The Planning Inspectorate

EST 1909

- 3 MAR 2011

3/20 Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol, BS1 6PN

Direct Line: 0117 372 8607
Customer Services: 0117 372 6372
Fax No: 0117 372 6241
e-mail: debbie.smith@pins.gsi.gov.uk

Mr Simon Wood, Planning Officer
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Council Offices, Argents Mead
Hinckley
Leicestershire
LE10 1BZ

Your Ref: 2010/00408/OUT

Our Ref: APP/K2420/A/10/2138596/NWF

Date: 2 March 2011

Dear Mr Wood

Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Appeal by Mr Iain Maclean Morris Homes (east) Limited
Site at Land At Hinckley Road, Stoke Golding

I enclose a copy of the appellant's proof of evidence.

The Council's documents have been sent to the appellant today.

Yours sincerely

Deb Smith, Case Officer
Planning

325(BPR)

You can use the Internet to submit documents, to see information and to check the progress of this case through the Planning Portal. The address of our search page is -
http://www.pcs.planningportal.gov.uk/pcsportal/casesearch.asp
You can access this case by putting the above reference number into the 'Case Ref' field of the 'Search' page and clicking on the search button

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE

Land at Hinckley Road,

Stoke Golding, Leicestershire

Appeal by Morris Homes (East) Ltd

Proof of Evidence of Iain M. Reid

LPA Ref: 10/00408/OUT
PINS Ref: APP/K2420/A/10/2138596

Iain Reid Landscape Planning Ltd
www.iainreidplanning.co.uk
Tel: +44(0)7711 775 933
February 2011

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 I am Iain McDonald Reid. I hold a Diploma in Town and Regional Planning and a Diploma in Landscape Design. I am a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and a Member of the Landscape Institute. I am a Director of Iain Reid Landscape Planning Ltd, based in Leicester. I have over 35 years experience in planning and landscape work in the United Kingdom, in both private and public sectors. Prior to becoming a consultant in the private sector, I was employed in local government in Leicestershire for some 10 years, latterly in charge of forward planning for one of the District Councils. From 1985 to 2008 I was successively a partner and director of Lovejoy (originally Derek Lovejoy Partnership), and latterly Managing Director, based in the Leicester and Birmingham offices, until Lovejoy was sold to the Capita group in early 2008; thereafter I was a director with the new entity Capita Lovejoy until late 2009.

1.2 Much of my work in the private sector has involved the planning, environmental assessment and landscape design of a wide range of development proposals, including freight termini, motorway service areas, waste disposal and management facilities, mineral extraction, and large scale employment, residential and mixed use development proposals. I have given evidence relating both to planning matters and to landscape and visual matters at some 200 public inquiries - both Development Plan Inquiries/Examinations and at Planning Appeals – throughout England, Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland. In the course of my experience I have acted on behalf of clients in respect of planning applications, planning appeals, and at development plan inquiries on a number of sites in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough.

1.3 I was approached by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners on behalf of Morris Homes East Ltd, in November 2010 and asked whether I considered that there was any sustainable objection to the appeal proposal in landscape or design terms. In advance of concluding that there was no basis for such an objection, I familiarised myself with the detail of the proposed development and its background, including a review of the relevant parts of development plan policy,

the consideration and determination of the appeal application by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) and I visited the appeal site and the surrounding area. I was instructed by Morris Homes East Ltd in this matter in January 2011. I confirm that this proof of evidence is true and has been prepared, and is given in accordance with the guidance of the professional institutions of which I am a member. I further confirm that the opinions expressed in my evidence are my true and professional views.

1.4 In the preparation of my evidence, I have familiarised myself with the appeal site and the surrounding area and with the relevant parts of the Development Plan and associated documents relevant to the appeal proposal.

1.5 My evidence is structured in the following way:

a) In section 2 I deal with matters relating to landscape planning policy and to landscape character assessment.

b) In section 3 I consider the appeal site and the development proposal.

c) In Section 4 I identify key issues relevant to my area of evidence; these issues have been drawn from the representations made by third parties to this appeal as the Borough Council advances no reason for refusal based on adverse effect on landscape or any other design aspects of the proposed development.

d) In section 5 I consider each of the key issues.

e) In section 6 I set out an overall summary of my evidence and my conclusions.

2.0 LANDSCAPE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Matters relating to planning policy generally are dealt with by Michael Watts of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners Ltd. I deal here solely with landscape planning policies and related guidance/ advice on landscape and design matters.

Development Plan

Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy

2.2 The Development Plan comprises East Midlands Regional Plan 2009 (RS); (Core Document (CD) 1) HBBC Core Strategy 2009 (CS) (CD 2); and the saved policies of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Local Plan 2001 (HBLP) (CD 3). There is nothing in either the RS or CS that directly affects either Stoke Golding or the appeal site in terms of landscape or design matters, although both contain general policies relating to design and landscape considerations (RS Policies 26 and 27; CS Policies 16, 19 and 24 - as noted in the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG)), and in the case of the CS, policies that relate, in overall terms to development in Stoke Golding (Policies 7 and 11). CS Policy 7 requires (inter alia): '

'...development to be of the highest environmental standards in line with Policy 24'

and CS Policy 11, in considering development in Stoke Golding seeks (inter alia) to

'Implement the strategic green infrastructure network detailed in Policy 20 (Green Infrastructure)....(namely)... *the strategic intervention relating to the Disused Railway Line (Nuneaton – Shenton Station'.* and to:

'Require new development to respect the character and appearance of the Stoke Golding Conservation Area by incorporating locally distinctive features of the conservation area into the development". (but see ¶2.7 below)

CS Policies 19 and 24 are borough-wide policies that deal, respectively, with Green Space and Play Provision and Sustainable Development and Technology.

Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan

2.3 In the HBLP, the appeal site lies immediately adjacent to, but outwith the

settlement boundary (as defined on the HBLP Proposals Map) at the eastern end of the village. As indicated in the SoCG at 4.4, the appeal site is subject to Policy NE5 – Development in the Countryside, and to Policy RES 5 – Residential Proposals on Unallocated Sites (and also to other generic policies). The former policy applies to all land outside the settlement boundary. The HBLP contains a number of landscape and landscape-related policies, all of which remain 'saved'. The appeal site is not subject to any of these policies:

- Green Wedges (NE3)
- Areas of Separation (NE4)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (NE6)
- Sites of County and Local Nature Conservation Significance (NE7)
- Local Landscape Improvement Areas (NE 10).

Additionally, although not a 'saved policy' the appeal site was not subject to:

- Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside (NE9).

Saved Policy NE 12 – Landscaping Schemes – sets out general requirements for the retention of existing landscaping features (sic), and for the provision of further landscaping as part of development proposals.

Emerging LDF Policy

2.4 The Borough Council published the Site Allocations and Generic Development Control Policies DPD Consultation Draft (Alloc and DC) in February 2009 (CD 4). The appeal site was identified as a preferred option (reference STG01, described as *'Land adjacent to 45 and 46 Sherwood Road'*) for development (of 59 dwgs) at Stoke Golding. The supporting text (on page 99) notes that:

'*The preferred options for housing allocation were based firstly on identifying land within the existing settlement boundary, followed by those adjacent to the current settlement.'*

Appendix 2 'Site Selection and Justification' to the Alloc and DC sets out justification for the selection of the site. The appeal site (reference STG01) is described as:

'Located on the eastern edge of the settlement off Hinckley Road, this site is currently identified as agricultural land.'

and it is noted that (inter alia):

Access could be achieved directly from Stoke Road/Hinckley Road.

All development would be required to provide a mix of housing types and tenures in line with Policy 16 of the core strategy and/or DSC1 of the Generic Development Control Policies, as well as taking into account the most up to date Housing Market Assessment.

This site also lends itself well to the natural expansion of the settlement boundary.'

These conclusions are clear and unambiguous in respect of the development suitability of the appeal site. It is relevant to note that when the site was assessed through the 2009 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) it was considered as part of a larger parcel of land, including land to the north (SHLAA Site Reference No AS 603) noted as being located '*Adjacent to settlement boundary'* and attracted the following comment:

'Local Plan Policy NE5 may apply.' and concluded that

'Site excluded from consideration because grade 2 agricultural land covers the entire site.'

There were no references to unacceptable landscape/ visual reasons for rejection, nor any consideration as to whether the cited concerns applied to the appeal site if considered alone.

Conservation Areas

2.5 There are two Conservation Areas within or adjacent to Stoke Golding village. The Stoke Golding Conservation Area (designated in 2004) covers the village centre and western part of village. It is located ca 500 metres to the west of appeal site beyond existing residential development on, and accessed via Sherwood Road/ Greenwood Road. The Ashby Canal Conservation Area (designated in 1990) extends along the whole length of the canal through the Borough and adjoins the Stoke Golding Conservation Area where the canal passes to the west of the village. The canal is located some 500 metres north west of appeal site at its closest point; the intervening land is used for agriculture (see also ¶5.3.2 below).

Landscape Character

2.6 Local landscape character has been assessed through a number of separate studies at national, regional, county and borough levels over the past 10-15 years. The published assessments provide character descriptions of specific areas and consider factors likely to influence future character and/ or set out prescriptions for change. Each is considered below.

2.6.1 The major part of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough (including the area surrounding Stoke Golding) lies within National Character Area 94 - Leicestershire Vales – as defined in the national assessment carried out in the late 1990's by the (then) Countryside Agency (now Natural England). Amongst the characteristic features of the area are the following:

- Gentle clay ridges and valleys; little woodland; strong patterns of Tudor and parliamentary enclosure.
- Frequent small towns and large villages; red brick buildings.
- Frequent imposing, spired churches.
- Great diversity of landscape and settlement pattern with many sub units

Factors influencing change to character include:

- Tree cover affected by Dutch Elm disease and ash die back.
- Substantial development of large edge-of town buildings and new roads which can be intrusive in what is often a very open landscape.
- High density residential development at the edges of villages and towns is often very intrusive with a lack of vegetation to absorb new development.
- Continued conversion to arable increasing the openness of the landscape and endangering the remaining areas of ridge and furrow.
- Neglect of hedgerow management.

Factors considered important in shaping the future character of the area include:

- The large-scale nature of recent developments should be addressed through equally large-scale landscaping measures.
- Many villages would benefit from local design initiatives to ensure that future change is appropriate to local character.

- The loss of hedgerow trees and the ageing present stock indicate the need for substantial new planting.

2.6.2 In the East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment (2010) the area surrounding Stoke Golding (and much of the western part of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough) lies within Regional Landscape Character Type 5A – Village Farmlands. This Character Type forms part of a group also described as Village Farmlands, and in geographic terms, covers the south western, western and north western parts of Leicestershire, (west of the former Leicestershire coalfield) from south of Hinckley northwards along the regional boundary to the West Midlands. The Regional Assessment identifies a number of key characteristics relevant to the subject site, including:

- Gently undulating lowlands, dissected by stream valleys with localised steep slopes and alluvial floodplains.
- Mixed agricultural regime, with localised variations but with a predominance of either dairy farming on permanent pastures, or arable cropping.
- Hedgerows and frequent oak and ash trees along hedgelines and streams contribute to well treed character of landscape.
- Moderately sized well maintained hedged fields across rolling landform create patchwork landscape of contrasting colours and textures.

2.6.3 The area is part of a larger tract of land that extends beyond the region into the West Midlands, where agriculture, particularly arable cropping, determines the character and appearance of the landscape, and the (relatively) limited resource of semi natural vegetation woodland and grassland, which, with hedgerows and river corridors, provides a network of habitats. The significance of the National Forest as a factor in changing landscape character is noted. The cohesion of the landscape type derives primarily from the mixed agricultural regime, with small copses, woodland and hedgerows, which displays a strong and identifiable character. Also recorded as a notable facet is the scale and extent of modern development on the fringes of villages, and the expansion and infilling of former rural settlements in the, leading to their development during the 19th and 20th centuries into small towns. The Assessment acknowledges the continuing

pressure for future development in villages and rural; settlements, and notes the dangers of such expansion in creating visual intrusion through the extension of the urban fringe into the countryside, although it acknowledges that the careful use of tree planting around settlement fringes can help to integrate new development into the landscape. The prevention of coalescence, through the maintenance of separation beyond the urban fringe and surrounding settlements is also noted. On a more general level, the importance of the protection and management of existing features such as hedgerows and the restoration of meadows and grassland, in addition to new woodland planting – particularly small scale planting - is noted.

2.6.4 The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy 2001 (revised 2006) provides an assessment at the county level. Stoke Golding is located within the Mease/ Sence Lowlands Landscape Character Area, which comprises the westernmost part of Leicestershire. The area is described as:

'... a rural landscape with most land in agricultural use. Arable is predominant overall, but arable and pasture are frequently mixed and there are localised areas where each dominates. The small stream valleys are characterised by pastureland.'

The relative absence of woodland is noted along with, as a corollary, the significance of hedgerow trees, often mature oaks which, together with *'...the woodlands, streamside and canalside vegetation, and tree cover associated with the villages and disused railway lines, all serve to contribute to a generally well-treed effect.*

The settlement pattern, apart from the small town of Market Bosworth, is described as:

'one of small villages and individual farmhouses evenly scattered throughout the area and linked by a network of minor roads.'

Distinctive features of the area include:

- *'undulating landscape with frequent small valleys*
- *mixed arable and pasture*
- *frequent hedgerow trees, mainly mature oaks generally well-treed appearance although little woodland.'*

2.6.5 A number of 'Issues' for the future management of change are identified, including:

- *'loss of hedges and hedge trees*
- *mature hedgerow oak and ash ageing*
- *planting of inappropriate species in rural hedges and verges'.*

The overall objective of the Strategy for the Character Area is summarised as:

'To conserve and enhance the rural character of the lowland agricultural landscape.'

A number of specific guidelines are set out, including:

- *Increase woodland cover in small to medium sized blocks*
- *Increase tree cover through the regeneration and replanting of hedgerow trees and scrub and willow fringe to streams*
- *Conserve and enhance hedges and hedgerow trees through improved management and appropriate new planting.'*

2.6.6. As part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework, HBBC commissioned, from consultants, the Hinckley and Bosworth Landscape Character Assessment in 2006 (CD 7) (HBLCA). Stoke Golding village, and the surrounding area (including the appeal site and the Ashby canal) lie within the Stoke Golding Vales Character Area, which flanks the urban areas of Hinckley and Barwell and extends across to the west to the borough boundary on the A5. Key characteristics are described as:

- '*Predominately flat with only gentle undulations.*
- *Medium scale rectilinear field pattern bounded by mixed hedgerows with scattered hedgerow trees and small copses.*
- *Settlement usually associated with local high points.*
- *Area criss-crossed by network of small lanes and public footpaths. The Ashby Canal features numerous attractive canal bridges.*
- *Mix of arable and pasture with frequent individual trees.*
- *Stoke Golding is an attractive settlement clustered around its prominent church, close to The Ashby Canal.*
- *Area is open and expansive with views occasionally limited by vegetation.*

- *This is generally a tranquil, rural character area despite the proximity of Hinckley and the A5.'*

2.6.7 The description of the character area observes that whilst it is in close proximity to the main urban centres of the Borough, there is little urban influence, with the consequence that the area is considered to be of medium to high sensitivity, with limited capacity to accept significant change. It is further noted that '

'There are few settlements, and Stoke Golding is the largest village, supported by other smaller scattered villages and farm buildings. Settlements are generally associated with high points.'

The Landscape Strategies for the character area are:

- *'Conserve and enhance the rural setting of existing villages.*
- *Increase woodland, tree and hedgerow planting in order to enhance urban fringe transition.*
- *Promote potential amenity facilities and historic links to the Battle of Bosworth.*
- *Seek to increase the overall proportion of woodland planting.*
- *Avoid creeping urbanisation arising from aspects such as highway improvements which do not reflect local character'.*

2.6.8 A local site appraisal confirms a number of the general descriptions provided in the HBLCA are applicable to the area around the appeal site:

- A ridge of higher ground ca 100m AOD+ runs south to north/ west to east through Stoke Golding, the appeal site and Dadlington village.
- The appeal site lies on the south side of this ridge falling gently from its northern boundary to the south,
- Further north the land drops relatively sharply from this ridge to the west/ north west towards Ashby Canal/ valleys of Rivers Tweed/ Sence at ca 90m AOD.
- Stoke Golding village is located west-east along the ridgeline, although relatively recent development has spread down the ridge (particularly on its north side) in places with a somewhat abrupt and raw edge to the north.
- The historic core of village lies to the west, with more recent development

(almost all post 1945) along Hinckley Road and to the north extending to the east up to the appeal site.

- There is a loose-knit area of existing built development west of Hinckley Road including St Martin's School/ Convent Lodge/ Lodge Farm/ Stoke Lodge/ Goosegrange (running from south to north).
- The redevelopment of the St Martin's Convent site (see also 3.7 below) will extend the development limits of the village further to the east, beyond the area described above.
- The appeal site and the surrounding area are typified by agricultural hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees, although in contrast to the appeal site and adjacent fields, land to the north west (extending to Stoke Lane/ Ashby Canal) has been subject to hedgerow removal, creating a significantly larger field between Stoke Lane and the northern developed edge of Stoke Golding.

Green Infrastructure

2.7 Also as part of the evidence base for the LDF, in 2008 HBBC commissioned from consultants the Green Infrastructure Strategy for Hinckley and Bosworth (GIHB). The provisions of the GIHB are reiterated through CS Policy 20. The strategy identifies a series of *'strategic interventions'*; none of those in the Southern sector (where Stoke Golding is located) are relevant to the appeal site. The only intervention relevant in any respect to Stoke Golding village is the upgrading of access along the former (now disused) railway line west of Stoke Golding between Stoke Golding marina and Shenton Station, and which could form, with the Ashby Canal towpath, a circular route.

3.0 APPEAL SITE AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

3.1 A description of the appeal site and its surroundings is set out in the SoCG. My comments here seek to expand upon that agreed description, and to highlight certain specific features. As noted above, the appeal site slopes gently from north to south, and lies on the south side of the local ridge that runs west to east through Stoke Golding village before turning towards the north towards the village of Dadlington.

Site Photographs

3.2 As noted in the SoCG, the site is bounded either by existing development (to the west and to the south), by Hinckley Road (to the south east and east) or a field boundary hedgerow (to the north). The frontage to Hinckley Road is defined by a mature agricultural hedgerow (primarily hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose and holly) up to ca 2m high. There is a footway along Hinckley Road on the south east and east site frontages, but no footways or public rights of way that cross the appeal site or adjoin it. The existing boundary conditions/ features, allied to local topography noted above, mean that views to the appeal site are limited, primarily to views that are available from public highways. **Figure 1** shows the appeal site and identifies a number of photograph viewpoints; the photographs are at **Figures 2 - 5** inclusive. The Photographs were all taken in early February 2011 and are thus winter views; in summer views there will be greater foliage on the hedgerows and trees and thus the screening effects of existing vegetation will be greater. The following sections describe what can be seen from the selected viewpoints, which are representative of the range of locations form where views to the appeal site, or part of it, can be obtained.

3.2.1 **View A** is a panoramic view from Stoke Lane (adjacent to the Ashby Canal) looking south east towards the appeal site ca 550 metres from the north east edge of the appeal site. Stoke Lane runs from the north side of Stoke Golding to Dadlington, passing close to the Ashby Canal, from where this photograph is taken. Ground level is ca 93m AOD. From the canal, land rises towards the

ridgeline that runs to the north of the appeal site; parts of both Dadlington village and Stoke Golding villages are visible (to the left and right hand sides of the view respectively) on the skyline. The sweep of the falling land, from the crest of the ridge, towards the viewpoint is accentuated by the absence of any internal vegetation within the large field that lies south/ east of Stoke Lane (this appears to be as a result of comprehensive hedgerow removal). The roofs of single storey properties on the north side of Sherwood Road are (just) visible on the skyline in the centre right of the view immediately to the left of the prominent group of conifers (which are located to the rear of No 77 Roseway, Stoke Golding). The two individual trees on the skyline in the centre of the view are in the hedgerow on the northern boundary of the appeal site, although the hedgerow itself cannot be seen in full due to intervening landform.

3.2.2 **View B** is taken from Stoke Lane on the western edge of Dadlington looking south west towards the appeal site and Stoke Golding village ca 420 metres from the edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 110m AOD. The church spire of St Margaret of Antioch in Stoke Golding is clearly visible, as is existing development on Sherwood Road and Roseway. The prominent group of conifers noted above are visible in the centre of the view; existing development on the north and west sides of Stoke Golding village is visible on and below the skyline. The appeal site lies to the left hand side of the view, screened by two intervening hedgerows, and the northern site boundary hedgerow, and cannot be seen from this location. A similar, but slightly more distant view is available from Footpath T61 that runs from The Green, Dadlington south west to Stoke Lane.

3.2.3 **View C** is taken from Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south/ south west towards the appeal site ca 260 metres from the edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 108m AOD. The view is taken from a field entrance off the footway. The church spire of St Margaret of Antioch in Stoke Golding is seen on the right hand side of the view, with existing development adjacent. The appeal site lies to the left hand side of the view, screened by an intervening field hedgerow, and the northern site boundary hedgerow. This view can be compared and contrasted with View D.

3.2.4 **View D** is taken from Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south along Hinckley Road ca 260 metres from the edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 108m AOD. In this view the existing roadside verges and field hedgerows provide screening to views towards Stoke Golding village to the west. The appeal site itself cannot be seen from this location.

3.2.5. **View E** is also taken from Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south along Hinckley Road ca 20 metres from the northern edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 110m AOD. The field hedgerow at the back of the footway provides a substantive screen to views to the west (although a views is available through the adjacent field entrance) into the appeal site. The Stoke Golding village sign is located at the north east corner of the appeal site; on the opposite side of the road, defined by a substantial tree belt that runs at right angles to the east away from Hinckley Road, is 'Goosegrange' an existing substantial property, which forms the northern edge of a loose-knit group of existing development north of St Martin's School (see also below).

3.2.6 **View F** is taken from Footpath T58 off Stapleton Lane Dadlington ca 500 metres north east of the appeal site boundary at an elevation of ca 105m AOD. Hinckley Road between Stoke Golding and Dadlington runs along the local ridge; the appeal site cannot be seen, but the roofs of existing development at the western end of Stoke Golding can (just) be seen behind and through the intervening hedgerows.

3.2.7 **View G** is taken from Stoke Road south of the appeal site, opposite the playing fields for St Martin's School ca 240 metres from the edge of the appeal site where Footpath U2 joins Stoke Road, at an elevation of ca 105m AOD. Although the developed edge of Stoke Golding is visible, north of Hinckley Road, the appeal site itself is not, as it is screened by intervening vegetation on the highway boundary and (particularly) within the school site on the east side of the road.

3.2.8 **View H** is taken from Stoke Road, close to its junction with Hinckley Road, south of Stoke Golding looking north towards existing development fronting Hinckley Road ca 65 metres from the edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 105m AOD . The appeal site lies immediately to the right of the single conifer/ post box in the centre of the view. It is only at or about this point that the appeal site edge becomes visible in views from the south along Stoke Road.

3.2.9 Footpath U2 runs north west from Stoke Road towards Hinckley Road. **View I** is taken from the footpath on the western edge of the first field which it crosses, ca 250 metres from the edge of the appeal site at an elevation of ca 105m AOD. Beyond this first field views from the footpath are screened by existing hedgerows and by a small copse east of Stoke Fields Farm. The view is similar to that at View H, in that one can see the developed frontage of existing housing to Hinckley Road, and part of the appeal site frontage to the east (right) of the last house.

3.2.10 **View J** is taken from Sherwood Road looking east towards the appeal site, ca 40 metres from the edge of the appeal site, at an elevation of ca 110m AOD. The end of the cul de sac of Sherwood Road is marked by an existing stand of self-set vegetation on the appeal site boundary. This, and the planting in the adjacent properties, limits views into the appeal site, although it is possible to see, over the garden boundaries, parts of the appeal site, the stand of existing trees (including prominent conifers) north of St Martin's School, and the rear of properties fronting onto Hinckley Road to the south.

3.2.11 **View K** is taken from Byway T99 that runs north east away from Hinckley Road north of St Martin's School at an elevation of ca 107m AOD. To the east, beyond the modern house at Lodge Farm, views towards the appeal site are screened by the house and by adjacent farm buildings. The only view available is from the first section of the byway ca 50 metres from the appeal site edge, to the site hedgerow boundary on Hinckley Road, with existing development on Hinckley Road visible beyond.

3.2.12 These photographs demonstrate that the appeal site itself has a restricted visual

envelope – by which I mean the surrounding area (or areas) from where the site can be seen. As a consequence of the screening effects of local topography, existing vegetation on and off site, and existing built development to the east, west and south, the appeal site is not seen as part of any wider tract of land. Neither is it significant, in any respect, to the existing setting of the village, unlike, for example, Crown Hill to the north west of the village centre, or the open sweep of land rising from the Ashby Canal to both Stoke Golding and Dadlington (I return to this latter point below).

Development Proposals

3.3 The appeal application is described in the SoCG; it was submitted as an outline application, with all matters reserved for subsequent approval save access. A new vehicular and pedestrian site access is proposed off Hinckley Road on the east side of the site, with a separate pedestrian access formed to the cul de sac head of Sherwood Road. The total site area is 3.1 ha. When the appeal application was considered by the Planning Committee (see below) my clients had confirmed that the sought permission for a maximum number of 60 dwellings on the site. The site layout proposals provided for a variety of two storey dwellings accessed off a 'Country Lane' internal loop and a series of private drives taken off the main access road from Hinckley Road, with an area of open space of some 0.45ha (incorporating a LEAP Local Equipped Area for Play) in the NW site corner. The application was supported by (inter alia) ecology and arboriculture statements.

3.4 The submitted Design and Access Statement (DAS) sets out the design thinking behind the development proposals and explains the evolution of the design proposals through discussions held with officers of the Borough Council. Following a number of iterations – which included increasing the number of units on the site - the final illustrative proposals embody a number of principal aspects:

- The layout creates a 'sense of arrival' at the site entrance.
- Larger properties are located along the Hinckley Road frontage to reflect existing character and minimise number of access points from Hinckley Road.

- Once into the site and beyond an initial focal point, the site entrance access road changes, into a country lane loop road, which meanders through the site.
- Affordable housing units are spread through the development.
- The village green and LEAP are overlooked by house frontages to ensure natural surveillance.
- Housing groups are arranged to create interesting street scenes.

Planning Application Determination

3.5 The application was considered at the Planning Committee on 3 August 2010. In the Officers' Report to the Committee (at Mr Watts' Appendix 1) there are no issues raised – as matters of objection - concerning the suitability of the site for development in design/ landscape terms, although, as I note below, a number of third parties had expressed views that the appeal was not a suitable location for development on account of landscape and or design considerations (and which are reiterated in the section of the Committee Report setting out consultation responses). The issues relevant to my evidence that were raised include (I use here the referencing in the Committee Report):

(a) and (kk) : loss of village identity

(h) : greenfield site/ beyond settlement boundary

(k) : village should remain separate from Dadlington and Hinckley

(l) : countryside should be protected

(m) : medieval ridge and furrow should not be destroyed

(bb) : loss of privacy and view

(cc) : density out of character with village.

3.6 The Committee Report noted, in respect of the Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Countryside that: *'The proposed development would introduce built form within the countryside though its impact would be limited given the existing development on three sides. Development would be brought closer to the neighbouring village of Dadlington though a separation would still exist.'*

In relation to agricultural land it was noted: *'While the site is classified as grade II agricultural land, there is no policy basis to refuse the application on these grounds. Furthermore, the refusal of the application does not necessarily mean*

that the site would be used for agriculture.'

On Design and Layout the Report summarised the consultation comments of the Council's Urban Design Officer: '*It is considered that the layout shows a varied and interesting proposal with key focal points addressed. An evaluation of the existing character has informed the scheme and the evolution to the final layout is clear. The layout responds well to the site and the settlement however the open space could be integrated better to maximise use.*'

In respect of impact on trees the Report concluded: '*The application proposes the loss of two* (Ash) *trees to the northern boundary .... both are in poor health and while in the rural environment this is not a safety matter when in close proximity to housing it could be. If these trees cannot be accommodated within the proposed public open space at the reserved matters stage then it is considered that they should be removed and replacement trees planted elsewhere on the site.*

3.7 The overall Conclusion in the Report stated: '*Whilst it is accepted that there is still a shortfall in the five year housing supply within the Borough it is considered that the approval of both sites in Stoke Golding for residential development would be harmful to the character of the area and exceed the local demand for housing as set out in the Core Strategy. It is also considered that the development of a previously developed site is preferable to a more prominent green field site and that this harm is not outweighed by the lack of a five year housing supply. It is therefore recommended that the application be refused.*'

The reference to the '*previously developed site*' in the context of *'both sites'* is to planning application (now permission) No 10/00358/OUT located on the St Martin's Convent site to the east of St Martin's School. In landscape and design terms, that site is separate from, and not related to the appeal site.

3.8 The recommendation in the Committee Report was for refusal of planning permission. Notwithstanding the contention in the Report that the development *'would be harmful to the character of the area'* none of the 5 recommended reasons for refusal (which were accepted and agreed by members) related to any contended adverse landscape effects or to design issues.

Revised Development Proposals

3.9 As I have indicated above, when the appeal application was considered by the Planning Committee in August 2010 my clients agents had indicated that permission was being sought for a maximum number of 60 dwellings, although in the course of discussions with the Borough Council during the processing of the application (and as evidenced in the DAS) the scale of development had varied, and had at one stage provided for some 75 dwellings (I understand that such increase in possible site numbers stemmed from comments of the Borough Council officers). My clients remain of the view that the maximum number of dwellings for which permission is sought is 60, and have prepared revised illustrative proposals showing how such development could be arranged on site. These proposals – at Mr Watts' Appendix 2 – retain a number of the facets that characterised the previous proposals, and incorporate limited additional landscape elements that derive from my assessment of the site and the potential effects of development, as follow:

- The layout creates a 'sense of arrival' at the site entrance.
- Larger properties are located along the Hinckley Road frontage(s) to reflect existing character and to minimise the number of access points from Hinckley Road. The existing hedgerow to Hinckley Road is retained (save for the site access) and supplemented with new hedgerow planting and occasional hedgerow trees.
- Once into the site and beyond an initial focal point, the site entrance access road changes, into a country lane loop road, which meanders through the site.
- Affordable housing units are spread through the development.
- Housing groups are arranged to create interesting street scenes.
- The village green and LEAP is located in the north west corner of the site, overlooked by house frontages to ensure natural surveillance. Within the area of open space informal tree planting groups are proposed.
- The existing hedgerow along the northern site edge is retained with a 10 metre deep margin within the site used for hedgerow reinforcement and

new hedgerow tree planting (to replace and supplement the 2 trees lost) with rough grass under planting (adjacent in part to the country lane).

- A new hedgerow is proposed within a 5 metre wide strip along the western edge of the site adjacent to the sides of properties on Sherwood Road.

The precise details of site layout would, of course, be subject to discussion and resolution through reserved matters approval(s).

4.0 KEY ISSUES

4.1 As I have noted above, none of the reasons for refusal of planning permission advanced by the Borough Council refer to adverse effects landscape effects or to design considerations, and I understand from the Council's Statement of Case and from the SoCG that they pursue no objection to the appeal proposal on these bases. In the representations submitted by third parties to the Borough Council at the time of the appeal application determination, and separately to the Planning Inspectorate in respect of this appeal, a number of issues relating to landscape effects and/ or/ design issues have been raised. I have examined these representations, which cover the following points that are relevant to/ overlap with my evidence:

- Reduction of separation between Dadlington and Stoke Golding/ loss of green belt or green wedge.
- Adverse effect upon historic connections to Battle of Bosworth/ Tudor dynasty.
- Adverse effect on heritage of village.
- Out of character with existing development on Sherwood Road.
- Adverse effect on the countryside.
- Outside the defined village/ settlement boundary and hence conflict with HBLP policy NE5.
- Conflict with HBLP policy BE1.
- Loss of Ridge and Furrow features on site.
- Adverse effect on site ecology.
- Loss of Grade II agricultural land

4.2 For the purposes of my evidence, I consider that these points can be drawn together into the following main issues:

- The effect on the proposed development upon local landscape and settlement character;
- The suitability of the site for development;
- Views of/ to the proposed development; and
- The effect of the proposed development upon the separation of Stoke

Golding and Dadlington.

I consider each of these issues in the following section.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF KEY ISSUES

5.1 Effect on local landscape and settlement character

5.1.1 The various levels of landscape character assessment considered at section 2.6 above identify a number of common characteristics or features of the area around Stoke Golding. These include:

- The location of settlements (generally) on high points (as with both Stoke Golding and Dadlington).
- Potential adverse effects of high(er) density development on settlement edges and the need to use planting to ameliorate such effects.
- Protection of existing hedgerows/ hedgerow trees and replacement as part of increasing woodland, tree and hedgerow planting.

5.1.2 The existing landscape character of Stoke Golding derives in part from the fact that historically, the village was located on a high point around the church. Subsequent growth to east along the ridgeline along the north side of Hinckley Road (almost all of which is post 1945) has maintained that degree of elevation and thus reinforced that local characteristic. Much of that more recent development (e.g. Sherwood Road and Roseway) is suburban in character and visible from the north (and indeed from the south) of the village – although Sherwood Road close to the appeal site is generally single storey and has, in comparison with other areas of development within the village, only a limited impact on skyline (e.g. in views from north/ north west (Views A and B described above). The more recent areas of development have left in places, raw edges between the development and adjacent agricultural land.

5.1.3 The appeal site has existing development on 3 sides: the sides of properties on Sherwood Road to the west, the rear of properties on Hinckley Road to the south and Hinckley Road (and properties beyond) to the east. These areas of existing built development, in association with the local ridgeline to the north, and existing vegetation provide substantial visual containment to the appeal site, such that it is essentially self contained and can be (and is) distinguished from the more

open agricultural land to the north west, north and north east. Additionally, the existing hedgerow to the Hinckley Road frontage - which will be retained virtually in entirety, save for the formation of the new access point - also helps to define and enclose the appeal site. The containment afforded by the ridgeline to the north is supplemented by the existing gappy hedge along the northern boundary of the site. The retention (and strengthening of this hedgerow with additional planting (which could be done through an appropriate condition)) would help to maintain this local feature, and at the same time, provide some additional screening to views from the north.

5.1.4 As I have noted above, in views from the north and north west it is (just) possible to see the tops of the roofs of single storey properties on Sherwood Road. The two storey properties on the appeal site would therefore, in principle, be likely to be seen from these directions, although the final form and roof heights of the development on the appeal site would be a matter for reserved matters approval. That said, there are three factors that need to be taken into account;

- the north west corner of the appeal site is proposed to be used for open space, and thus development would be set back from that part of the site, at levels at or below the properties on Sherwood Road and thus less likely to appear on the skyline in views from the north and north west;
- the existing development on Sherwood Road will, of itself, obscure views to part of the development on the appeal site in those views; and
- in addition to existing planting, new planting could be provided along the north and north west edges of the appeal site to reinforce that existing, and thus provide a more substantial visual screen in future to these views.

5.1.5 In essence, Stoke Golding is a linear settlement (although that form has in practice only been developed over the past 60 or so years), that has grown from its earlier nucleated pattern around the Church, to extend along Hinckley Road to the east (and in depth). Within that form are areas of differing age, development style and character. The village centre - the Conservation Area - is clearly different in site layout, building forms, materials and age than the (predominantly) single storey suburban development at Sherwood Road/ Greenwood Road/

Roseway, which lies between the Conservation Area and the appeal site. The appeal proposals will have no effect whatsoever, in design terms, upon the Conservation Area, primarily because the two areas lie some 500 metres apart and are separated physically and visually by the suburban development noted above. It is contended that the form of proposed development on the appeal site is objectionable because it is not in keeping with the character of the Sherwood Road development. I agree that the character of the proposed development on the appeal site is different – and deliberately so - from that at Sherwood Road; whilst I appreciate that the type of development at Sherwood Road will be attractive to many, the practical reality is that in design terms it is anonymous – it could be anywhere – and in terms of site density is a relatively inefficient use of land. In addition, there is little variety or interest in the road/ site layout, no landscape structure beyond that found in gardens, and no areas of local open space. To require that the appeal site should be developed in the same manner would compound these shortcomings; by contrast, the appeal site development proposals represent an efficient use of land, with variety and design interest in the site layout, with an area of local open space (which will also serve some of the needs of residents in Sherwood Road) whilst also respecting the established character of adjacent existing housing areas and local landscape features.

5.1.6 In overall terms, the existing visual containment of appeal site by development and landform, supplemented by existing (and limited additional planting) will ensure that development of the site would have no adverse effect upon local landscape character. The built form of the development proposals, which were developed through discussions with the Borough Council's officers, will enhance the character of the village, and will consolidate the established form of the settlement.

5.2 **Suitability of the site for development**

5.2.1 The Borough Council, has, through the SHLAA, acknowledged the suitability of the site for development. It is correct that the SHLAA concluded that the site was not considered suitable for development on the basis of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of the appeal site and land to the north, but I note that:

- the Borough Council does not refer to this as any part of its reasons for refusal or its case at this inquiry (indeed the Committee Report considers but rejects agricultural land as a possible objection); and
- in any event, even if it was, the limited size of the site would suggest that its loss as agricultural land would not be material.

In addition, the Borough Council indicated in the Alloc and DC DPD (CD 4) that the site was considered suitable for development, and represented the preferred option for residential development in Stoke Golding. I accept immediately that a number of third party objectors to the appeal proposal disagree with the Borough Council's conclusions in this regard, but it is a matter of record that the Borough Council's considered view, in issuing the Alloc and DC DPD Consultation Draft, was that the site represented a suitable site for development.

5.2.2 As indicated above, the appeal site is defined on three sides by existing built development. It is in a sustainable location (as explained in the evidence of Mr Watts) and as I explain more fully below, the site is well enclosed, with an absence of viewpoints from where one could see the whole of the development to see overall development (although I acknowledge that some part of development could be seen in filtered skyline views from north and north west).

5.2.3 I note that a number of objectors refer to contended specific attributes of the site, including its potential significance as a Tudor site and the presence of ridge and furrow features on the site. The archaeological/ heritage issues are subject to the continuing discussions noted at ¶9.1(3) of the SoCG. As acknowledged in the submitted Archaeological Assessment prepared by CgMs (May 2010) the development of the appeal site would result in the loss of the existing ridge and furrow landscape features within the site (although parts could be retained with the area of open space). Ridge and furrow is an historic landscape feature that is found in and around Stoke Golding, although no reference is made to it as a *specific* feature in the Stoke Golding Vales Landscape Character Area in the HBLCA, let alone any intent to seek to protect or preserve it as a feature of the area (unlike in other LCA's). In the consultation response to the appeal application, the County Archaeologist Chief Executive, Leicestershire County

Council (Archaeology)) raised no objection to the development on the basis of loss of ridge and furrow features, and although third parties raised such objections, the Report to the Planning Committee on the appeal application did not mention the issue as a main consideration in itself, or that it was subsumed within any of the main considerations. The relative value of areas of ridge and furrow in the East and West Midlands was examined in the English Heritage publication *Turning the Plough* in 2001. From surveys in 9 midland counties, including Leicestershire, in the late 1990's the study identified some 43 *'priority townships'* where the quantum and quality of the remaining areas of ridge and furrow was considered the best locations to seek protection or preservation (accepting that scheduling might be the best, but not the only route available to achieve that). Stoke Golding was *not* one of the 11 priority townships identified in Leicestershire and Rutland, and the study acknowledged that although areas of ridge and furrow did occur outside the priority townships, preservation in situ would be difficult, and that preservation by record would be appropriate. I do not consider that there is any evidence that the presence of ridge and furrow on the site is, of itself, a reason for refusal of permission.

5.3 **Views of/ to the proposed development**

5.3.1 I have set out above in section 3.2 a description of a number of the views available to the appeal site and illustrated these views with recent site photographs. Although the final form of the development proposals on site – if planning permission is granted – will be determined through reserved matters approvals for individual building design, materials, colour etc. the site layout proposals as set out in the DAS and as further described at ¶3.9 above, allow for a considered view of the possible effects of the proposed development in views of/ to the appeal site. From my descriptions at section 3.2, I consider that there are three key views - Views A, B and C – that encapsulate the main issues in respect of views to the proposed development. I set out the potential visual effects from these viewpoints below. I do not suggest that the other viewpoints are of no importance; the majority of these other viewpoints are relatively close to the site (reflecting its limited visual envelope), and development on the appeal site will inevitably be seen from these locations, but the effect of the change in

view will generally be restricted to the viewpoint and the immediate adjacent area. In other views, only a limited part of the development on the appeal site would be visible (in contrast to existing development) and thus the significance of the new development would be limited.

5.3.2 **View A** is taken from Stoke Lane adjacent to the Ashby Canal. The Borough Council's Ashby Canal Conservation Area Management Plan records (on Plan 12) the views out from this location in the Conservation Area towards Stoke Golding Church and a vista (*'to be protected'*) out in a south easterly direction towards the eastern part of the village, and notes in respect of the latter that *'new development on top of ridge spoils view'*. This is a reference to existing development at Roseway (and potentially to development on Sherwood Road). At no point in the assessment of the appeal application has the Borough Council suggested that the appeal proposals would have any effect – let alone an adverse effect - upon the Ashby Canal Conservation Area. That must be correct, for the appeal site lies beyond the ridge crest and falls gently to the south and thus from this lower viewpoint, the intervening landform will screen much, if not all of the development on the appeal site. Depending on the final form of development on the appeal site the upper parts of roofs on dwellings towards the northern edge of site may (just) be visible although these would be screened (in part) by existing vegetation which could be supplemented through limited additional planting to the northern field boundary hedgerow and within the area proposed for open space in north west site corner. For reasons that I explain more fully below, this viewpoint is important in the appreciation of the juxtaposition of the settlements of Stoke Golding and Dadlington, for the view encompasses both hill top settlements; their respective situations are reinforced visually by the extensive sweep of land that runs, from Stoke Lane up to the developed edge of Stoke Golding in a single field. Development of the appeal site would have no adverse effect upon that element of the view.

5.3.3. From Stoke Lane on the western edge of Dadlington there is a view south west towards Stoke Golding village, and particularly to the church spire (as shown in **View B**). The open sweep of land falling from Dadlington and Stoke Golding

towards the canal is evident. The appeal site lies to the left of the view screened partly by the rear gardens of existing development in Dadlington and by the overlapping and screening effects of existing vegetation (on and off site), although in winter one can (just) see the roofs of existing development fronting Hinckley Road through the vegetation (in summer foliage will obscure any views). Development on the appeal site would be visible in winter views from this location, but partly on account of distance and also on account of the existing and potential additional screening effects of on and off site vegetation, would have only a very limited effect on this view. The main focus of the view – out to the west over the open falling land towards the core of Stoke Golding village and the church would be unchanged.

5.3.4 From Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south, views to the appeal site are limited because of the roadside hedgerow – and in practice the only clearer views obtainable towards the appeal site are through field entrances. One of these, close to Dadlington village is shown in **View C**. As with View B, there is a longer distance view to the west towards Stoke Golding church spire as a skyline feature. Existing vegetation (again both on and off site) limits views south towards the appeal site, although in winter it is just possible to see, through the vegetation, the roofs of properties on Hinckley Road. The upper parts of the roofs of development on the appeal site – particularly that on its northern flank (depending on final development layout/ form) will be visible from this location in winter, although on and off site vegetation (the former could be supplemented by additional planting within or adjacent to the northern site boundary) would filter and/or screen the available views. As I explain in section 3.2 and comment further below, the unfolding view as one moves from Dadlington to Stoke Golding is constrained by the existing highway boundary hedgerows, and thus View C represents a worst and exceptional case. Even then, the likely change in the view as a possible consequence of the development of the appeal proposals is not, of itself, sufficient to amount to a compelling objection to those proposals.

5.3.5 I consider that the potentially critical views to the appeal site are those from the north west – within the arc that runs west from Dadlington village round past the

Ashby canal towards the core of Stoke Golding village. In lower level views adjacent to the Ashby Canal, existing vegetation and landform will provide screening to views on the appeal site. In more elevated locations, on the edges of Dadlington, views are restricted by on and off site vegetation (and particularly the roadside hedgerows along Hinckley Road). Although development on the appeal site may be visible in part from this views, the on and off site vegetation (along with the supplementing of the former through new planting) would ensure that the visual significance of the proposed development (subject to its final form being resolved through reserved matters approval) would be very limited.

5.4 Separation of Stoke Golding and Dadlington

5.4.1 It is a matter of fact that the two settlements of Stoke Golding and Dadlington lie in relatively close juxtaposition to one another. There is no extant development plan policy which expressly seeks to maintain the existing level of separation between the settlements – the 'gap' between the settlements was not, for example, defined as an 'Area of Separation' under Policy NE4 in the HBLP. Although a number of objectors refer to the area between Stoke Golding and Dadlington as a *'green wedge'* or as a *'green belt'*, in planning parlance, it is neither. In Leicestershire, Green Wedges are areas of open land identified in Development Plans which are considered to be of structural importance in relation to settlement form. One function of green wedges to effect separation of settlements. Although there are extant *'green wedges'* in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough, the area between Stoke Golding and Dadlington does not form one, or comprise any part of one of these areas. Similarly, there are no areas of green belts in Leicestershire. Thus the issue in relation to separation is the practical effect of the development in changing the existing close relationship between the two settlements.

5.4.2 At the closest point, the two settlements lie some 300 metres apart measured as the crow flies across open agricultural land between the rear of properties on Sherwood Drive Stoke Golding (close to the appeal site north west corner) and the rear of properties on Hinckley Road Dadlington. From properties in one village one can see the other village. That relationship would not change. The

two settlements are connected by two roads – High Street/ Stoke Lane and Hinckley Road. There are no other public rights of way between the two settlements, save Footpath T61 (see ¶3.2.2 above) that runs north east from Stoke Lane to The Green in Dadlington. Thus the actual and perceived separation of the two settlements derives from what can be seen, and perceived, from these two sections of road. The development of the appeal site will have no effect upon the actual or perceived separation of the settlements along High Street/ Stoke Lane, although as noted in ¶5.3.2 above, in the views from the Lane adjacent to the Ashby Canal the open sweep of land between the two settlements is important in establishing the juxtaposition (and appreciating the separation) of the settlements.

5.4.3 The distance from the southern edge of Dadlington to the northern edge of 'Goosegrange' opposite the appeal site (and the Stoke Golding village sign) along Hinckley Road is ca 240 metres. As a traveller moves from north to south along Hinckley Road, one can pick up the visual presence of Stoke Golding village and its edges, in views through field entrances, but as one approaches 'Goosegrange' and the village sign one registers fully the imminent entry into another settlement. Conversely, one does not sense having left Stoke Golding, heading north towards Dadlington, until one is past 'Goosegrange'. Development of the appeal site - directly opposite 'Goosegrange' - would maintain the existing separation distance along Hinckley Road between the two settlements, although self evidently, development in Stoke Golding will be, as with Dadlington, on both sides of the road. Whilst I acknowledge that the development of the appeal site would reduce the actual separation distance between the settlements along Hinckley Road, and I accept that the nature and character of the developed edge of Stoke Golding will change as a consequence of the development on the appeal site in terms of perception, the sense of there being an area of open land uses separating the two settlements will maintain.. .

5.4.4 The development would thus have no practical adverse effect on the actual separation distance between the two settlements in views from Stoke Lane, and although it would reduce the separation distance marginally along Hinckley Road,

would not change the perceived physical relationship between two settlements, which are relatively close at present and would remain so after the development of the appeal site.

5.5 In respect of the key issues that I have identified above, it is my overall view that whilst the development of the appeal site will entail change in visual terms, the development would have no adverse effect on local landscape character or upon the character of Stoke Golding settlement. The appeal site, as acknowledged by the Borough Council, is wholly suitable for development and would not give to any adverse effect on views on account of topography, existing development and the screening effects of both existing vegetation and potential new planting, which could be secured through an appropriate planning condition or conditions. Although there would be some – but very limited - change to the extent the separation of Dadlington from Stoke Golding (and such separation has never been afforded any currency through the development plan) a meaningful area of separation between the settlements would remain following the development of the appeal site, and thus the separate characters of the two settlements would be maintained.

6.0 SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE AND OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The appeal site lies at the eastern end of the established linear village of Stoke Golding. The site slopes gently from north to south, and lies on the south side of the local ridge (at ca 100m + AOD) that runs west to east through Stoke Golding village before turning towards the north towards the village of Dadlington. The site is bounded by existing development (to the west and to the south), by a mature agricultural hedgerow to Hinckley Road (to the south east and east) and a mature field boundary hedgerow and hedgerow trees (to the north). The appeal application is in outline, with all matters (save access) reserved for later approval. The application was supported (inter alia) by specialist studies on ecology and arboriculture and by a Design and Access Statement, which explained that the development proposals had evolved through discussions with Borough Council officers.

6.2 In the Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan (CD 3) (which with the East Midlands Regional Plan (CD 1) and the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy (CD 2) together form the Development Plan) the appeal site lies immediately adjacent to, but outwith the settlement boundary (as defined on the Proposals Map). The appeal site is subject to Policy NE5 – Development in the Countryside, which applies to all land outside settlement boundaries and to Policy RES 5 – Residential Proposals on Unallocated Sites. The HBLP contains a number of landscape and landscape-related policies, all of which remain 'saved'. The appeal site is <u>not</u> subject to any of the following policies:

- Green Wedges (NE3)
- Areas of Separation (NE4)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (NE6)
- Sites of County and Local Nature Conservation Significance (NE7)
- Local Landscape Improvement Areas (NE 10).

Additionally, although not a 'saved policy' the appeal site was <u>not</u> subject to:

- Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside (NE9).

Saved Policy NE 12 – Landscaping Schemes – sets out general requirements for the retention of existing landscaping features (sic), and for the provision of further

landscaping as part of development proposals.

6.3 Published local landscape character assessments, and local site appraisal identify a number of specific local features, including:

- A ridge of higher ground ca 100m AOD+ runs south to north/ west to east through Stoke Golding, the appeal site and Dadlington village.
- The appeal site lies on the south side of this ridge falling gently from its northern boundary to the south,
- Further north the land drops relatively sharply from this ridge to the west/ north west towards Ashby Canal/ valleys of Rivers Tweed/ Sence at ca 90m AOD.
- Stoke Golding village is located west-east along the ridgeline, although relatively recent development has spread down the ridge (particularly on its north side) in places with a somewhat abrupt and raw development edge to the north.
- The historic core of village lies to the west, with more recent development (almost all post 1945) along Hinckley Road and to the north extending to the east up to the appeal site.
- There is a loose-knit area of existing built development west of Hinckley Road including St Martin's School/ Convent Lodge/ Lodge Farm/ Stoke Lodge/ Goosegrange (running from south to north).
- The redevelopment of the St Martin's Convent site will extend the development limits of the village further to the east, beyond the area described above.
- The appeal site and the surrounding area are typified by agricultural hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees; in contrast to the appeal site and adjacent fields, land to the north west (extending to Stoke Lane/ Ashby Canal) has been subject to hedgerow removal, creating a significantly larger field between Stoke Lane and the northern developed edge of Stoke Golding.

6.4 My photographs A-K and supporting commentary demonstrate that the appeal site itself has a restricted visual envelope. As a consequence of the screening

effects of local topography, existing vegetation on and off site, and existing built development to the east, west and south, the appeal site is not seen as part of any wider tract of land. Neither is it significant, in any respect, to the existing setting of the village, unlike, for example, Crown Hill to the north west of the village centre, or the open sweep of land rising from the Ashby Canal towards both Stoke Golding and Dadlington

6.5 Although the Planning Committee Report (at Mr Watts' Appendix 1) in respect of the appeal application stated that the proposed development *'would be harmful to the character of the area'* none of the 5 recommended reasons for refusal (which were accepted and agreed by members) related to any contended adverse landscape effects or to design issues and the Borough Council advances no objection to the development on the basis of adverse landscape, visual or design grounds.

6.6 In terms of the **effect of development upon local landscape and settlement character**, the existing visual containment of appeal site by development and landform, supplemented by existing (and limited additional planting) will ensure that development of the site would have no adverse effect upon local landscape character. The built form of the development proposals, which were developed through discussions with the Borough Council's officers, will enhance the character of the village, and will consolidate the established form of the settlement.

6.7 The appeal **site is suitable for development** – as accepted by the Borough Council indicated in the Site Allocations and General Development Control DC DPD Consultation (CD 4) in that it represented the preferred option for residential development in Stoke Golding. The appeal site is defined on three sides by existing built development. It is in a sustainable location, it is well enclosed, with an absence of viewpoints from where one could see the whole of the development to see overall development.

6.8 The potentially critical **views to development** on the appeal site are those from

the north west – within the arc that runs west from Dadlington village round past the Ashby canal towards the core of Stoke Golding village. In lower level views adjacent to the Ashby Canal, existing vegetation and landform will provide screening to views on the appeal site. In more elevated locations, on the edges of Dadlington, views are restricted by on and off site vegetation (and particularly the roadside hedgerows along Hinckley Road). Although development on the appeal site may be (just) visible in part from this views, the on and off site vegetation (along with the supplementing of the former through limited new planting) would ensure that the visual significance of the proposed development (subject to its final form being resolved through reserved matters approval) would be very limited.

6.9 The **separation between Stoke Golding and Dadlington** villages, has never been afforded any currency through the development plan. Whilst there would be some – but very limited - change to the extent the separation between the settlements, a meaningful area of separation between the settlements would remain following the development of the appeal site and thus the separate characters of the two settlements would be maintained.

6.10 I do not therefore consider that in respect of landscape or design issues there is any sustainable objection to the proposed development and I invite the Inspector to conclude accordingly.

Figures

Figure 1 Appeal Site and Photograph Locations

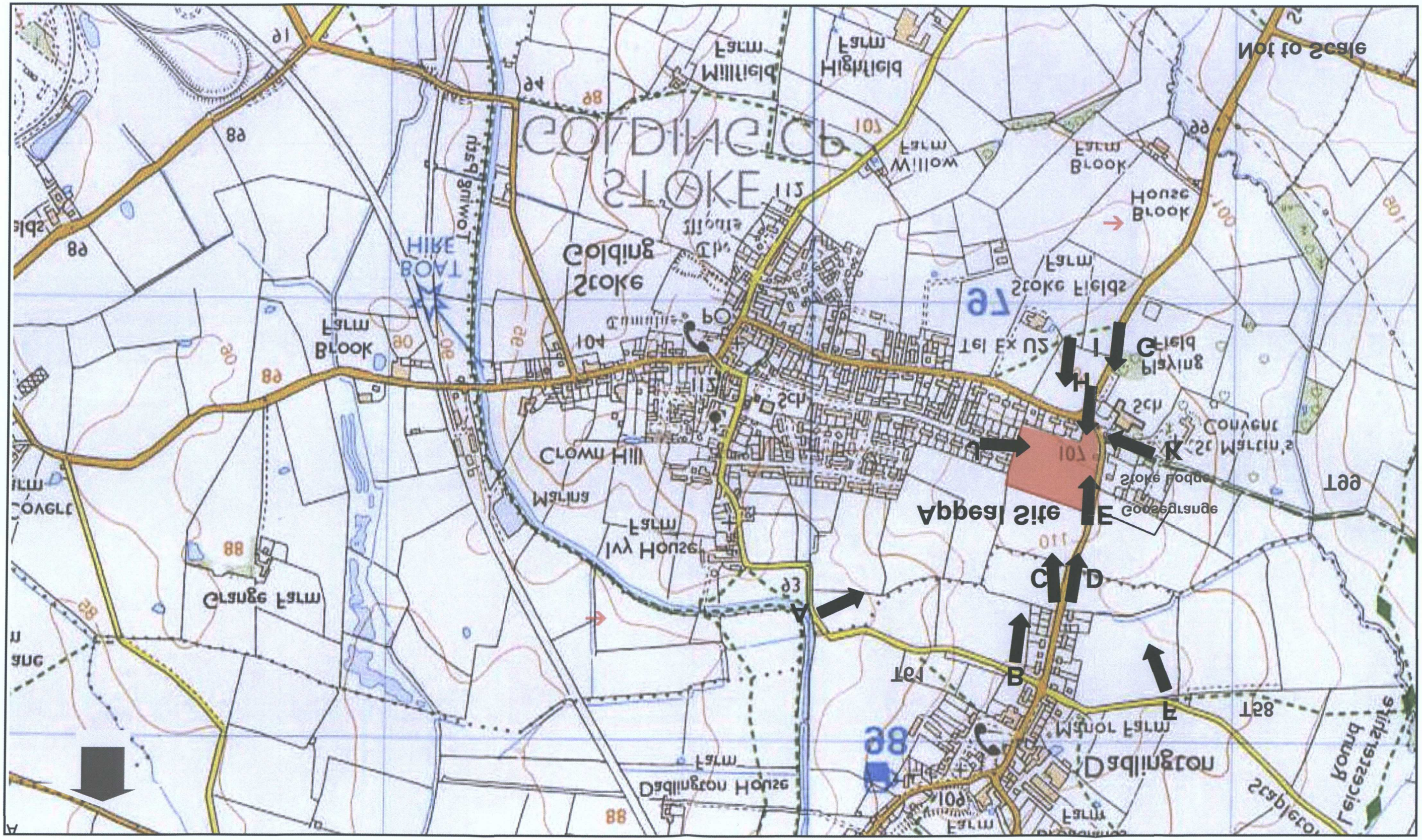


Figure 2 Site Photograph Views A and B



View A: from Stoke Lane (adjacent to Ashby Canal) looking south east towards appeal site ca 550 metres north west of appeal site.



View B: from Stoke Lane on western edge of Dadlington looking south\ west towards Stoke Golding church ca 420 metres north of appeal site.

Figure 3 Site Photographs Views C-E



View C: from field entrance off Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south/ west towards appeal site ca 260 metres north of appeal site.



View D: from Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south towards appeal site ca 260 metres north of appeal site.



View E: from Hinckley Road Dadlington looking south towards appeal site ca 20 metres north of appeal site.



View F: from Footpath T58 off Stapleton Lane looking south west towards appeal site ca 500 metres north east of appeal site



View G: from Stoke Lane looking north towards appeal site ca 240 metres south of the appeal site

View H: from Stoke Lane looking north towards appeal site ca 65 metres south of the appeal site



View I: from Footpath U2 looking north east towards appeal site ca 250 metres south west of the appeal site

Figure 4 Site Photographs Views F- I

Figure 2 Site Photographs Views L and K

View L: from Sherwood Road looking east towards abbeal site
ca 40 metres west of the abbeal site



View K: from Bywey 199 looking east towards abbeal site
ca 20 metres east of the abbeal site

