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25/11/20

DM/20/2877

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For the attention of: Mr. A. Watt

Description: Outline application for single chapel crematorium with a single abated cremator and natural burial site with associated access, car parking, landscaping and drainage. All matters reserved apart from access.

Location: Turners Hill Burial Ground, Turners Hill Road, Turners Hill, West Sussex RH10 4BP

With reference to your letter asking for comments on the above application, I have now had the opportunity to consider the application and offer the following comments on landscape issues.

Please note that the advice given to Mid Sussex District Council by the County Landscape Architect is given as part of a service level agreement between East Sussex County Council and Mid Sussex and is not a statutory consultation response. The weight to be given to the content of these responses is a matter for the Local Planning Authority.

1.0 Summary Recommendation

Recommend for refusal	It is recommended that the application is not supported as the proposed scale of the development and intensity of use would have an unacceptable impact on local landscape character and views.
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2.0 Reason for Recommendation

2.1 The NPPF Section 15 provides policies for conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 170 states that:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- a) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- b) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
- c) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and*
- d) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.*

2.2 The NPPF Section 12, Paragraph 130 requires that:

'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents'.

If permitted the proposed development would need to incorporate suitable landscape mitigation measures to ensure that it would meet the design requirements of the NPPF. This would include appropriate design details for the building as well as external hard works and planting.

2.3 The site is not within the High Weald AONB however, it is immediately adjacent to the boundary which is Turners Hill Road.

2.4 The Mid Sussex District Plan does not designate specific areas for their landscape character and qualities. In accordance with Natural England guidance the district does have a Landscape Character Assessment which identifies areas of distinct character across the district. Development proposals for the site would need to be assessed for the impact on the key landscape characteristics and sensitivities of the site and surrounding area.

Landscape and Visual Context

2.5 The proposed development is supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment or LVIA (Indigo Landscape Architects, August 2020). This report provides an accurate description of the baseline landscape and visual context for the site and surrounding area. The methodology for the assessment is based on recognised good practice.

2.6 The site and surrounding area are located within the High Weald National Character Area (HWNCA) and the key characteristics of this area are contained within the LVIA Appendix F.

The HWNCA encompasses the High Weald AONB and in places the HWNCA extends beyond the boundaries of the AONB, this is the case with the application site. These areas of the HWNCA are of similar geology, topography and land cover to areas within the AONB and provide the setting and a landscape buffer to the AONB landscape.

- 2.7 The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (MSLCA) places the site within the High Weald landscape character area and the key characteristics of this area are contained within the LVIA Appendix F. As with the HWNCA this character area extends beyond the boundaries of the AONB and incorporates the site and surrounding area. The character of the area between Turners Hill Road and the village is very similar to that of the adjacent AONB. This landscape does support key components which are representative of the AONB, such as the ghyll woodland of Butchers Wood, the strong field pattern of irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and a rolling topography. In this context walkers on the local footpaths and users of the road network would not notice the transition from the AONB landscape into that of the site and surrounding area.
- 2.8 The LVIA does note that the assessment of potential effects is based on assumptions regarding the detailed design and layout. This would presumably include the design and scale of the building, the layout of parking areas and earthworks. The final detailed scheme could be significantly different to that described in the submitted plans and this would bring into question the conclusions regarding potential landscape and visual effects on local views and specific elements of landscape character such as topography, sense of place and tranquillity. As the proposed development is in outline these landscape comments are based on the worst-case scenario.

Potential landscape and visual effects

- 2.9 There would be significant and long term adverse visual effects from Public footpath 68w where it crosses the site between viewpoints 3 and 5. The LVIA identifies that the visual effect on viewpoint 3 would be substantial adverse in year 1 reducing to neutral adverse on maturation of the proposed planting. The assessment of viewpoint 4 is substantial adverse year one reducing to neutral and viewpoint 5 major adverse reducing to neutral. A neutral visual effect assumes that the magnitude of effect (LVIA Table D: Visual effect significance matrix) would be neutral by year 15. Sections of the footpath would have permanent views towards the development through access routes and clearings. From these areas the visual impact is likely to be significant and adverse in the long term. There would be close views to the crematorium building and other parts of the proposed development including access roads and car parking.
- 2.10 The proposed mitigating woodland planting for the extent of this path through the site would change the experience of walkers from open views across countryside to enclosed woodland. This could be oppressive compared with the experience of a mosaic of open and enclosed views for users of this path. This assessment does not consider the impact of completely enclosing the footpath with vegetation and concealing the open vistas currently enjoyed across the site.
- 2.11 It is acknowledged that the visual impacts would be restricted to the local area, as indicated by the zone of visual influence mapping and viewpoint panoramas. There are likely to be long term adverse visual impacts on the AONB immediately to the south of the site from Turners Hill Road. There would be negligible visual impacts on the wider AONB landscape.
- 2.12 The LVIA concludes that the overall visual effects of the proposed development would be substantial and major adverse on completion of the development reducing to slight adverse/neutral by year 15 when the proposed mitigating planting has matured. This is relying on the implementation of a landscape masterplan which would provide heavily wooded areas to

the north and west of the proposed development. Detailed comments regarding the appropriateness of the proposed landscape mitigation are provided below.

- 2.13 The proposed development would be greater in scale and extent than the extant permissions. The proposed crematorium would require a larger building set deeper into the countryside with extensive hard surfaced areas for car parking and access roads. The requirement for a larger building and a much larger car park would suggest that the activity associated with a crematorium would be more intense than that for the consented natural burial ground and chapel. The impact on relative tranquillity and local sense of place would be greater than the consented development.
- 2.14 The LVIA concludes that the overall impact on local landscape character would be moderate adverse on completion reducing to slight adverse at year 15. This assessment identifies that the site is of high landscape sensitivity (section 5.4) and that the magnitude of effect would be medium to low. Policy THP8 of the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to ensure that development does not have a detrimental impact on areas of substantial landscape value and sensitivity. Whilst the site would be unlikely to be considered valued landscape in the context of the NPPF it is assessed to be of high sensitivity by the LVIA.
- 2.15 The LVIA methodology, Table Y: Overall effect on landscape character, sets out the following:

Magnitude of Effect	Criteria for assessing magnitude of landscape effects on overall landscape character
Medium-High adverse	The proposals are very damaging to overall landscape / townscape character in that they would cause major loss of, or major alteration to, key components of the baseline landscape / townscape.
Medium adverse	The proposals are damaging to overall landscape/ townscape character in that they would cause partial loss of, or moderate alteration to, key components of the baseline landscape / townscape.
Medium-Low adverse	The proposals are slightly damaging to overall landscape / townscape character in that they would cause minor loss of, or slight alteration to, key components of the baseline landscape / townscape.
Low Adverse	The proposals cause minimal damage to overall landscape / townscape character in that they would cause very minor loss or alteration to key components of the baseline landscape / townscape.

- 2.16 Paragraph 7.4.3 of the LVIA concludes that the magnitude of effect would be medium to low adverse in the short term reducing to low adverse in the medium to long term. The significance of effect on a landscape of high sensitivity is assessed as moderate adverse reducing to slight adverse in the long term (using the application of Table Z: Landscape effect significance matrix). This assessment understates the level of change that would occur due to the proposed development. The introduction of a complex access road and car parking for 109 vehicles would be a considerable change to this countryside site. The creation of 109 car parking spaces and the associated access roads would require extensive levelling and re-profiling of the site topography. The crematorium building would have a floor area considerably larger than the combined footprint of the permitted chapel and reception building. The LVIA conclusions do not fully assess the impact of the development on the

sense of place of a relatively tranquil green field site which is rural in character. The change to the character of the landscape would therefore be more likely to have a medium-high adverse magnitude of effect on a landscape of high sensitivity which would result in a substantial adverse effect on completion reducing to major adverse in the longer term.

- 2.17 The LVIA concludes that as the crematorium building would be set back further from the road than the approved chapel the therefore overall impacts would be lower than for the permitted development. In the previous permitted appeal decision (DM/17/1167) the Inspector concluded that the proposed development would be acceptable as it would concentrate development close to the road and permitted carpark.
- 2.18 The impact on tranquillity of at least two funerals a day would introduce considerably more vehicle and people movements than the permitted development. The LVIA suggests that these components would not be uncharacteristic of the surrounding landscape. This is an underassessment of the potential impact of large numbers of people, cars and activity around the crematorium building. This increased activity adjacent to the AONB boundary could have an adverse impact on the tranquillity of the AONB in the vicinity of the site.
- 2.19 The site area is part of the landscape character of the surrounding countryside and the High Weald character area. The scale and significance of effects on the site itself are relevant to the potential impact on the local landscape character. The fact that a development cannot be seen from public vantage points in the wider area should not be considered a reason for development. Much of the wealden countryside is enclosed as a network of small-scale fields in a strong hedgerow framework. The assumption that because a site is not widely visible or that the proposed development would not impact on the character of the wider landscape should not be a presumption in favour of development. The application site is in fact elevated and sits on an open ridgetop which is an integral part of the surrounding rolling landscape. In this context the potential adverse impact of the development on the site and immediate surroundings would be locally significant.
- 2.20 The proposed development would have an adverse impact on the intrinsic character and beauty of the local countryside. It is for the Local Planning Authority to consider the weight that this is given in relation to other considerations including need.

Proposed mitigation

- 2.21 The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (MSLCA) places the site within the High Weald Forest Ridge landscape character area. One of the key issues identified for this area is the lack of management of existing woodland areas.
- 2.22 The following Land Management Guidelines, taken from the MSLCA, for this character area are relevant to the site and surrounding area:
- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the woodland and agricultural landscape for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes.
 - Extend existing woodland areas rather than creating new woodland features, reinforcing existing, distinctive landscape patterns.
- 2.23 The LVIA Appendix G contains landscape masterplans for the extant permissions. These include illustrative landscape proposals for the permitted developments associated with the natural burial ground, Lizard Landscapes LLD787/02, and planting plan hla 359 01, associated with the chapel. The latter is the more recent permission and indicates woodland planting around the periphery of the site and groups of trees around the chapel and car parks. The landscape masterplan for the permitted development would provide a more varied mosaic of tree planting to the site boundaries and retain open meadow areas. In both extant permissions the proposed woodland planting is less extensive than

in the current application. In the current application the woodland planting would extend further east across the site to the north of the proposed crematorium. This would mask the character of the existing open fieldscape and would not maintain the historic landscape pattern. The LVIA visual assessment suggests that this planting is primarily intended to screen the proposed development from the surrounding areas. The long-term management of these woodland areas would need to be secured so as not to add to the issue of inadequately managed woodland in the LCA outlined above.

- 2.24 With reference to the proposed woodland planting as mitigation and screening enclosure from wider views and the local footpath network. The LVIA describes the proposed planting in Paragraph 6.2.26/27 as follows:

Significant structural woodland planting would be undertaken on the crematorium site (south of footpath 68W) as part of the establishment part of the scheme. Structural woodland planting would also be undertaken as part of the natural burial part of the establishment phase of the scheme, however the majority of 'memorial' planting would be undertaken in a phased approach over a number of years.

The descriptions for implementation of woodland planting and memorial planting are distinctly different. The woodland planting is of smaller feathered native trees or whips about 2.5 m in height planted one per square metre. This is very dense and would usually be specified to create a woodland screen, as is suggested for the Turners Road frontage. The proposed memorial planting is of larger specimens planted at 4.5 and 6m in height and no spacing is indicated for how far apart they would be planted.

- 2.25 The approved landscape drawing for application DM/15/1035 and drawing LLD787/04 indicates trees planted 3m apart and in a matrix with gaps between the groups of trees. The Landscape Design Strategy and Outline Plant Specification (Lizard Landscapes, December 2014) states that:

'The proposals should include the planting of native species tree group trees and intermittent scattered trees to the southern and western boundaries. Native species tree planting should be implemented to the car park planting bays further diffusing and containing views made toward the proposed development.' The annotation on this drawing is that *'The Natural Burial Ground proposals include the planting of a woodland extending across the site over time.'*

The implication for the memorial planting associated with the natural burial ground is that the planting would extend across the site over time and would not be planted at day 1. This is not consistent with the typical specification for woodland planting which is intended to provide a landscape screen. Woodland screen planting as mitigation would usually be comprised of trees and understorey shrubs. By contrast the memorial tree planting associated with the natural burial ground would be individual specimen trees.

- 2.26 The Phase 1 drawing (917-MP-02) for the current application indicates woodland planting across phase 1 and 2 of the site which would appear much denser than the memorial planting of individual trees spaced apart. The memorial type of planting can be seen in the aerial views of both Clayton Wood and Ham Down natural burial grounds. On the ground at Clayton Wood there are clear views through the trees and across the site. This is of a different character to that of the proposed woodland screen planting.

- 2.27 It is appreciated that the detailed landscape planting scheme can be dealt with by condition. However, the conclusions of the LVIA regarding the assessed landscape and

visual effects rely heavily on the provision of woodland planting to screen the development.

Previous Appeal Decisions DM/17/1167

- 2.28 The Inspector for the above appeal concluded that the chapel located close to and parallel to the road would concentrate activity close to the permitted car park. The current application would push the development deep into the site. He also considered that the modest scale of the chapel would not undermine the rural landscape character of the site and surroundings.
- 2.29 The Inspector for the earlier dismissed appeal DM/16/1887 for houses on this site concluded that landscaping should not be used to hide an otherwise unacceptable large-scale development.

Conclusion

- 2.30 It is recommended that the application is not supported as the proposed scale of the development and intensity of use would have an unacceptable impact on local landscape character and views.

Yours Sincerely,

Virginia Pullan CMLI
County Landscape Architect
East Sussex County Council