

MEMORANDUM

To : VICTORIA EATON, SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER
From : MANDY NEILL, SENIOR LANDSCAPE OFFICER
Tel : 01432 260150 My Ref : Hildersley SHLAA site
Date : 5TH October 2010 Your Ref :

LANDSCAPE CONSULTATION – INITIAL COMMENTS

SITE: HILDERSLEY, ROSS-ON-WYE

PROPOSAL: POSSIBLE HOUSING SITE

Landscape Description

The site lies adjacent to the Wye Valley AONB and to Penyard Park, an Unregistered Historic Park and Garden. The landscape character of the site is broadly Principal Settled Farmlands. At Hildersley itself the character is very mixed however, including small scale farms, a business park, modern housing estates and a small ambulance station. It is bounded by a dismantled railway to the north and a MOD rifle range to the south west.

The Urban Fringe Sensitivity Analysis (UFSA, 2010) identifies key viewpoints of Ross-on-Wye. One is at Hildersley Farm (no. 13) from an important main road into the town, looking south-west towards Merrivale, which shows flat agricultural land. Another key view is from Alton Court (no. 14), looking north-east over the rifle range. This view shows that the historic field pattern at Hildersley has been degraded by the loss of field boundary hedgerows and disrupted by the insertion of the rifle range. A line of conifers also weakens the rural character of the landscape. Hildersley does not act as a distinctive 'gateway' to Ross-on-Wye. The M50 provides distant views from the north across the Rudhall Brook valley (no. 7). These clearly include the land at Hildersley and are therefore important locations. The woodland on Penyard Park limits the views that can be obtained over the site from the south.

The UFSA (2010) also provides a sensitivity analysis for Hildersley as being Low-Medium. This is due to the visual incoherence from the disparate elements in the area and the partially degraded landscape by intensive agricultural use.

Landscape Comments on Possible Housing

A comment is provided on the RPS Urban Design Concept Masterplan, dated 4th October 2010) (in italics), followed by an explanation based on Herefordshire Council site meeting 5th October 2010.

1. *Very few internal hedgerows are retained. No connection is made to the surrounding areas.*

Given that many hedgerows have been lost in this area, any new development should seek to retain the remaining hedgerows as a basis for a green framework, both within the site and to the boundaries. These should also connect to an extended green infrastructure that links

to the surrounding area – particularly the mature vegetation along the Town and Country Trail, the young woodland that has recently been planted near to the Hildersley Farm buildings and to the woodland on the slopes of Penyard Park. Such green infrastructure can provide connection corridors for both humans (walking and cycling routes) and wildlife (particularly bats in this location).

- 2. A peripheral landscape buffer is proposed. The first view into Ross along the A40 will be of an anaerobic digestion plant. This will be separated from the farm buildings by new housing and no access proposals are shown at this time.*

The design of the edges of any new development will have a significant effect on the key views into Ross-On-Wye, as well as local views in the immediate area. The quality of the architecture should be of a high standard so that the design of the buildings ‘fit’ into the landscape without the need for dense screen planting. Planting on the boundaries should be used to compliment and filter views of new built development. Views along the eastern boundary will be important as this will provide a first view of Ross-On-Wye for visitors coming to the area on the A40. This development provides the opportunity to create an appropriate, distinctive ‘gateway’ representative of the character of the town.

- 3. A majority of the mature orchard is lost. The ‘avenue villas’ could put the existing trees at risk and detract from these as a feature.*

A triangle of land should be retained around the Hildersley Farm buildings, including the large trees along the driveway and the mature orchard. This established area fits well with the landscape character of the area and will filter views of the new development.

- 4. The feature tree is not identified.*

There is a feature tree that should be retained, located in one of the hedgerows along the southern boundary of the current recreation ground area.

- 5. None of the young woodland is retained on either side of the farm.*

The young woodland planting should be retained in-situ as much as possible. This will provide an instant maturity to any new housing development that can help to settle the scheme into the landscape. It also contributes considerable biodiversity to the immediate area and could be linked to the provision of public open space associated with the new housing.

- 6. A vista to Ross on Wye is proposed, however random tree planting is currently shown in this area which would disrupt the views.*

The spire of St Mary’s Church is a predominant view of Ross from much of the surrounding landscape –a vista that maintains this view should be provided through the new development.

- 7. The development does seem to be retained on the lower slopes, however it does cross (and remove) an existing hedge boundary.*

It would be preferable to keep the extent of housing development on the lower slopes, away from the woods at Penyard Park. Development that follows the contours, rather than crossing them uphill, usually has a better fit into the natural landform. The MOD land at the rifle range would be more suitable for development, than extending built form of the town further east along the A40 past the Hildersley Farm buildings.

Other Comments

- Development proposals will need to include ecological assessments and should take into consideration the necessary mitigation measures from an early stage in design. The design should also be informed by a detailed Landscape Character and Visual Assessment.
- Consideration should be given to including a cycleway / footway connection from the north west corner of the site, along the boundary of the existing residential development towards the Fire Station. This will provide a good, direct link to the facilities of the town centre.
- If there is not a need for a large, formal recreational area with pitches at this location, then the area of housing currently proposed on the mature triangle of orchard could be relocated here.
- The concept of a recreational route / trim trail around the edge of the development needs further evidence to show how this would work and that there would be a user demand for this.
- Consideration could be given to using the existing barn complex as a much stronger 'heart' to the centre of the development.

Please accept that these comments are given at an Officer level without prejudice to any future decisions that the Council may make.

AMANDA NEILL, CHARTERED MEMBER OF THE LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE