



Technical Note

Landscape Statement

Land West of Chaffinch Close & Land West of Burlow Close, Birdham, West Sussex

28 September 2018

Planning Ref: HELAA (2018) Site ref. HB10024 | SHLAA (2014) Application; site refs. BI1403 & BI1404
Planning Authority: Chichester District Council

1. Introduction

Urban Wilderness Ltd (UW) is appointed by Hallam Land Management Ltd (HLM) to provide technical advice with respect to masterplanning and landscape and visual impact of land to the west of Chaffinch Close and Burlow Close, Birdham, West Sussex.

This technical note first examines the planning policy context relating to the site with respect to landscape and visual matters, before then addressing the site's existing condition and capacity to accommodate development of the type proposed.

Development proposals are currently emerging. For the purposes of this note it is assumed that a residential scheme is proposed on the basis of a 60:40 split between built development and Green Infrastructure, in line with Natural England's current guidance.

This note is to be read in conjunction with representations made by Henry Adams, dated 28th September 2018.

2. Planning Policy Context

The two sites, to the west of Chaffinch Close and Burlow Close respectively, are located on the periphery / boundary of the Chichester Harbour AONB, with the B2179 and A286 providing the southern edge of the designation.

The following planning guidance is of relevance with respect to landscape matters: (a) Chichester Harbour AONB Planning Principles, (b) Chichester District Landscape Capacity Study (2009) and (c) the Chichester Harbour AONB Management Plan (2014 - 2019).

a. Chichester Harbour AONB

The Chichester Harbour Conservancy's role, stated within the Planning principles document reads as follows:

- "(i) To protect, conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Chichester Harbour AONB; and*
- (ii) To protect, conserve and enhance the value of the area for wildlife; and*
- (iii) To conserve, maintain and improve the Harbour and support its associated marine facilities for water-based recreation where they are consistent with (i) and (ii); and*
- (iv) To support sustainable forms of industry and agricultural practice where they are consistent with aims (i), (ii) and (iii); and*
- (v) To support the economic and social needs of the local communities where they are consistent with aims (i), (ii) and (iii)."*

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These principles will form the basis on which a proposed development at Birdham will be assessed. The need for new local housing in support of social and economic need will therefore have to be carefully balanced with the principles to preserve and enhance the natural beauty and wildlife value of the AONB.

b. Chichester District Landscape Capacity Study (2009)

This study identifies the Birdham area as being in Zone 13 (LCA 13): West Wittering and Birdham. The assessment states that:

“To the west of the village are small to moderate size arable fields and pasture. Due to nurseries and other small scale development along the B2198 to the south of Birdham, the perception of separation between Birdham and the small settlement of Somerley further south, is limited.”

Chichester district Landscape Capacity Study, HDA (October 2009), Para 4.2.47, p. 22

The area west of Birdham in which the two potential development sites are located, is then further subdivided and classified as Landscape Character Area (LCA) 94: Birdham Western Coastal Plain. This assessment defines the sensitivity of the area as “Substantial.” This area does however cover a broad tract of land to the north, west and south including a large extent of the AONB. Clearly development within the countryside / AONB, which is divorced from the existing settlement edge, will be of substantial sensitivity to development. It also follows that land adjacent to the urban area will be subject to urbanising influences and with effective screening will be of a lower sensitivity to development. It is of note that the same report states that the hedgerow network is relatively good and interspersed with tree belts across the area. These landscape assets can be reinforced to ensure inter-visibility is restricted. It is our view that a more detailed capacity assessment will be required for the site and it's immediate surrounds and that the assessment of “substantial” sensitivity may not be representative of Area 94 as a whole.

c. Chichester Harbour AONB Management Plan (2014 - 2019)

“Equal consideration should be given to development proposals on its borders which may have an impact on the AONB itself and its setting. Urban extensions around Chichester, Fishbourne, Southbourne, Emsworth, Havant and other settlements and villages could potentially lead to the loss of the distinctive identity of associated smaller settlements, the erosion of rural character and the loss of open views into and out of the AONB.”

(Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Management Plan, 2014-2019 (Section 6: Buildings and Development, p. 32)

A new management plan (2019-24) is currently being prepared and has been out for public consultation in September 2018.

This guidance is borne out of the five planning principles stated in 1(a) above. However, in our opinion the site is well contained visually with mature native hedging, woodland and field boundary trees which channel views and help screen the development from many vehicular receptors. Similarly, the recreational receptors using the footpath network to the north of the proposed development area are a significant distance away from the site. It is anticipated that the disturbance to their visual amenity will be low due to the flat topography and intervening vegetation. Further, in terms of the rural character, in our opinion this can be enhanced over the long term: Housing density, quality and materials palette can be designed to be in tune with the local vernacular and therefore help reflect and enhance local landscape character. Equally, new green open space amenity and the associated green infrastructure can help screen views towards the site from existing receptors to the north west and south west. This can help ensure that the new development is sensitive to the local character, retains the sense of openness and creates a strong sense of local landscape identity.

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2. Existing Landscape Condition

Chichester Harbour AONB

Site HB10024, formerly site refs. BI1403 & BI1404 (2014) are located on the edge of the AONB. In terms of development planning they therefore sit in a transitional zone in terms of landscape sensitivity and capacity. As noted above it is of note that the 2014 SHLAA, which subdivided the site into land parcels, found parcel BI403 to be available, achievable and suitable. The boundary of the AONB has not however changed during the intervening period between 2014 and 2018.

Local Landscape Character

The area is comprised of flat open countryside, mostly arable in nature. LCA 94, within which the site sits, covers a broad area to the north, west and south of Birdham. It is of note that this LCA covers land both within and outwith the AONB (to the south of Birdham). The character of the landscape surrounding Birdham being broadly identical whether designated for its beauty of indeed falling outside of this designation. This points to a conclusion that the boundary of the AONB has been drawn in a somewhat arbitrary fashion.

The site and its surrounds are characterised by small to medium sized, irregular arable fields abutting the edge of Birdham. Fields are defined by deciduous vegetation such as Oak, Goat willow, Hawthorn and Blackthorn with mature but fragmented hedgerows.

Visibility

Fragmented but mature hedges along site BI1403's southern boundary afford glimpsed views northwards from the B2179. Views take in glimpses of arable fields, copse and field boundary tree planting and Birdham's existing urban edge. Otherwise, the eastern edge of the two sites is screened from public view by housing along Chaffinch Close, Burlow Close and Florence Close. Views from the west are typically screened by mature hedge planting along the site's western boundary, coupled by the flat landform of the surrounding landscape. Long-distance views across the flat plain may be available from Shipton Green and to a lesser degree from West Itchenor by both residential and Public Right of Way (PRoW) users. However, as these are between 750m and 1.6km distant from the two sites, the visual impact of development is likely to be mitigated by intervening vegetation and other intervening development such as the Itchenor Caravan Park and Lippering Farm complex.

Built Environment

The site is characterised by a mixture of housing types along the sites' eastern boundary, with the most recent addition being Chaffinch Close, recently constructed with four new houses added since 2011. The southern boundary is defined by the B2179 and northern urban edge of Somerley village.

Existing housing presents a hard edge to the countryside with rear gardens backing onto fields with a mix of boundary styles.

The western arrival experience into Birdham along the B2179 is characterised by residential properties fronting onto the main road, with a mixture of mature hedging and timber lap fence panels defining their boundaries. Further residential development runs off the B2179 onto Pipers Mead.

One's sense of arrival into Birdham from the west lacks coherence or sense of place. Development to the north of the B219 could offer the opportunity to improve one's sense of arrival and soften the existing urban/rural interface with a more coherent, greener edge to the existing settlement boundary.

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Road Network

The southern site BI1403 is located adjacent to a three-way junction of the A286, B2179 and B2198 culminating at a roundabout. This creates a transport nexus through which local traffic is directed. This road comprises of a busy thoroughfare across the area and as such brings with it an urbanising influence on the landscape to the north and a reduced sense of tranquillity to this part of the AONB.

Path Networks

There are no PROWs either on or adjacent to the site. The nearest PROWs are 750m north of Site BI1404 and 500m south of site BI1403 off Bell Lane (B2198).

Hydrology & Flood Risk

Both and parcels BI403 and BI404 are in Flood Zone 1 and are therefore are not susceptible to flooding. The combined site (HB10024) has a number of drainage ditches traversing the site. These could be integrated into a Green Infrastructure strategy which would serve to screen development when travelling towards Birdham from the west and when looking north from the B2179.

3. Preliminary Desk-Based Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Sightliness in from public roads and pathways

In general, the two sites identified in the 2014 SHLAA will be seen predominantly by (i) vehicular receptors considered of low to medium sensitivity¹ (due to the transient nature of their journey), viewing the development from the B2179. Views will be glimpsed through gaps in hedging and partial or heavily filtered in nature by existing vegetation and housing. Open or expansive views north are not possible from the minor roads due to intervening housing and vegetation.

Views southwards, from the public rights of way to the north of the two sites, are expansive and rural in character, with few urbanising characteristics in the field of view. Views into the site from the north may take in some development above existing treed boundaries. It will be important therefore to ensure that development within the site includes screen planting to the north to maximise screening and to ensure views from the north retain their rural outlook.

Views between Site and Landscape Designations

There are no long distance views north from B2179 to Chichester Channel and the wider AONB due to a mixture of field boundary hedging, hedgerow trees and housing.

There is a very distant view of the South Downs National Park from the north western corner of the site. This National Park lies 25km to the north east of both sites and, within the context of an otherwise predominantly flat plain, provides a useful reference point. This feature could be incorporated into a masterplan framework to frame any available views towards this landmark (albeit distant).

Footnote 1: Guidelines for Landscape Visual Impact Assessment *GLVIA3 - paragraphs 6.33 - 6.34
(Landscape Institute - 2013)

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Finally, there is a viewpoint to the north west of the site, where public footpaths converge on the Westlands Lane unclassified road. This viewpoint is 1km distant from site B1403 and 800m distant from site B1404. New housing might be partially visible through gaps in field boundary hedging and the mature tree canopies from this viewpoint. As above it will be important therefore to ensure that development within the site includes screen planting to the north to maximise screening and to ensure views from the north retain their rural outlook.

4. Landscape Opinion

The two sites appear to have potential for future development and we concur with the findings of the 2014 SHLAA assessment, where their suitability for development was considered favourably.

Effects on Setting of the AONB

The potential development sites are both located on the edge of the AONB boundary, with the B2179 appearing to form a fairly arbitrary edge to this designation.

The specific landscape features of the site, such as its hedged boundaries, flat landform and field ditches etc, can be readily retained. Indeed development offers the opportunity to enhance these features and to increase tree coverage across the area. Indeed paragraph 19.66 of the Adopted Chichester Local Plan 2014-29, states that “*Trees and woodland are essential to the value of Green Infrastructure; their appropriate management, retention and provision of new tree planting can help to combat climate change and flooding, alleviate pollution and modify microclimate.*”

The site's existing visual amenity, which is already well enclosed and characterised by linear hedgerows and hedgerow trees can also be retained. The site and its immediate environs is not characterised by broad open and expansive views. More open views are available as one moves north and west away from Birdham. In this context development and associated Green Infrastructure will reinforce the existing landscape pattern and maintain this sense of enclosure. Indeed new planting associated with high quality development could be considered to soften the existing hard edge of Birdham and to improve the rural / urban interface between the settlement and the AONB.

In terms of landscape effects, the 2009 Landscape Capacity Study suggested that the Zone 13 area has a high sensitivity to change. However, it is anticipated that there will be no diminution in quality of Birdham's western boundary, with significant physical separation between the village and neighbouring Shipton Green retained.

The design of new development, with appropriate massing, the use of local materials and built form, hard and soft landscape treatments, significant new green infrastructure and public open space across the two sites could be used to enhance the AONB boundary. The development site could be delivered in a manner which makes it an attractive place to live and work in accordance with the Chichester Harbour AONB's fifth planning principle to help support local social and economic development.

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Sustainable Location

The principle residential access would be formed directly off the B2179 and as such, the development could be readily accessed, moreover besides vegetation clearance to create the access and internal road network, existing boundary hedgerows are readily retained and enhanced with additional vegetation. The site also sits within close proximity to Birdham and its local facilities. Indeed additional planting and habitat creation accord with Chichester Harbour AONB's second planning principle o conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Any new development would follow existing urban densities and development patterns, with the BI1403 site following the predominantly ribbon development pattern along country lanes and transport corridors.

Development of the BI1403 site would also mirror the residential patterns and urban character of Somerley village on the southern side of the B2179. There is an opportunity to improve the sense of arrival into Birdham from the west which would serve to improve the urban/rural interface and help enhance the underlying landscape character of the AONB.



+44 (0)113 472 0030



7 Saw Mill Yard, Water Lane, Holbeck, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS11 5WH



www.urbanwilderness.co.uk



@urban_wild