

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

of

DAVID WEBSTER

BSc (Hons), MSc, MA, CMLI

relating to

OPENNESS, LANDSCAPE / TOWNSCAPE & VISUAL EFFECTS

on behalf of

ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

in connection with

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ON LAND AT SANDOWN PARK RACECOURSE

at

PORTSMOUTH ROAD, ESHER, SURREY, KT10 9AJ

Local Planning Authority Reference: 2019/0551

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1 Introduction

Qualifications

- 1.1 My name is David Webster, and I am a Chartered Landscape Architect, elected to membership of the Landscape Institute in 2008. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Garden Design and a Master of Arts Degree in Landscape Architecture.
- 1.2 I confirm that the evidence which I have prepared and provide in my Proof of Evidence is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institute, the Landscape Institute, and that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

Context

- 1.3 I provide this evidence on behalf of the Elmbridge Borough Council in respect of the Green Belt, landscape / townscape, and visual aspects of **Reasons for Refusal 1 and 2** relating to the refusal of outline planning permission **2019/0551**.
- 1.4 It is accepted that the development proposals for **Sites A, C, E1, E2 and F** would not be inappropriate in terms of their Green Belt location.
- 1.5 I acknowledge that the planning information for the 'Disputed Sites': **Sites B, D and 1 - 5** has been submitted in outline, with scale, layout, appearance and landscaping all reserved for consideration at a later date.
- 1.6 In my opinion the development proposals would introduce significant built form, car parking and other associated development to a number locations along the boundary of the Racecourse or in highly visible locations towards the centre of the Racecourse.
- 1.7 My judgement is that there would be materially damaging Green Belt effects arising from the proposed development of the Disputed Sites. Additionally, I consider that the proposals would cause significant harm both to both the character and visual amenity of the area, and that the harm could not be significantly reduced by appropriate in character mitigation.

2 The First Reason for Refusal: Harm to the Green Belt

- 2.1 The Racecourse falls entirely within the Green Belt. As stated in **Policy DM17 (CD1.2)** and Paragraph 133 of the **NPPF (CD2.1)**, the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts being their openness and their permanence. I consider that the development proposals at the Disputed Sites would clearly result in harm to the Green Belt and therefore conflict with **Policy DM17** and the **NPPF**.
- 2.2 The starting point to my evidence is that the proposed development represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and Paragraph 143 of the **NPPF (CD2.1)** states that such

development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 144 of the **NPPF (CD2.1)** identifies that 'substantial weight' should be afforded to any level of harm.

- 2.3 Having established the definitional harm to the Green Belt, my evidence identifies the actual harm to the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it.
- 2.4 A key Green Belt policy consideration is evidently the 'openness' of the Green Belt and the implications of development on it with reference, in particular, to Paragraphs 145 and 146 of the **NPPF (CD2.1)**. My evidence reviews both the openness of the Racecourse as a whole, and then subsequently of the individual development sites that are disputed.
- 2.5 The concept of openness is not narrowly limited to the volumetric approach and a number of factors are capable of being relevant to the issue of openness - prominent amongst these is how built up the Green Belt is now and how built up it would be if redevelopment occurs. In this case, such factors include spatial/physical considerations, and as a material concern my evidence details the specific volumetric increases for each development site, and the likely changes in spatial organisation that would result in clear harm to the Green Belt.
- 2.6 The Grandstand complex forms the most noticeable built form within the site, situated on higher ground than the racecourse to the north and the car and coach parking to the south. The other built form on the site, including the stables, lodge, staff residences, golf course and karting track are relatively low level and usually only single storey. The visual and perceptual response to the site is that of the Grandstand being surrounded by largely open space.
- 2.7 I believe that, in this case, any consideration of openness also has a visual dimension, namely the impact of the proposed development on the perception of openness of the Green Belt at each of the Disputed Sites.
- 2.8 I judge that the perceived extent of openness extends from the residential dwellings to the north of Lower Green Road, southwards towards the rear of the commercial and residential properties on the north side of the Portsmouth Road. This area of perceived openness would therefore include the entirety of the Racecourse, a far greater area than that indicated in **Plan EDP 2: Separation Plan (CD5.50)**. The development proposals, if implemented, would clearly introduce new built form and result in an obvious perceived harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 2.9 **Policy DM17(c) (CD1.2)** states that *"Proposals for the limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites will be considered in light of the size, height, type, layout and impact of existing buildings, structures and hard standing, together with the degree of dispersal throughout the site of existing and proposed development"*. My evidence demonstrates that when reviewed from the perspective of the whole Racecourse, or on a site-

by-site basis, that the scale, massing and distribution of the development proposals will – to varying degrees - constitute additional, often substantial, harm to the openness of the Green Belt and conflict with **Policy DM17 (CD1.2)**. It is well understood from case law that the essential quality of openness is the freedom from built development.

- 2.10 Finally, my evidence assesses the contribution that the Racecourse makes to the purposes of the Green Belt by reference to recent Green Belt Boundary Reviews. The Racecourse lies within **Strategic Area A**, described in the **GBBR 2016 (CD3.8)** as a narrow and fragmented band of Green Belt which closely abuts the edge of south-west London. **GBBR 2016** concludes that **Strategic Area A** performs **Very Strongly** against both **Purposes 1** and **2**, and more specifically that the Green Belt at Sandown Park performs **Strongly** overall.
- 2.11 The supplementary **GBBR 2018 (CD3.9)** refines these conclusions to include an assessment of Green Belt performance within smaller sub-areas which adjoin the existing urban settlements. This review considered **Site 3** (Sub Area 70) and **Site 4** (Sub Area 69). When considering sub-area performance with regard to Green Belt **Purpose 2**, **Site 3** achieved a score of 5, meeting the purpose assessment criteria **strongly**, and making an **important contribution** to the wider strategic Green Belt. **Site 3** was not recommended for further consideration. Whilst **Site 4** performed less well and was recommended for further consideration, it has not been recommended for removal from the Green Belt. **Sites 1, 2** and **5** were promoted for consideration, but not subsequently assessed.
- 2.12 The only local changes to the Green Belt have seen an increase in coverage over the site by 1.36ha following the **GBBR Minor Boundary Amendments 2019 (CD3.10)**. I believe that this change reinforces the argument that the actual (and perceived) boundary to the built-up area of Greater London are the existing dwellings to the north of Lower Green Road, not the small number of ancillary buildings within **Site 3**.
- 2.13 In my opinion, the proposed development would significantly undermine the performance of the Green Belt with regard to both **Purposes 1** and **2**. In particular, the development of **Site 3** would necessarily result in the built-up area of Greater London moving south across Lower Green Road into the Racecourse. Further, the wider development of the Disputed Sites would result in the erosion of the 'essential gap' between Greater London (Lower Green) and Esher, resulting in clear harm to the Green Belt.

3 The Second Reason for Refusal: Landscape / Townscape Effects

- 3.1 I conclude that the proposed development would be in conflict with policies within the **Elmbridge Core Strategy (CD1.1)** and the **Elmbridge Development Management Plan (CD1.2)**.
- 3.2 **Policy CS9** guides that additional residential development should be provided primarily

through redevelopment of PDL. Whilst it is accepted that some sites offer a varying amount of PDL, I do not believe that the scale, massing and distribution of the proposals will enhance local character. Indeed, by my assessment the proposals will result in a significantly adverse effect. In addition, the **Design and Character SPD: Esher (CD3.2)** suggests various issues and opportunities that should be considered, but the proposals do not reflect these aspirations.

- 3.3 **Policy CS17** under 'Local Character' requires that development should respond to the *"positive features of individual locations, integrating sensitively with the locally distinctive townscape, landscape, and heritage assets, and protecting the amenities of those within the area"*. For the reasons described in my evidence, I do not believe that the proposals reflect or integrate with the local landscape / townscape and therefore conflict with this policy.
- 3.4 **Policy DM2(b)** requires that development should *"preserve or enhance the character of the area, taking account of design guidance detailed in the Design and Character SPD"* with particular regard to the following attributes: appearance, scale, mass, height, levels and topography, prevailing pattern of built development, and separation distances to plot boundaries. My evidence concludes that the outline proposals do not demonstrate such regard and therefore conflict with this policy.
- 3.5 The **LTVA (CD5.52)** suggests that areas in close proximity to the Racecourse that are situated outside **SLCA (CD3.19) Character Area UW6** should be considered to form part of an urban area. I do not agree with this assessment and instead consider that the Disputed Sites, with the exception of **Site D**, form an important landscape boundary between the urban areas that surround the Racecourse and its open central area.
- 3.6 On this basis, whilst **Character Area UW6** provides some commentary on the central area of the Racecourse, it does not provide the site-specific consideration required to act as an appropriate baseline for the Disputed Sites. Unfortunately, beyond a high-level description of each of the Disputed Sites, there is very little analysis of their site specific **value**.
- 3.7 The site-wide judgement of landscape value in the **LTVA (CD5.52)**, ignores any finer grained consideration of landscape features and other aesthetic, perceptual or experiential qualities apparent within the disputed appeal sites. Given that the Disputed Sites are located at the boundary to the Racecourse, I consider it likely that they will be highly valued at a local scale.
- 3.8 My site specific assessment of value concludes that a number of the Disputed Sites benefit from the 'character and valuable fabric' as described in Paragraph 4.28 of the **LTVA (CD5.52)**, and should be considered to be of a higher value than **Local**, more in line with the **Borough** value attached to **Landscape Unit UW6-A** in the recent **Landscape Sensitivity Study (CD3.25)**. I consider that **Sites 1, 3, 4 and 5** should be ranked as having a **Medium (Good)** value (please refer to **Tables 1 and 2, Appendix 1**).

- 3.9 Further, the landscape **susceptibility** to change of either the Racecourse, or the Disputed Sites individually, is not properly considered as required by **GLVIA3 (CD3.17)**. This concept describes the ability of a defined landscape / townscape to accommodate the specific proposed development without undue negative consequences. It follows that the consideration of susceptibility must form part of the assessment of effects and not the baseline study. My own assessment ranks **Sites B, 1, 3, 4 and 5** as having a **High** susceptibility. The **LTVA (CD5.52)** does not appear to record any rankings.
- 3.10 The **sensitivity** of a landscape / townscape to change is a function of both value and susceptibility. I consider that the failure of the **LTVA (CD5.52)** to properly consider value or susceptibility at a more granular scale than the entire Racecourse undermines the overall assessment of effects. My own assessment of each of the Disputed Sites reveals a higher degree of sensitivity, with **Sites 1, 3, 4 and 5** considered to have a **Medium High** sensitivity.
- 3.11 Thereafter, I demonstrate that for many of the Disputed Sites there will be a higher magnitude of change resulting from the appeal proposals than described in the **LTVA (CD5.52)**.
- 3.12 When the increased sensitivity is considered alongside the greater magnitude of change experienced by each of the Disputed Sites, the overall landscape / townscape effect is larger than reported in the **LTVA (CD5.52)**, which states at Paragraph 7.33 that the *“long-term impact of the proposal on the local townscape and wider landscape context would be no greater than moderate/minor”*. I disagree with this assessment.
- 3.13 The scheme has been submitted in outline, with no committed landscape scheme on which to base any assumption as to the efficacy of the landscape mitigation and about which I have already expressed some of my concerns. It seems to me that in the absence of an approved landscape treatment there should be little or no reduction in effect noted in the ‘longer term’.
- 3.14 On this basis, I have focussed on the Day 1 or likely ‘worst case’ effect, where I conclude that **LTVA (CD5.52)** under reports the likely effects. My own assessment concludes that the **Site B** effects would be **Moderate Substantial Adverse**, and the proposed residential development effects (**Sites 1 – 5**) would range from **Moderate** to **Substantial Adverse**.
- 3.15 It is interesting to note that the **LTVA (CD5.52)** judges the short and longer-term effects of the proposed development to be the same, which would appear to indicate that the proposed landscape mitigation does not offer the longer-term benefits as described at **Appendix EDP 6**.

4 The Second Reason for Refusal: Visual Effects

- 4.1 As a general note, I consider that an application for this quantum of development should have included verifiable photowire visual representations of the proposed development to better illustrate the scale and massing of the submitted parameter plans.

- 4.2 I consider that public views towards the open central parts of the Racecourse to be of **High** value, particularly where the views take in parts of the mature treelined boundaries that are characteristic of the Racecourse and contribute to the Green Belt and landscape character. Views of The Warren, in particular from Esher Green, will be of **Medium High** Value given the rising topography, setting and overall visual amenity of this ancient woodland. Views of the open areas of hard standing are considered to be of **Medium** value, given that the Grandstand – a local landmark – will often feature in these views.
- 4.3 The **LTVA (CD5.52)** assessment of visual effects fails to properly consider the **susceptibility** to change of the viewer, which depends upon receptor occupation or activity and the extent to which attention focuses on views and visual amenity.
- 4.4 I consider the most susceptible visual receptors to include local residents in proximity to the Racecourse, in particular those located along More Lane, Lower Green Road and certain locations on Portsmouth Road. These receptors are considered to have a **High** susceptibility. Pedestrians walking around the perimeter of the Racecourse are considered to have a **Medium** susceptibility, with cyclists and motorists considered to have a **Low** susceptibility.
- 4.5 I also consider that the receptors within the Esher Conservation Area will have a higher susceptibility to reflect the proximity and heightened visual interest of the designation. In my opinion, the susceptibility of pedestrians would be **High** and road users **Medium**.
- 4.6 Derived from the rankings of value and susceptibility (**Table 7, Appendix 1**) the visual **sensitivity** of a wide variety of receptors was considered to range from **Medium Low** (road users on Portsmouth Road and Station Road) to **High** (local residents on More Lane, Lower Green Road and the Esher Conservation Area).
- 4.7 The **LTVA (CD5.52)** concludes at Paragraph 7.34 that the *“anticipated visual effects are limited by both landscape screening and existing built form, including larger built form already associated with the Racecourse”*. I disagree with this assessment on the basis that the majority of the proposed development will be located on the site boundaries, where the proposals themselves require the removal of much of the landscape screening, thereby increasing the intervisibility of the proposed built form and the identified visual receptors.
- 4.8 I consider that there are a wide range of receptors that are likely to experience visual effects and for each receptor it can be demonstrated that there is ample scope to conclude a higher level of effect at Day 1 than has been recorded in the **LTVA (CD5.52)**. This has been achieved through the proper consideration of receptor susceptibility and a more realistic assessment of the likely magnitude of effect. The Day 1 visual effects of the proposed residential development are considered to range from **Moderate Substantial to Substantial Adverse** for local residents and **Moderate to Moderate Substantial Adverse** for pedestrians.