

PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

prepared on behalf of

Denton Homes Ltd.



Proposed residential development

Land at rear of

FIRLANDS – CHURCH RD – SCAYNES HILL – SUSSEX RH17 7NH

Report prepared by

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Summary

- **The study site lies on the edge of Scaynes Hill settlement on the High Weald fringe.**
- **There is scope for limited residential development concentrating on the western section abutting existing settlement.**
- **The submission of an appropriate layout with an enhanced buffer will effect a suitable transition to open countryside to the south east.**
- **Development should have a tailored landscape and biodiversity enhancement scheme to integrate with the local context.**

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1.0 **Introduction**

1.1 My name is Adrian Draffin. I am a chartered Landscape Architect and have over thirty five years experience with landscape planning and related issues. My company - Draffin Associates Limited, Landscape and Environmental Planning Consultancy - has been instructed by the applicant, Denton Homes Ltd, in November 2019 to appraise the site at the rear of Firlands, Church Road, Scaynes Hill and to prepare a landscape and visual impact assessment based on *The Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2013*. Observations with regard to visual boundary screening are also given with regard to the potential landscape mitigation measures to accommodate any proposed residential development. This preliminary document forms part of the supporting information for the site promotion in the Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) allocations DPD on behalf of the applicant.

1.2 A parallel preliminary Bio-diversity Enhancement report has also been undertaken to inform future residential development.

1.3 The site lies immediately south east of Church Road, Scaynes Hill opposite Scaynes Hill Common. The purpose of this report is to identify the special characteristics of the existing landscape, to assess the likely potential impacts of the proposal and to consider the most appropriate mitigation measures and their residual impact to integrate the proposal with the local context.

1.4 A site walkover and visual appraisal was undertaken during December 2019. Reference is made to the base OS contour map data and to the indicative landscape parameter plan (dwg no.762/01)

1.5 A desk study was also undertaken of the Development Plan policy and map data available from the MSDC website. Local landscape protection issues are also reviewed.

2.0 **Assessment methodology**

2.1 This assessment will consider the existing landscape character and any potential sensitivity to change. This will include a landscape resource description and evaluation.

2.2 The nature of the proposal in terms of location, scale and type of development will then be reviewed.

- 2.3 A landscape and visual appraisal of the site is included to identify areas of particular visual impact and the scale of visual impact with reference to *The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* criteria (Version 3 published by LI 2013) (GLVIA). (**Appendix C**)

3.0 Existing site (see Appendix A - base OS site plan)

3.1 Site location

The study site, that extends to approximately 2ha, lies to the rear of Firlands property south east of Church Road Scaynes Hill.

3.2 Land Use

The site lies at the north eastern edge of Scaynes Hill village. The current site consists of rough grassland with boundary field hedgerow and timber fencing enclosure. The proposal will utilise the existing access adjacent Downs View Close. The site is bordered by properties along Church Road to the north west as well as within Downs View Close. Scaynes Hill Social Club lies at the western corner of the study site.

3.3 Settlement

The site is located on the north eastern edge of Scaynes Hill village. It is bordered by existing housing to the north west with farmland to the south east. Scaynes Hill village centre lies 0.5km to the south west.

3.4 Topography

The south east facing site lies between the 75m and 65m contour AOD. The character of the study site and the immediate context is defined by the prominent slope. The local high ground is provided by Scaynes Hill Common located to the north at 75m AOD. Further afield in the High Weald at Ardingly the land rises to 120m AOD to the north over 10km distant.

3.5 Drainage & Vegetation

The River Ouse catchment flows approximately 3km east of the study site. The soil type consists of sandstone over Weald Clay. The site is located adjacent managed farmland on the wider Watlands Farm and Watlands Wood. There are broadleaf field hedgerows enclosing the site with Costells Wood, registered Ancient Woodland and SSCI land north of Scaynes Hill village.

3.6 Landscape

The south east facing aspect is the key landscape site feature with views across the Low Weald. The majority of the site is open rough grassland with some scattered fruit trees and enclosure field hedgerows. Some of these are recorded as traditional farmland hedges along the southern boundary.

3.7 Public access

The study site vehicular access is from Church Road. The public footpath The Sussex Border Path, Mid - Sussex link, follows Clearwater Lane running some 300m beyond the southern boundary. There are no public footpaths on the site.

3.8 Visual context and existing views (**see Appendix D**)

The site is largely enclosed to the north west, north and east by existing settlement, mature vegetation and landform. There are limited public views at the main entrance. There are distant views from Clearwater Lane 300m beyond the southern boundary.

3.9 Inward public views – Church Road (**Appendix D – sht 1 photos 1-2**)

There is an existing gated access link from Downs View Close. The Church Road frontage opposite these gates presently comprises a mature beech hedge significantly restricting inward views from the public highway.

3.10 Inward residents views (**Appendix D – sht 1 photos 3-6**)

The existing 5no. properties at Downs View Close and 8no. properties along Church Road abut the north west boundary of the study site. All properties offer direct rear views over the study site.

3.11 Inward distant views – Clearwater Lane (**Appendix D – sht 2 photos 7-8**)

The sloping nature of the site is evident in the panoramic views of Scaynes Hill settlement. The relationship between built form and neighbouring countryside in context is apparent with the study site visible in the background beyond foreground farmland and woodland spinney. The existing Downs View Close properties are visible. The majority of housing is 2 storey although there is some 2.5 storey apparent behind the Social Club. Apart from the St Augustine village church tower the mature trees dominate the village skyline.

3.12 Site/ Outward views – (**Appendix D – sht 3 photos 8-12**)

The extent of rough and damp grassland is evident with built form in the background.

3.13 Visual appraisal - summary

Visually the study site is enclosed by existing settlement, landform and mature vegetation to the north west, north and east.

Adjacent residents on Church Road and Downs View Close overlook the site along the north west boundary.

There are filtered distant views of the site from Clearwater Lane 300m beyond the southern boundary.

4.0 Planning Policy

Landscape Designations

4.1 The study site has no specific landscape designations.

4.2 Landscape Character

4.3 The site lies within “Area 10 High Weald Fringes ” landscape character area of the MSDC LCA 2005. The description states:

- *A wooded often confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity. The western part around Scaynes Hill is drained by the headwaters of The River Ouse.*

4.4 The same document includes a ‘management detractors’ section including the following recommendations:

- *Protect existing views from the area and avoid skyline development.*
- *Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.*

4.5 The site lies in the Mid Sussex Adopted Local Plan (2018-2030) Policy Area DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside. Within the strategic objectives

- *Development will be permitted in the countryside provided it enhances the quality of the landscape character and it is supported by a Development Plan Document.*

4.6 The Mid Sussex Housing Capacity Study (2014) indicates that DP12 Area near Scaynes Hill has medium capacity for appropriate development.

5.0 **Assessment of Landscape Character**

5.1 The study site contains landscape features that are typical of the “Area 10 High Weald Fringes ” landscape character area of the MSDC Landscape Character Assessment.

5.2 The site makes a *moderate* contribution to the overall character with some discordant features. The existing landscape resource is visually limited by the present land use and guidance recommends that the character should be enhanced.

5.3 Positive change by appropriate sensitive development is encouraged. This should include the restoration and enhancement of existing landscape features and the creation of an enhanced boundary green infrastructure including new hedge and tree screen planting.

5.4 Particular consideration should be given to the topography and the relationship with the existing settlement.

6.0 **Proposals (Appendix E)**

6.1 The indicative landscape parameter plan is shown on the attached site layout. **(Appendix E)**
The development concept includes an inner area of potential development contained by enhanced green infrastructure. The design principle is to utilise the existing access, subject to any highway improvements required, and to concentrate development in the less prominent western section of the site adjacent existing settlement. This approach will allow the reinforcement of the south eastern section of the site both in landscape and ecological terms.

6.2 The outer landscape boundary elements will be largely retained, managed and enhanced as an appropriate setting for the proposal. This includes the creation of a new inner landscape layout that will link to the wider landscape setting and provide a suitable transition between settlement and countryside. The boundary landscape zones treatment will be designed to provide the appropriate visual amenity to accommodate potential development within in the High Weald Fringe context.

- 6.3 A landscape and tree protection zone will be established to the boundary landscape buffer (subject to tree report recommendations).
- 6.4 The existing site can be divided into two landscape areas, the inner former agricultural, remnant orchard area and the outer boundary enclosure abutting the adjacent countryside to the south east. Apart from the removal of poor inner trees for driveway access requirements, subject to survey, the existing tree cover and hedgerow margins will be retained for biodiversity and managed for conservation. The existing landscape and green infrastructure will be enhanced with new linked boundary screening. It is also suggested that an informal pond area and communal orchard be considered to improve bio-diversity as part of the development proposal.
- 6.5 New landscape works will also be included with further boundary enhancement to the buffer zones as required to provide an appropriate reinforced setting to the proposal. The recommendations of the project ecologist will be followed to enhance marginal areas and links to local habitats.
- 6.6 The main components of this proposal that will have a landscape and visual effect will be the construction of the new residential properties with associated vehicular access, parking and boundary treatment. The associated infrastructure landscape will require considered surface water drainage design with a long-term landscape management plan. Permeable paving and native boundary planting will be included.

7.0 Visual Receptors

- 7.1 The term 'receptors' is used in landscape and visual impact assessments to mean an element or assemblage of elements that will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development. Physical landscape receptors including vegetation and landform are not directly affected by the proposal and my assessment has thus concentrated on *visual receptors*.
- 7.2 Visual receptors include:
- Public Footpath users
 - Local Residents
 - Users of the roads in the vicinity.

8.0 Impact of Proposals

- 8.1 The study site has an edge of settlement character with natural features generally dominating built/engineered form noting the wider Low Weald countryside context. The key public views are to be found from Church Road on the north western boundary. More restricted residents views include limited sections from the adjacent Downs View Close and neighbouring Church Road properties. Filtered distant views from Clearwater Lane 300m beyond the southern boundary show the study site in the wider village context. The receptor groups include pedestrians, motorists and local residents.
- 8.2 Pedestrians will have filtered views of the entrance layout from Church Road. These will be subject to any agreed highway improvements.
- 8.3 Motorists will become aware of any access improvements along Church Road.
- 8.4 Local residents at Downs View Close and along Church Road lie adjacent to the study site to the north west. Existing residents will have views to the proposed development through any gaps in the existing boundary screen. The proposed common boundary landscape treatment will therefore require review.
- 8.5 Pedestrians using Clearwater Lane and The Sussex Border Path will have panoramic views of the eastern edge of Scaynes Hill village within the wider rural context. The existing topography including the study site is a key design constraint if visually intrusive development is to be avoided.
- 8.6 There will be disturbance from construction traffic and engineering works during parking works but once complete the proposed development will have an internal parking layout visually containing vehicle movement with outer structural landscape features.

Landscape impact assessment

- 8.7 The magnitude of the landscape 'effect' from the proposal should take account of the previous land use on a site with limited remaining natural features apart from the outer field hedgerows and damp grassland. Noting the elevated village setting, the proposed development extent and enclosure treatment will require careful design.

- 8.8 The proposal will require a transition zone between the village settlement extension and the wider countryside and Lower Weald. A new reinforced green infrastructure treatment including the use of mixed age street trees, communal orchard and pond, native screening and enclosure with improved marginal habitat will be adopted. A site management company will be established by planning condition for all the communal and boundary areas to ensure full establishment of the proposed landscape enclosure. The cumulative effect will deliver a proposal of initially **moderately significant** landscape impact particularly at the western end of the site. This will diminish with the new landscape structure establishment along the outer boundary.

Visual impact assessment

- 8.9 The assessment of the visual impact of the proposal is taken by selecting the key viewpoints into the study site as set out in sect 3.9-3.11. I describe the likely degree of visibility of the proposal and assess their impact against the GLVIA criteria (**Appendix C**).

- 8.10 My selected viewpoints are indicated on the attached OS reference plan with the visual appraisal (**Appendix D**). **To be completed subject to an indicative residential layout being promoted in the DPD.**

- 8.11 *Viewpoints 1- 2 - Church Road*

- 8.12 *Viewpoints 3 - 6 - North west boundary.*

- 8.13 *Viewpoints 7 - 8 - Clearwater Lane*

9.0 Mitigation

- 9.1 Taking account of the existing planning policy and landscape constraints, if the study site were to be developed sensitively for potential residential development then **moderate landscape mitigation** would be necessary. This would be concentrated principally on the lower southern and eastern section of the site bordering the open countryside . It is assumed that the entrance will not require major alteration and therefore minimal change to public view.

9.2 In order to maintain and enhance the existing site character, natural landscape features would need to dominate and enclose engineering works. The existing outer boundaries of the site would require appropriate landscape protection, management and enhancement. The lower site will require green infrastructure improvements by considered landscape boundary enhancement. This will then provide a long-term all year round screen and transition zone between the wider countryside setting and the development proposal. **(This should include a long-term management plan including a suitable drainage system, native mixed-age screen planting and improved boundary habitat.)**

9.3 The outer boundaries and associated marginal habitats will require routine management and appropriate access. Landscape mitigation will include **tree and hedgerow buffer planting/ management and margin reinstatement with new fencing** to maintain the site character. **Ecological management proposals will also be adopted for the boundary habitat, pond management and communal orchards.**

9.4 The new development layout will include a landscape strategy to link and integrate the new land use with the existing outer landscape framework/ green infrastructure. A combination of boundary enhancement with appropriate hard and soft landscape design will form the basis of the new development.

9.5 The following mitigation measures form an integral part of the development in order to limit landscape and visual impacts.

- Retention of key existing vegetation in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries).
- Retention of key existing habitats in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries).
- The adoption of a landscape strategy and long-term Landscape Management Plan.
- Sustainable drainage landscape design to ensure water quality and cost effective site management.

10.0 **Assessment of Effects**

10.1 **Landscape Impacts** - Overall there would be landscape and visual impacts as a result of alterations to the landscape during the development period. **To be completed subject to an indicative residential layout being promoted in the DPD.**

- 10.2 As the proposal site is an elevated edge of settlement location it has the potential to result in moderate landscape impact resulting from the construction works and extended land use. This would include the site clearance and construction phases.
- 10.3 The site clearance works will involve the removal of a limited number of poor inner trees to set out the new layout, subject to a tree condition survey.
- 10.4 The construction phase will involve construction traffic, site setup and the normal construction site activity.
- 10.5 The landscape engineering management plan will include an enabling works programme to ensure an appropriate SUDS drainage scheme is installed to filter any surface water runoff before any discharge into the local system and compliance with all EA requirements.
- 10.6 A key element in the drainage scheme will be the porous hardstanding design to be used in the proposed development. Care will be taken in detailed drainage engineering design to minimise the impact on existing tree root protection areas.
- 10.7 Soil levels to be reviewed subject to drainage requirements (see the engineering report).
- 10.8 **Visual Context and Existing Views** - Existing mature vegetation, landform and settlement obscure wider views of the site, but the site is partially visible locally from the immediate boundary roadside and adjacent properties.
- 10.9 The proposal site and the mature existing hedgerow to the front boundary mean that existing direct public views into the site are limited to the vehicular entrance. Potential views of the proposals are described below.
- 10.10 *Church Road* – The vehicular entrance location will remain with any highway improvements limited to new signage and resurfacing.
- 10.11 *NW boundary* – The rear boundary screening will be enhanced by new mixed-age native tree and hedge planting outside any fencing required.
- 10.12 *Clearwater Lane* - The southern boundary is already filtered by foreground hedgerows. Any additional boundary outer planting will further soften the potential impact of any residential development.
- 10.13 The new inner treatment will include permeable hard landscape finishes to minimise drainage impact.

- 10.14 The long-term management plan proposed will improve the setting by the management of boundary vegetation, by reinforcing the tree screening element in the new landscape strategy and improving the bio-diversity value of the wider countryside setting. In addition, the future management company will adopt an ecological management regime that will create an appropriate transition zone between the development and the Low Weald context. The overall principle of restore, manage and enhance is encouraged by MSDC and an enabling works landscape programme for this site will be agreed as part of the planning proposal.
- 10.15 To summarise, the proposed development will have a potential **short-term moderately adverse impact** on the character of the site. This is largely on account of the potential visual impact of the proposed houses, access drive and parking while the reinforcement mixed native screen planting and boundary enhancement is undertaken. In the long term there will be a 'moderate beneficial impact' effect to the majority of my selected views. Once the long-term management plan takes effect then a richer habitat will be created that will enhance the character of the local area as set out in the MSDC 'Area 10 High Weald Fringes' landscape character area.

11.00 Residual Impacts

- 11.01 Once constructed to an agreed site layout and engineering/ landscape specification, the key ongoing element affecting the landscape impact will be the Landscape Management Plan. The main features of this plan will include
- the site improvements comprising mature boundary tree, hedgerow and undergrowth management with arboricultural issues addressed.
 - the improved green infrastructure scheme managed locally to promote marginal species, bio-diversity and ecological benefits with wildlife corridor links.
 - the new development landscape designed to use green links to integrate housing, parking and access successfully into the wider local context. Opportunity for further visual screening by mixed-age native planting and new hedgerow planting will be taken to incorporate the new layout with the local landscape character.
 - management operations to be agreed with the owners and any special landscape drainage features necessary to maintain the optimum soil quality and growing conditions to support the native habitat and improve green infrastructure.

12.00 Conclusion

- 12.01 The assessment identifies that the development will be visible from limited public locations to the north west and south of the proposal. The impacts resulting have been classed as **short-term moderately adverse**. These will revert to a **no-change** effect as the mitigation proposals establish and eventually have a **moderately beneficial** impact. Close views are limited to the properties bordering the north western section of the site.
- 12.02 With sensitive landscape and engineering design the character of the site is respected with built form broken up visually by strong landscape enclosure utilising mature tree screening and new mixed-age framework planting.
- 12.03 The long-term Management Plan will guide the establishment of the reinforced landscape screen and improved boundary habitat. With the inclusion of appropriate surface water drainage including informal ponds the landscape framework/ green infrastructure will provide a practical transition zone that allows new species to establish.
- 12.04 The proposal will initially have a slightly adverse impact on the character of the site. However, this impact will be localised and will be for a temporary period only. Once the long-term management plan is implemented then there is a vision for the successful integration of the proposed development into the local community and an enhancement of the WBC 'Area 10 High Weald Fringes' Landscape Character Area.
- 12.05 The setting of the wider countryside and Low Weald will be respected by the new development. Views will be enhanced by the creation of a new landscape infrastructure around any agreed proposals.

Appendix

- A Location Plan – OS plan incl topography
- B Aerial photograph
- C Criteria for visual impact assessment (GLVIA v3 2013)
- D Landscape Photographic Appraisal
- E Indicative landscape parameter plan.