

# **LAND AT SODBURY ROAD, WICKWAR, SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

## **SUMMARY LANDSCAPE PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

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**APPEAL BY BLOOR HOMES SOUTH WEST**

**Status: Exchange**

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**Planning Inspectorate Reference:  
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P22/01300/O**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I am Jane Jarvis, a Senior Landscape Planning Officer at South Gloucestershire Council, and I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.
- 1.2 My evidence sets out the key landscape and visual issues relating to the Appeal Site and putative Reason for Refusal 1, including the effect on the character and appearance of the local area.

## 2.0 SITE CONTEXT

- 2.1 No landscape related planning designations cover the site.
- 2.2 Group TPO 1113 covers the Willows within the north east frontage of the site, adjacent to the Grade II listed South Farm.
- 2.3 The southern edge of the Wickwar Conservation Area lies further north along B4060, with the Grade II\* listed Church of Holy Trinity in its northern part. The B4060 Sodbury Road provides a rural, southern approach into Wickwar, with a notable transition in character along its western edge comprising open agricultural landscape, intermittent development, to a denser historic village core.
- 2.4 The site lies within South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Area (LCA) 5: Wickwar Ridge and Vale. The broad Wickwar Ridge, on which Wickwar and the site are located, is noted as accommodating expansive westward views across the landscape. The site's open character helps facilitates these views from Sodbury Road, as well as views towards the listed church from Frith Lane. The site also forms an integral part of the green, agricultural midground in views from the footpath network lying to the west of the B4060. Therefore, the intrinsic function and value of the site is the physical, visual, and perceptual connectivity it provides between the village and its landscape surroundings, which allows the observer an appreciation of the wider landscape setting of Wickwar.
- 2.5 Wickwar has an essentially linear settlement form, which has noticeably expanded since the late C.20 along the eastern side of the B4060 High Street/Sodbury Road, to include the two recent residential schemes opposite the site. Although, this development has had an impact on both Wickwar and the surrounding landscape, its restriction to the eastern side of the B4060 has respected the established development pattern of the western side of Sodbury Road and preserved the long-distance views westwards. Also, the recent housing has incorporated extensive landscape mitigation to help integrate it into the surrounding area. Importantly, the 'built' enclosure of the eastern side of Sodbury Road is currently 'balanced' by the open character of the site.

### 3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT & LANDSCAPE ISSUES

- 3.1 I consider that the proposed approach for the site's development does not overcome the fundamental landscape and visual issues arising from the location, scale, and prominence of the Appeal proposals.
- 3.2 The Appeal scheme will form a large, dominant, and awkward projection out into open countryside, to the west of Sodbury Road, which is at odds with the prevailing settlement pattern. Its built footprint will extend significantly further west than the existing settlement edge formed by the of South Farm complex and development lying further north, and the shallow plot depth of development that characterises the western side of Sodbury Road further south, with the northern housing parcel representing an 'outlier' offset from the existing housing.
- 3.3 I do not consider that the loss of openness and rural character of the site, with the development in place, can be mitigated. Even if I considered that the principle of the Site's development, as proposed, was acceptable, which I do not, the proposed level of mitigation will not adequately integrate the new housing into its surroundings or soften its suburban appearance in views across the landscape. In addition, the central and southern parts of the western open space corridor will be physically dominated by the size of the proposed attenuation basins, which will restrict the space available for both recreation usage and a strong landscape infrastructure. The outward facing development edges of the perimeter blocks themselves have a 'hard and uniform' treatment, which incorporate sparse mitigation planting.
- 3.4 The proposed scheme will significantly impact on the observer's appreciation of the wider landscape setting of Wickwar and its character, as it will:
- obstruct the westerly, panoramic views from the Sodbury Road, and those of the Church of the Holy Trinity from the eastern end of Frith Lane;
  - transform the rural southern approach route into Wickwar enclosing the western edge of the B4060 to suburbanise its character; and
  - be visually prominent in views back to the village from the surrounding footpath network.
- 3.5 The development of the Appeal site will set a precedent for further, future housing to the west of the B4060.
- 3.6 The Landscape and Visual Baseline Assessment (CD1.11) acknowledged that there would be a fundamental change to the character of the site. I agree that there will be a

significant transformation of the site's character from open, greenfield land to largely built development, which will also impact on its immediate surroundings.

## 4.0 PUTATIVE REASONS FOR REFUSAL

- 4.1 The landscape and visual issues of the Appeal proposals are considered below with reference to national and Local Plan policy.

### National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) 5 September 2023 (CD4.7)

- 4.2 With reference to NPPF para. 174 (b), I consider that the site has an intrinsic function and value in terms of providing physical, visual, and perceptual connectivity between the Wickwar and its rural landscape setting. Its undeveloped, open character also positively contributes to the retention of an attractive rural approach into the village along the Sodbury Road, at the same time 'balancing' the built enclosure of the eastern side of this road.

### SG Core Strategy (Adopted December 2013) (CD4.4)

#### Policy CS1: High Quality Design

- 4.5 Whilst detailed landscape design is one of the matters reserved for future consideration, I consider that the site is unsuitable for the proposed development. The Appeal proposals will not safeguard or enhance the character of the receiving landscape. Compared the two recent housing schemes on the opposite eastern side of Sodbury Road, the proposed development will deliver proportionally less open space and landscape mitigation to help assimilate it into the surrounding landscape.

#### Policy CS2: Green Infrastructure

- 4.6 Additionally, the proposals will not preserve the long-standing historic relationship of the village to its wider landscape setting, but instead will form a large, suburban and visually prominent projection out into the open countryside.
- 4.7 The large, proposed attenuation basins that will dominate the western public open space, to constrain the space available for both informal recreation and a strong landscape infrastructure. The outward western and southern facing development margins will present hard edge treatments, without any significant mitigation planting.

#### Policy CS9: Managing the Environment and Heritage & Policy CS34: Rural Areas

- 4.8 The Appeal proposals represent a significant loss of greenfield land and will not protect or respect the intrinsic character and function of the open agricultural landscape within which the site lies.

Policy PSP1: Local Distinctiveness & Policy PSP2: Landscape

- 4.9 The Appeal proposals will not conserve or positively contribute to the distinctiveness of the local landscape and locality, but instead, will significantly erode the rural setting of Wickwar. The proposed scheme will not deliver an acceptable transitional landscape edge treatment pursuant to integrating the new housing into its surroundings.

Policy PSP3: Trees and Woodland

- 4.10 Part of the TPO Willow group will be removed, which will significantly diminish its value as a local green landmark.

## 5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 I conclude that the proposed scale and nature of the Appeal proposals will:

- significantly and detrimentally encroach into the countryside west of Wickwar to completely transform the open agricultural character of the site;
- appreciably project beyond the established built western edge and footprint of the village and not respect the historic development morphology of Wickwar or be in keeping with its built linear form along the B4060;
- replicate the built enclosure of the eastern side of the Sodbury Road, which will result in a suburban southern approach into the village, as well as further eroding the relationship and connectivity of the village to its landscape surroundings,
- fail to conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the rural landscape lying to the west of Sodbury Road, and the contribution this area makes to the setting of the village;
- significantly impact upon existing views across the landscape, particularly the long-distance, and open westerly views from the Sodbury Road and those back towards the village from the surrounding footpath network; and
- not incorporate, or deliver, a well-designed green infrastructure including appropriate, transitional edge treatments and green landscape buffers, which will allow any new housing to be satisfactorily assimilated into the local landscape.

5.2 Therefore, as a matter of principle, I consider that the Appeal proposals will have a significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area and that this adverse impact should attract significant weight in the planning balance.