VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

WESTMORELAND FARM, ROGUES LANE, HINCKLEY, LEICESTERSHIRE

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PREFACE

I, Ellie Jones of MacDonald Planning Consultancy, have been requested to carry out the following visual impact assessment to provide my professional opinion in respect of:

1. what contribution the site currently makes to the landscape; and,
2. the likely impact the proposed development will have on the landscape.

Qualification

After qualifying with a Law degree from the University of Birmingham in 2003 I embarked upon a career as a Town Planner employed by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council. I successfully completed an MSc in spatial planning at Oxford Brookes University in 2006 where I specialised in environment law (including the assessment of visual impact). Following the completion of my MSc qualification I joined Marrons Solicitors as a Planning Consultant before qualifying with full professional membership to the Royal Town Planning Institute. I am now an independent Planning Consultant.

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Methodology

3.0 Baseline existing conditions – the site

4.0 The setting – landform, landcover and landscape elements

5.0 Analysis of the proposal – visual impact

6.0 Conclusions

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This visual impact assessment supports an application made to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council for full planning permission for the demolition of an existing dwelling and outbuildings; the erection of a replacement dwelling and swimming pool and the conversion of an existing outbuilding at Westmoreland Farm, Rogues Lane, Hinckley.

1.2 This statement appraises the contribution the existing buildings make to the appearance of the countryside, as well as, assessing the likely impact of the proposed buildings.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 An initial desk top assessment of the site was first carried out. This was researched through the use of baseline maps, identifying the site's location and existing physical features. The baseline maps include Ordnance Survey maps, historical maps and the local planning authority's proposals map. The maps used not only show the site in context with any other nearby development, transport routes and public footpaths but also the relevant policy framework and land designation for the site. In addition to this, the use of Google mapping helped to provide aerial photography, offering more detailed information about the physical characteristics of the landscape. An aerial image of the site which defines the site area and depicts the identified transport routes and public footpaths is provided below (Figure 1).

2.2 Having assessed the collated maps and imaging, potential principal viewpoints were then identified within and around the site. The identification of these viewpoints (i.e. public footpaths, existing transport routes) helped to establish the potential receptors of the landscape, to in turn, aid assessment of the landscape value.

2.3 Following on from the initial desk top study a field survey was carried out. A number of directional photographs were taken from within and outside of the site (see photographs A-G and the associated viewpoint plan at section 4 below).

Throughout this process an assessment was made of both the objective and subjective elements of the site before the completion of the final analysis.



Denotes application site

Denotes adopted public highway

-------- Denotes public footpath

3.0 BASELINE EXISTING CONDITIONS – THE SITE

3.1 The site lies outside the identified settlement boundary of Hinckley and is therefore designated as countryside. The site is currently occupied by an existing dwelling and associated former agricultural buildings varying in both age and quality. The existing buildings have not been occupied for some time.

3.2 Due to the site's location outside of the settlement boundary, land surrounding the site remains undeveloped countryside. The policy applicable to countryside land within the adopted Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan is Policy NE5. Policy NE5 is a saved policy. It states planning permission will be granted for development in the countryside which is either:



(a) important to the local economy and cannot be provided within or adjacent to an existing settlement; or

(b) for the change of use, reuse or extension of existing buildings, particularly those of historic value; or

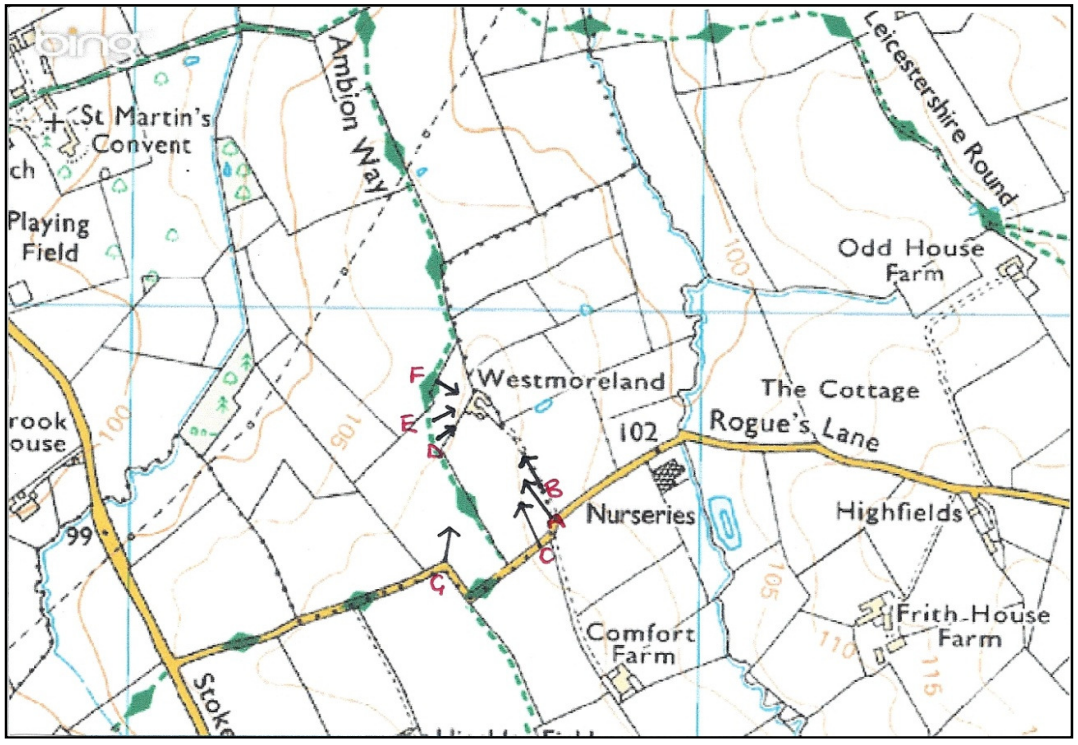
(c) for sport or recreation purposes.

The policy also provides five design based points (criteria i-v) which are in place to ensure the proposal complements its surroundings and meets highway safety standards.

4.0 THE SETTING - LANDFORM, LANDCOVER AND LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

4.1 Westmoreland Farm is located off Rogues Lane to the north of Hinckley. Rogues Lane is a rural road linking Barwell with the village of Stoke Golding. There are a number of farms situated along Rogues Lane. The area is undeveloped countryside and thus, has a very rural feel. Much of the area is in agricultural use with clear well established field boundaries. Rogues Lane is itself lined by hedgerows reaching approximately 2.5 metres high. The aerial photograph at section 3 above highlights the site's rural setting.

4.2 The following paragraphs of this statement will assess the various public viewpoints identified from both the desk top and field studies referred to above. The photo viewpoint plan adjacent highlights where the directional photographs were taken from.



Viewpoints

4.3 The site occupies an elevated position to the north of Rogues Lane (photographs A and B below). As can be observed from the Ordnance Survey plan, the site effectively sits on the brow of a hill.





4.4 As a result of the established hedgerow planting along Rogues Lane there are only glimpsed views of the site from the highway. These views are limited to the access drive (photographs A and B), a break in the hedgerow at the site of a former access point opposite Cold Comfort Farm (photograph C) and a field access further along Rogues Lane heading in the direction of Stoke Road (photograph D). Whilst it is possible to gain these 'snap shot' views, it is apparent that the presence of a number of well established trees existing on the site further obscure the view of the existing buildings. The result of this; is that whilst the site is situated within the undeveloped countryside, views of it from the adopted highway are relatively contained. Whilst these are summer views, the visual penetration will not, in my estimation, be significantly different in winter months. The trees will clearly lose their foliage but the distance from the

highway and the hedgerow will continue to obscure views of the site. Photographs C and G show the views of the site through the breaks in the hedgerow referred to and clearly highlight how the existing trees further conceal the site when viewed from Rogues Lane.


Photo C


Photo G

4.5 As highlighted at figure 1 (page 5), there is also a public footpath stretching along the north western boundary of the site. It is along this footpath that a clearer view of the site and its existing buildings can be achieved. Whilst this is clearly a public footpath, it was apparent on site that, it is overgrown in places and is evidently not as well used as the vehicular highway. Notwithstanding that however, it is the views along this footpath that highlight the poor quality and unsightly appearance of the existing development on site. Photographs D, E and F show views of the site from the public footpath.

Photo D



Photo E



Photo F



4.6 The existing property features on the 1888-1891 historic map of Hinckley and appears to be a traditional 19th century rural dwelling. It is a two storey, grey rendered property which is modest in scale and very simple in design. The main dwelling is overwhelmed by the extent of "add-ons" and linked outbuildings which have been developed over time.

4.7 The linked outbuildings vary in age and design. There is a dual pitched red brick outbuilding with a metal corrugated roof attached to the side of the main dwelling, as well as, a number of outbuildings constructed of grey blockwork (as are shown on photographs D, E and F above). The overall condition of the buildings (including the dwelling) is poor. The addition of grey render and the range of unsympathetic and poorly designed extensions conceal the simplicity of what was once a traditional rural dwelling. Years of neglect only add to its 'tired' and unsightly appearance. The poor condition and architectural quality of the existing buildings do not, in my opinion, make a positive contribution to the rural landscape.

4.8 In addition to the principal house and linked outbuildings there are a number of detached outbuildings. These too vary in age and construction and include; a traditional red brick cow shed and workshop, a dutch barn, a triple garage, a substantial industrial building modern agricultural building, as well as, other smaller structures. The cow shed and dutch barn are both clearly visible from the public footpath as shown on photographs D, E and F above. Whilst the majority of outbuildings on site are of poor design and constructed of unsympathetic, unattractive materials, the red brick cow shed and workshop are more traditional in both their design and choice of materials. As a result, these buildings not only provide a link to the former agricultural use of the site but arguably make a positive contribution to the site and the landscape setting.

4.9 The dutch barn is clearly visible from the public footpath and is the dominant feature from Rogues Lane. The building is in a poor condition. Whilst it is not unusual to see similar buildings throughout the countryside, the loss of this building would not, in my opinion, be detrimental to the overall appearance of the landscape. Similarly, the triple garage, milking parlour and vast industrial building to the rear of the dutch barn fail to make a positive contribution to the overall appearance of the site.

5.0 ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSAL – VISUAL IMPACT

5.1 The application proposes the demolition of the existing dwelling and linked buildings at Westmoreland Farm and the erection of a new replacement dwelling and single storey outbuilding to provide a hydro therapy swimming pool. The proposal includes the demolition of the dutch barn, triple garage, industrial building and other smaller structures present on site. The proposal also includes the retention of the red brick cow shed and workshop. The workshop is proposed for conversion to an annex to provide on site accommodation for a support worker/carer. A number of visuals/photomontages have been produced to depict how the proposal would appear on site if planning permission were granted. These visuals have been considered as part of this section of the assessment.

5.2 As stated at paragraph 4.4 above, despite being located within the open countryside there is little opportunity to view the site from public vantage points. The best views of the site are achieved from the public footpath rather than the adopted public highway. On the occasions where it is possible to view the site from the public footpath, aside from the cow shed stretching along the north western boundary of site, its overall appearance is untidy, tired and architecturally uninspired. The poor condition of the existing buildings and, the choice of materials used, fail to make a positive contribution to the rural landscape. In this regard, in my view, the site in its current condition detracts from, rather than enhances, its rural setting.

The replacement dwelling and outbuildings

5.3 The design of the proposal has taken a two pronged approach. The principal dwelling has sought to adopt more traditional rural design features whilst the swimming pool building provides a more contemporary element to the scheme. This combined approach successfully reflects the different uses of the proposed building. The concept for the overall design was to develop a scheme that appears as a cluster of traditional farm buildings, which have been developed over a period of time and, which have subsequently been converted. This is reflected in the different linked

sections of the building and the design features such as the blank windows, former stable openings and full glazed panels. The overall design of the proposal is attractive and successfully recreates a high quality conversion scheme found throughout the countryside. There is nothing, in my estimation, which makes the design of the proposal intrinsically inappropriate for its countryside location.

Views from Rogues Lane

5.4 The replacement dwelling and outbuilding (swimming pool building) are located on a similar footprint to the existing dwelling and linked outbuildings. The height of the proposal does not exceed the height of the tallest building already existing on site. Where possible a number of existing trees are to be retained whilst additional landscaping is also proposed (see diagram 1 of the Design and Access Statement).

5.5 One of the main differences to the appearance of the farm from Rogues Lane will be the removal of the dutch barn, the adjacent milking parlour and the triple garage. Whilst these buildings are not uncommon features of the countryside, they are tired and of no visual significance to the landscape. The removal of these buildings opens up views of the converted workshop which is far more attractive and traditional in its design. When viewed from Rogues Lane the design and siting of the replacement buildings, coupled with, both the retained and proposed landscaping ensure the proposal relates well to the countryside setting and assimilates with its surroundings. The photomontage (provided by Swift) shown below provides a detailed perspective of how the proposal will appear from Rogues Lane.



Existing view from Rogues Lane



Proposed view from Rogues Lane

Views from the public footpath

5.6 A greater visual impact will be perceived from the public footpath, for whilst the cow shed will remain in the foreground, the extent of existing unsightly development (which is clearly visible from this vantage point – photographs D, E and F) will be removed and replaced by the new development. The side elevation of the swimming pool building and the upper floor of the rear elevation of the replacement dwelling will be visible from the public footpath, although in places this will be largely obscured by the trees and existing field hedgerow to be retained on site (photographs D, E and F above). The design which incorporates a combination of two and single storey development and a range of ridge heights, reflects the pattern of existing development on site. Similarly, the siting of the proposal reflects the layout of the existing buildings and would not, therefore, appear to encroach beyond the

extent of existing development when viewed from this public vantage point. The removal of the existing unattractive buildings and, the erection of the replacement scheme, would significantly improve the overall appearance of the site from this viewpoint which would, in turn, make a positive contribution to the appearance of the landscape.

Views from within the site

5.7 Whilst the above paragraphs of this statement have addressed views of the site from public viewpoints, it is obvious that the clearest views of the building are observed from within the site itself. The following two photographs and photomontages (produced by Swift) seek to demonstrate the 'before' and 'after' images of the site. Much larger copies of the photomontages shown below have been submitted as part of the application. Those shown below, therefore, are merely provided for ease of reference.

5.8 The first pair of images looks at the existing and proposed rear elevation. The photograph is taken from the field to the south west of the existing property. Even at this proximity it is apparent that views of the property are to some extent obscured by the existing field hedgerow boundary and trees. The photomontage provides a closer view of the replacement dwelling than the image of the existing buildings provided by the photograph. Notwithstanding that, however, the photomontage effectively shows how the proposal is located in a similar position to the existing development and how it has sought to relate to the pattern and scale of existing development on site. For instance, it is apparent that the unattractive, single storey, block work outbuildings currently present on site would be replaced by a single storey, contemporary, glaze and render swimming pool building. The scale and position of the swimming pool building is similar to the existing outbuildings whilst the design is significantly improved. In addition, whilst handed differently to the existing, the differing ridge heights of the replacement property reflect the changes in ridge height of the existing dwelling. Whilst the proposed dwelling is larger than the one it replaces, this is balanced by the removal of the dutch barn and other outbuildings currently visible on site.





5.9 The main difference proposed in terms of layout and siting is in relation to the single storey wing. Clearly, this wing proposes to extend into the field beyond the existing development. However, in my opinion, the impact of this will be limited. This is because whilst the single storey wing will be positioned in the foreground, the swimming pool building will extend beyond it in the background. Moreover, the single storey wing will be sited nearer to the position of the existing hedgerow which would further reduce any perceived impact. Additional landscaping is also proposed to be sited in front of the wing as detailed in the Design and Access Statement at diagram 1. In any event, the resulting formation of a courtyard is not an unusual feature of rural properties. Thus, whilst the existing property does not provide a courtyard in this location, I consider it to be neither inappropriate nor detrimental to introduce one as part of the proposal.

5.10 The full length glazed windows to the rear elevation; arched glazed doorways and recessed blank opening to the single storey wing are all design features commonly found in conversion schemes and other rural properties. Such features are appropriate to the site's countryside location and do not, in my estimation, pose a detrimental impact to the visual appearance of the site.

5.11 The second set of images (shown below) views the site from the top of the access drive, at the entrance to the existing farm complex. Here the photograph clearly highlights the current condition of the site and its buildings. The triple garage is particularly unattractive. The accompanying photomontage provides an accurate perspective of how the front elevation of the principal dwelling and the side elevation of the single storey wing referred to above would appear on site.

5.12 Whilst the replacement dwelling is larger than the existing property it has been designed to present a principal dwelling and outbuildings. The single storey wing incorporates traditional rural features (i.e. blank openings and arched windows) to give the appearance of a former stables or cow shed. This relates well to the retained cow shed which is visible in the background of both the photograph and photomontage. The glazed link between the wing and the principal dwelling assists in creating the appearance of a principal house with associated converted outbuildings. This reduces the bulk of the replacement dwelling whilst ensuring it relates well to its countryside location.

5.13 Having considered views of the existing and proposed development from both within and outside of the site, I am of the opinion, that the proposed replacement dwelling, which includes the removal of a number of unsightly outbuildings, would significantly improve the overall appearance of the site to the benefit of the wider landscape.





The retained buildings

5.14 Whilst taking the opportunity to redevelop and provide a new replacement dwelling, the current proposal has also sought to retain the existing positive features of the site (the red brick cow shed and workshop). The applicants propose to carry out remedial and maintenance works to the cow shed whilst converting the workshop to an annex. The design details of the proposed conversion have been sensitively considered to ensure it relates well to the design of the replacement dwelling.

5.15 The retention of these buildings is positive because it preserves the former agricultural and historical connection the site has to the landscape whilst also relating well to the design concept for the remainder of the site. The cow shed and workshop retain the courtyard arrangement to the north east of the site which is complemented by additional landscaping.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The visual quality of the existing buildings on site is poor and fails to make a positive contribution to the appearance of the landscape.

6.2 The replacement dwelling is located on the footprint of the existing buildings and adopts a similar layout. When viewed from the public footpath the replacement dwelling will not appear to encroach further into the countryside beyond the existing development. The removal of the existing buildings and erection of the replacement scheme will greatly improve the appearance of the site from this vantage point.

6.3 The removal of the tired dutch barn and other outbuildings, which currently fail to make a significant contribution to the landscape, will improve the appearance of the site when viewed from Rogues Lane.

6.4 The design of the replacement dwelling is both attractive and appropriate to its countryside location.

6.5 The removal of the existing buildings and the erection of the replacement scheme would significantly improve the overall appearance of the site and would, in turn, make a positive contribution to the appearance of the landscape.