the existing pattern of fields and woodlands on the Site. The proposals incorporate extensive new woodland and shaw planting, including the restoration of historic connections between existing ancient woodlands, and a programme for the sustainable management of all the woodlands within the wider (blue line) landownership boundary.
- **The rural character of the narrow, enclosed tracks and lanes** – The Proposed Development would lead to some loss of rural character, because of the need to comply with visibility (sight line) requirements for vehicles at the site entrance from Rickman's Lane and the health and safety requirements for visitors, horse riders and the public. The proposed native woodland, tree and hedgerow planting would restore the enclosed character of tracks and lanes and drainage, surfacing, fencing, lighting and signage should be selected and designed to minimise disruption to rural character.
- **The small scale, intimate and pastoral landscape character** – The buildings and infrastructure (eg. vehicular access, car parks, fencing, lighting, signage) associated with the Proposed Development would reduce the small-scale, intimate character of the landscape on part of the Site. The proposed extensive woodland, tree and hedgerow planting would restore the landscape structure in areas where it has become degraded

and would partially screen and soften local views to the new buildings so that they are well integrated within their landscape context. The continuity of working farm operations on the Site and a programme of landscape restoration and management would support the conservation and long term sustainability of the distinctive pastoral Low Weald character.

- **The time-depth of the landscape** – The Proposed Development would result in some adverse impacts on the time-depth of the local landscape, including (temporary impacts) on the landscape setting of a Grade II Listed buildings (at Crouchland and Lanelands) during the construction stage and the introduction of new built infrastructure which is larger in scale than that associated with traditional Low Wealden farmsteads. However, the masterplan retains and reflects the existing pattern of fields, woodlands, shaws and tracks on the Site and the proposed ambitious landscape restoration programme would bring opportunities to reinstate lost landscape elements, including field ponds, wetlands, hedgerows, shaws, orchards, species-rich meadows and green lanes, and to reintroduce traditional sustainable modes of woodland management, including coppicing.

Mitigating predicted visual effects

10.3 The assessment of predicted visual effects (Section 9) is based on the assumption that the masterplan for the Proposed Development incorporates the following landscape design principles, which would minimise negative visual effects on the identified visual receptors:

- **Views towards the northern and eastern parts of the Site** (Access Road, Farm Hub and Rural Enterprise Centre), Representative Viewpoints 1, 2, 3 and 9 – The proposed hedgerow, tree and woodland planting would provide enclosure and a backdrop to views along Rickman’s Lane and the access road to Crouchlands Farm; the new junction (with new hedgerow planting set back from the road and new woodland planting between the two junctions) would be perceived as one of the sequence of irregular small ‘greens’ that are characteristic of the settled Low Weald landscape. Extensive proposed woodland planting would screen the operational Farm Hub and part of the Rural Enterprise Centre in views from the east and would partially enclose the new picnic area, creating a more enclosed landscape and reinforcing the characteristic matrix of woodland and pasture on the Site
- **Views to the southern and eastern parts of the Site** (Rural Food and Retail Centre, Cookery School and Equestrian Centre), Representative Viewpoints 4, 5 and 6 – There are sensitive views to these areas of built development from the PROW that crosses the centre of the Site (north-south). This is a historic drove road adjacent to two Grade II listed buildings with a distinctive narrow pasture alongside. Part of the foreground narrow pasture alongside the PROW/drove road would be managed as meadow and wetland habitat and, as it matures, the proposed woodland and tree planting along the eastern boundary of the narrow pasture would close down the view to buildings within the Rural Food and Retail Centre and Equestrian Centre. Small parts of the buildings of the Cookery School, the Rural Food and Retail Centre and the Indoor Arena may be glimpsed through the trees and amidst the tree canopy, particularly during the winter months. However no buildings would break the skyline and, given the existing character of this landscape, which has a mix of woodland and farm buildings, such residual visual effects are judged to be insignificant.
- **Views to the western parts of the Site** (Glamping Fields and Hardnip’s Barn), Representative Viewpoints 7 and 8 – The woodland tree belt surrounding the Glamping

Parking area (to the south of Hardnip's Copse) would completely screen parked vehicles from view; occasional filtered views to vehicles parked in the Special Events Overflow Parking area are predicted to remain when this area is used (a few times per year). The glamping pods (including service pathways) should be sited beyond the 15m wide ancient woodland buffer zone and within new woodland edge planting. The proposed glamping pods have been carefully sited to mitigate visual impacts from PROW and proposed areas of woodland in the north-east part of the Northern Glamping Field and to the south west of Hardnip's Barn (connecting Limekiln Wood and Hardnip's Copse) are critically important in screening such views. The sunken glamping pods in the Northern Glamping Field would be screened by landform and by the specimen trees within the field.

Residual landscape and visual effects

- 10.3 With the incorporation of the mitigation measures set out in paragraphs 10.2 – 10.3, there are not predicted to be any significant residual landscape and/or visual effects following completion.

Summary

- 10.4 The layout, massing and design of the Proposed Development has been guided by the LVIA, in order to minimise predicted adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 10.5 The site is not within a protected landscape or an area designated for scenic landscape value. However, the distinctive landscape elements and features that are sensitive to the proposal are the extensive ancient woodlands; the network of woodland, shaws and hedgerows; the rural character of the narrow enclosed tracks and lanes; the historic landscape setting of locally listed buildings; and the intimate and pastoral character of this low-lying clay vale landscape.
- 10.6 Parts of the site are currently in a degraded condition. For example, woodlands have been neglected and left unmanaged and some areas have undergone a process of decontamination and restoration following the closure of the former biogas processing plant. For many years this has been an industrial site and it therefore does not display the remote, tranquil character that is typical of other parts of the Low Weald landscape.
- 10.7 This is a landscape-led masterplan which seeks to integrate the Proposed Development and to conserve, enhance and restore the distinctive landscape character and important biodiversity of the site. For example, 15m buffer zones around all ancient woodlands would ensure protection and low light corridors for bats; and replanting historic shaws and hedgerows alongside tracks and within larger fields would restore the historic landscape pattern and reconnect the ecological network. The masterplan also safeguards the rural character of the public rights of way on the site and respects the landscape setting of historic drove roads, listed buildings and locally important heritage features, such as coppiced woodlands, ponds and the site of a historic glassworks. Each component of the scheme has been sited to minimise landscape and visual impacts and the emerging design of all buildings, routes, car parks and pathways has been carefully tailored to reduce the perceived scale of built interventions and integrate the development within its landscape setting.