



## **Landscape Proof of Evidence**

Christopher McDermott BSc, BLD  
on behalf of the appellant

**Pins ref:** APP/R3650/W/23/3327643

**LPA ref:** WA/2022/01887

**Client:**

For the appellant Redwood Southwest Ltd

**Date:**

December 2023

**LAND ADJACENT TO THE MIDHURST ROAD, HASLEMERE**

## **1 WITNESS PARTICULARS AND BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. I am Christopher Nigel McDermott, a director of my own consultancy, Sightline Landscape Ltd, based in Bath, Somerset. I have a Bachelor of Science in Botany and a Bachelor of Landscape Design. I qualified as a Chartered Landscape Architect in 1989 and have been a member of the Landscape Institute until 2020. I have practiced continually throughout, previously working for a mix of large multi-disciplinary consultancies and smaller practices. I set up my own consultancy in 2013.
- 1.2. I was the landscape consultant for Scotland Park Phase 1 and gave evidence on behalf of the appellant at the inquiry. I produced the Landscape and Visual chapter of the Environmental Statement for the Appeal Proposal and undertook the landscape design, including for the detailed part of the application.
- 1.3. I am instructed on behalf of Redwood Southwest Ltd, the Appellant, to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of the Inquiry.

## **2 THE QUANTUM OF DEVELOPMENT**

- 2.1. The site can be described as forming two parts, a 'Development Area' accommodating the proposed housing and a 'Wider Land holding' which forms the balance of the site and will provide an extensive area of accessible greenspace. A landscape and visual analysis informed the choice of areas within which to locate the proposed dwellings. The Development Area will lie immediately adjacent to the southern urban edge of Haslemere. If development is to proceed within land designated as AONB, then it is important that the land is used most efficiently in terms of the housing numbers provided while minimising adverse effects on the AONB. In my opinion, the correct balance has been struck in terms of the quantum of development, as defined by the areas chosen for development and the proposed density and height parameters, while minimising adverse landscape and visual effects on the wider AONB, particularly now that design changes suggested by Waverley Borough Council have been incorporated into the scheme.

## **3 HARMS TO THE AONB AND COUNTRYSIDE**

- 3.1. In my opinion there are two main areas of significant adverse landscape and visual effects prior to mitigation, that will arise as a result of the Appeal Proposal they are:
  1. A change in the character of three grass fields in the north to a residential area, perceived by some as contrary to the character of the AONB.
  2. A change in character and visual effects associated with the proposed Midhurst Road access.
- 3.2. The proposal would result in some physical loss of grassland, but the proposals would result in a change to the landscape at a very localised level, would have a limited effect on landscape character of the Wooded Greensand Hills character area and would not cause material harm in respect of the quality and scenic beauty of the wider AONB. It is also the case that settlements are a feature of AONB and well-designed buildings can contribute to the character and quality of an AONB.

- 3.3. The second significant landscape and visual harm, prior to mitigation, will arise from the construction of the road access junction with the Midhurst Road. It will result in the loss of some trees on the east side of the Midhurst Road due to the need to create a right hand turn lane and a junction bell mouth. This will weaken the enclosed green character of the road, however, road users will perceive this in context with the character of nearby stretches of the A286, for example, the road is frequently wider and central white lining are commonplace along the route to Kingsley Green to the south.
- 3.4. While the tree loss will open attractive views of Red Court Woods and the SDNP to road users, it is proposed to re-establish the enclosed green character of the road through extensive tree planting, including use of advanced stock, and in some areas planting in advance of the engineering works taking place.
- 3.5. In my opinion the harms will be effectively mitigated within an appropriate timescale by establishing a high-quality landscape appropriate for this location within an AONB.

## **4 COMPENSATION**

- 4.1. The Development Area will comprise 4.69 hectares of housing, with the Wider Landholding comprising 18.53 hectares. This equates to 78% of the Appeal Proposal comprising greenspace, accessible by the community. The Wider Land Holding will include:
1. A bespoke facility, in perpetuity, for the 1st Haslemere Scout Group, within its own woodland setting.
  2. A facility for Grayswood Nursery and Forest School, within its own woodland setting, in perpetuity.
  3. A Nature Reserve.
  4. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, allowing other sites within the borough to be released.
  5. Restoration of Red Court Woods.
  6. Preservation of a WWII Spigot Gun Emplacement.
  7. A Walker's Car Park
  8. Community Orchards
  9. Allotments
- 4.2. AONB were established to benefit the population and the landscapes and ecosystems within them. If the proposed development proceeds the majority of the Site will be allocated for recreation, learning and habitat enhancement. It should be regarded as an exemplar of how the landscape can be managed and enhanced for the benefit of the population and wildlife. This contrasts with the current use of the land which is largely private with limited active value to the local community.
- 4.3. In my opinion the Appeal Proposal is largely compliant with the aspirations of the Surrey Hills AONB Management Plan. Landscape harms are outweighed by the benefits of positive management of a large area of the AONB, improved public access for its enjoyment combined with educational and recreational opportunities for a wide cross section of the community.

## **Trees, Woodland, Hedgerows and Landscaping**

- 4.4. Care has been taken to minimise tree loss throughout the Appeal Proposal, respect root protection areas and avoid future conflict with dwellings. The only exception being unavoidable tree loss along the Midhurst Road. I have quantified tree loss and gain in my main proof and conclude that there will be a substantial benefit to trees and woodland ecology due to the proposed planting and restoration of Red Court Woods.
- 4.5. The Council's reasons for refusal references Policy H9 in the Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan. Overall, the scheme does comply with H9, particularly in bringing Red Court Woods into positive management and the retention of the majority of trees and hedges within the site. The exception is the tree loss arising due to the proposed Midhurst Road access, but adequate compensation is provided in the form of new tree planting. In my opinion the Appeal Proposal will, in time, have an overall benefit in terms of trees, woodland and hedgerows.

## **5 COMPARISON OF THE APPEAL PROPOSAL WITH ALTERNATIVE SITES WHICH COULD ALSO, POTENTIALLY, CONTRIBUTE TO HOUSING NEED**

- 5.1. Green Belt and protective landscape designations significantly limit the availability of development sites that can deliver meaningful housing provision within Waverley Borough, if they are to be unconstrained by designation. If the proposed extensions to the Surrey Hills AONB become formalised the area of unconstrained land will reduce. The NPPF makes provision for developing sites within the AONB that have acceptable landscape and visual effects. To contribute to satisfying section b) of para 177 which requires the scope for, "*developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way*" to be considered, all the potential sites within the Borough (whether in the AONB, Green Belt or not), which are capable of delivering a quantum of around fifty or more units (and not already consented or allocated) has been undertaken.
- 5.2. It is evident that there are few sites preferable to the Appeal Proposal in terms of landscape and visual considerations, within the borough and I believe that the Appeal Proposal is the only site remaining that can provide meaningful housing numbers immediately adjacent to the urban edge of Haslemere. While the Appeal Proposal will result in some detrimental landscape and visual effects, they will be largely confined to the Development Area, with limited effects on the wider AONB. The proposed access from the Midhurst Road will initially have a detrimental effect on landscape character and visual amenity, but in my opinion, these can be sufficiently mitigated within an appropriate timescale. The minimal residual effects following mitigation should be balanced against the substantial landscape, biodiversity and recreational benefits afforded by the remainder of the site. In accordance with paragraph 177 of the NPPF, this scheme offers real and tangible public benefits in the public interest.
- 5.3. It is my view that the Appeal Proposal will result in an overall benefit in terms of landscape and visual issues for the reasons stated above and so is largely compliant with national and local policies. I, therefore, respectfully request that the Inspector upholds the scheme and allows the grant of planning permission so far as landscape and visual issues are concerned.