

Landscape Summary Proof of Evidence

In Respect of Outline Planning Application with all Matters Reserved Except for Access, for up to 80 Dwellings with Associated Landscaping, Open Space, Infrastructure and Vehicular and Pedestrian Accesses

At Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

On behalf of Miller Homes Limited

Date: 29 June 2026 | Pegasus Ref: P25-2536

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Contents.

1. Witness Particulars	3
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1. Summary and Conclusions

Witness Particulars

- 1.1. My name is Andrew Cook, and I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography (BA Hons) and a Masters Degree in Landscape Design (MLD). I am a Chartered Landscape Architect, Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI), Chartered Environmentalist (C Env) and Member of the Institute of Sustainability & Environmental Professionals (MISEP) (formerly known as IEMA). I am one of the founding Executive Directors of Pegasus Group, which was established in 2003, and I am also the National Head of Environment team. Since then, the company has grown, establishing sixteen offices across the UK, employing approximately 600 planning and environmental planning professionals and staff. The company is a corporate member of the Institute of Sustainability & Environmental Professionals (MISEP) (formerly known as IEMA) and was a founding member of IEMA's Quality Mark scheme, under my direction.

Introduction

- 1.2. I am instructed on behalf of Miller Homes Limited, thereafter referred to as the appellant, to present evidence relating to landscape and visual matters in respect of the appeal, submitted pursuant to Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, concerning development of Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex ("the site" or "appeal site"). This evidence should be read in conjunction with the proofs prepared by Nick Billington regarding Planning (CD9.1), Julian Forbes-Laird regarding Arboriculture (CD9.3), Lyndsey Barrett regarding Ecology (CD9.8) and Jonathan Smith regarding Heritage (CD9.5) matters to gain an understanding of landscape and visual matters in the round.
- 1.3. I was not instructed to consider this matter until after the application was refused. I was specifically asked to advise whether I could professionally support the proposed scheme, and if so, whether I would be willing to provide evidence to the inquiry. I can confirm that before accepting the instructions I considered the papers, visited the site, and specifically considered of the relevant the work submitted on behalf of the appellant in support of the application as well as the views of the officers of the Council, and where relevant, the views of third parties – I thereafter confirmed that I was willing to act, and accepted instructions in this matter.
- 1.4. Subsequent to starting to draft my Proof, I understand that the Council have now withdrawn their first Reason for Refusal with regard to alleged harm to the rural character of the area. I also note that the Rule 6 Party do not allege any unacceptable harm with regard to landscape character from a visual appearance or residential visual amenity. Notwithstanding their positions with regard to these matters, I am aware that this is a Public Inquiry that is now scheduled to be heard before a Planning Inspector and accordingly I have proceeded to address matters relating to landscape character and landscape and visual matters to enable to Inspector to be fully informed in coming to a decision with regard to the proposed scheme.

Description of the Proposals

- 1.5. A detailed description of the proposals is set out in the application documentation, including the Planning Statement (CD1.4) and the Design and Access Statement (DAS) (CD1.5). It is also set out at the start of the Officer's Report to Committee (CD3.3) and addresses the

landscape matters in particular. I rely upon these detailed descriptions rather than repeating this information. Fully conversant with the proposals, I have set out my analysis and professional judgement.

- 1.6. The site of the planning application lies to the south of North Colwell Farmhouse and comprises of three irregular open greenfield parcels, which are separated by belts of hedges and woodland.
- 1.7. The proposed access lies within the built-up area of Haywards Heath, with the wider application site for the dwellings within the countryside as defined in the District and Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.8. The site benefits from extensive woodland around the boundaries with trees and hedges also within the site. Beyond the southern boundary is Ancient Woodland. To the north of the site are residential properties and their gardens which form linear ribbon development along Lewes Road. These are comprised of large, detached dwellings. To the north is the Lewes Road Conservation Area. In addition, there is a Grade II listed property of Colwell House
- 1.9. The site is allocated as a local gap within the Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan (HHNP) (CD5.5).
- 1.10. Further to the west is a public right of way (HAH/29CU/2) which runs north to south. This is separated from the site by the neighbouring garden and other land outside of the application site. This footpath is well screened and there is no intervisibility.
- 1.11. This application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of up to 80 dwellings, with associated landscaping, open space, infrastructure and vehicular and pedestrian accesses, on land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. It is the means of access that is to be determined at the outline stage, with landscaping, appearance, layout and scale to be determined in a subsequent reserved matters application.
- 1.12. The application is supported by parameter plans, an illustrative masterplan and an indicative landscape proposal (Appendix 2). These show how the internal layout of the site could be configured to accommodate the development that has been applied for. The plans show a new vehicular point of access onto the Lewes Road, which is to be fixed and determined at the outline stage.
- 1.13. The residential scheme includes a comprehensive landscaping scheme (Appendix 2) comprised of planting which would deliver a net gain in overall vegetation, more than offsetting the limited loss of tree cover to accommodate access to the site. The proposed green infrastructure is designed to help soften the appearance of the residential scheme within the landscape, and the benefits of this would increase over time, commensurate with vegetation growth rates. The proposed planting would mitigate some of the adverse landscape and visual effects associated with the residential scheme. I consider that the green infrastructure proposed would be beneficial.

Effects on Landscape Elements and Landscape Character of the Site

- 1.14. Whilst significant parts of the site would change from being undeveloped to developed, it is important to note that the scheme would result in some beneficial effects with regard to the

landscape elements that currently define the landscape character of the site. The site would change from pastoral fields to a high-quality design residential neighbourhood set within an attractive, substantial landscape framework. The elements that currently contribute to defining the character of the site, namely trees, shrubbery and hedgerows, would all be strengthened and form more prominent elements in the medium and longer term, but I recognise this would be in the context of a new residential neighbourhood.

- 1.15. Collectively, if one draws the different elements of the site together, it defines the overall character of the site itself. In summary, the site is characterised by field boundaries but is influenced visually by the adjacent dwellings and Lewes Road. The site is framed to the north by residential areas and by the highway, Lewes Road which introduces substantial urbanising influences. The site, in terms of its character, forms an urban fringe of Haywards Heath settlement environment.
- 1.16. The scheme would introduce a high-quality residential built environment which would be in keeping with the local settlement and character area, in particular, the local Conservation Area, and therefore, would not be at odds or out of character or appearance with its context. However, adopting a precautionary approach, the proposals would result in an overall adverse effect in landscape character terms. The proposal would however accommodate extensive new green infrastructure which would replace several pastoral fields and again change this character of the site to be more representative of the local landscape character area and therefore would result in some beneficial effects at the site level.
- 1.17. The boundaries of the site are on the whole, framed by a combination of built form and mature vegetation, which provide a sense of visual containment and enclosure associated with the site. Indeed, the strong extent of enclosure is notable.
- 1.18. Some existing residential curtilages are close to the site's northern boundary which creates a sense of physical and visual connection between the current settlement edge of Haywards Heath and adjacent northern parts of the site.
- 1.19. At the site level, with a **medium susceptibility** (given its urban fringe character), **value** and **sensitivity** combined with a **high magnitude of change** would result in an overall **major (adverse)** effect in landscape character terms which would be highly localised to the site and its immediate visual environs; quickly diminishing to **negligible** beyond this extent.

Effect on Landscape Character

- 1.20. The northern half of the site and the surrounding area of Haywards Heath is located within the National Character Area 122 High Weald. The southern half of the site and the area to its south are located within the National Character Area 121 Low Weald.
- 1.21. The overall key characteristics reveal a settled and farmed landscape with many specific references to built infrastructure and individual settlements. This NE document is inevitably a high-level character assessment, which provides a useful overview by which to understand the character of the local landscape and its surroundings. At this higher level, it is considered that the scheme would bring about negligible change (medium sensitivity combined with negligible magnitude) to the key characteristics of this NCA beyond the site. At this National Character Area level, this landscape would have a medium susceptibility and a medium value resulting in a medium sensitivity, which combined with a negligible change of magnitude, would result in a negligible degree of effect as a consequence of the scheme being in place.

The proposal would be in-keeping with the character of the adjacent settlement and would be in accordance with this Natural England landscape strategy.

- 1.22. All of these key defining characteristics would continue to remain and prevail beyond the immediate visual environs of the site where effects would effectively be negligible. It is accepted 3 small fields would be lost to accommodate the proposals.
- 1.23. The Mid Sussex District Council published a Landscape Character Assessment for the district in November 2005. Part 3 identifies 10 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) defined in the district and the descriptions are followed by an evaluation based on key issues for change and landscape and visual sensitivities, and the evaluation concludes with a management objective and land management guidelines for each area.
- 1.24. These Landscape Character Areas are illustrated on the Landscape Character Plan at Appendix 3. The site and its immediate surrounding environs fall within the High Weald Fringes (LCA ref no. 10).
- 1.25. The High Weald Fringes LCA 10 starts on internal pg. 106 and provides a summary of the character of the area within which the site and environs lies along with the key defining characteristics of the landscape.
- 1.26. All of these key defining characteristics would continue to remain and prevail beyond the immediate visual environs of the site where effects would effectively be negligible.
- 1.27. As previously described, the character of the site is formed by gently sloping pastures, mature trees and field boundary hedgerows. The site is strongly enclosed by woodland and native hedgerows on all boundaries, which provide some visual separation between the site and surrounding countryside. The southern boundary is slightly more open, where some existing residences at the edge of Haywards Heath are afforded views over the site and to the far side of the valley. The character of the site is influenced by adjacent residential development to the north.
- 1.28. The site is not covered by any designation that recognises a specific landscape or scenic importance. The site contains some elements of value, namely the boundary hedgerows and trees which provide some physical connectivity to the wider landscape beyond its boundaries. It is considered therefore, that the landscape value of the site is medium.
- 1.29. Overall, as an area of settlement fringe agricultural pastureland type with a medium value and medium susceptibility, the character of the site is therefore considered to be of medium sensitivity.
- 1.30. The proposed development would result in an inevitable change to the character of the site. Effects relate to a change in the current land use from undeveloped fields to residential development with associated green infrastructure. It is acknowledged, however, that the proposed layout means that the site would retain most of its valuable features in the form of boundary woodland and hedgerows and individually important trees. Overall, as stated previously, the magnitude of change within the site is assessed as high, resulting in major adverse effects overall, noting that this effect would be highly localised and would diminish rapidly to negligible beyond the immediate visual environs of the site.
- 1.31. As far as landscape character is concerned, I acknowledge that the site itself would see some considerable change from several pastoral fields. However, the baseline that needs to be

taken into account here is that the proposed scheme is framed by housing to the north. No significant off-site works are proposed, and as such, the character of the local landscape beyond the site in both physical and experiential terms would remain materially unchanged with the scheme in place.

- 1.32. I recognise that the scheme would bring about an inevitable change to the character of the application site itself, however, such a change would, in physical terms, be confined within the application site boundaries. Off site, the pattern of the land cover, woodland and hedge cover and agricultural mix, undulating topography, and Haywards Heath's settlement pattern as identified in the various published reports, would all continue and prevail with the scheme in place. Consequently, it is considered that those key characteristics of the wider landscape and settlement beyond the application site boundary as identified above would be physically unaffected with the scheme in place. It is only the experiential factors of character, both visual and audible elements that would be influenced to some limited degree within the visual environs of the site. The scheme would not change the broad character of the wider area as the 'settled agricultural scene', which would continue to prevail with the scheme in place. The sensitive design of the proposed scheme would reflect the local settlement character of Haywards Heath. Any such effects would be highly localised, therefore.
- 1.33. With regard to the site itself, it is currently pastoral land. The boundary of the site is framed by a combination of mature hedgerows and woodland, which provides a strong sense of visual containment and enclosure associated with the site. The site does accommodate some features such as trees and hedgerows, which contribute to the defining characteristics of the locality, but all of these elements would be retained, and their presence reinforced with the green infrastructure proposals forming an integral part of the scheme.

Effect on Countryside Local Gap

- 1.34. I note that Policy E5 refers to land outside the built up area that has been designated as a local gap between Haywards Heath and neighbouring towns in order to create a landscape buffer. The purpose of this buffer is to support and enhance ecological connectivity, to maintain the landscape character of the area, and to maintain the individual settlements. I would note the proposed scheme would continue to support and provide the opportunity to enhance ecological connectivity through the site and neighbouring area. The proposal would also maintain the landscape character of the area beyond the site itself and it would maintain the individual identity of Haywards Heath as being separate and distinct from other neighbouring settlements. Furthermore, the proposed scheme would not unduly erode the landscape character of the area. Neither would it harm the setting of the town.
- 1.35. I note that the concept of setting has to be capable of being appreciated in a landscape and visual context. The site is not capable of being appreciated from either the public areas within the town and settlement itself, nor from the adjacent countryside, as it is completely contained and framed by woodland, tree cover and vegetation, so would not have a bearing upon the perceived setting of the town of Haywards Heath. Furthermore, the proposal would retain and enhance the separate identities of the neighbouring settlements.
- 1.36. The site is located on the south-eastern edge of Haywards Heath. In this location, the countryside is designated as a Green Corridor, as well as Countryside Area of Development Restraint, as shown in Appendix 12. These designations extend across the site and neighbouring administrations, particularly to the south as far as the district boundary. The district boundary in this location follows a small watercourse through Cains Wood. South of

this watercourse lies Lewes District. In the Lewes District Local Plan (2020), all of the countryside in the northern part of the district in the vicinity of the site is designated as countryside policies which includes an array of policies related to this rural area, as set out and illustrated in Appendix 12. The countryside policies in both district authorities are not specifically referenced as Local Gap Policies, but the references to Local Gap in Policy E5 is used in the context of common parlance rather than a specific designation. The countryside designation in the Lewes district extends far and wide as an extensive policy washing over the whole of its northern district.

- 1.37. Approximately 1km to the east of the site and Haywards Heath lies the village of Scaynes Hill. The separation between this settlement and Haywards Heath is approximately 1km and the physical and perceived sense of separation between these two settlements would not change the proposed scheme in place. Due south of the site and Haywards Heath at an approximate distance of 3km lies the villages of Wivelsfield, alongside Wivelsfield Green. Given the substantial separation of 3km, the proposal would not materially affect the physical and perceived sense of separation between Haywards Heath and these two villages with the proposed scheme in place.
- 1.38. I consider that the proposed scheme would not conflict with Policy E5 of the Neighbourhood Plan when read in the round, in light of my analysis.

Effect on General Visual Amenity

- 1.39. To reiterate, character and appearance are two different aspects.
- 1.40. It is evident from the general conclusions of the LVIA and the visual analysis I have undertaken for this proof that the proposed development would be visually well screened due to surrounding woodland, tree cover and the settlement of Haywards Heath to the north. The proposed development would be set within 3 existing fields where field boundaries are demarcated by established and mature hedges, tree hedges and woodland. As such, substantial tree cover frames the whole of the site. Based on the agreed viewpoints, it is evident that the proposed scheme would be well contained as a result of topographical variation in the local landscape, vegetation screening including hedgerows, woodland and tree cover, roadside vegetation, as well as existing residential areas framing the site to the north. The only views of the proposal would be from a few residential properties on the south side of Lewes Road. More distant views across the wider landscape towards the site would not be possible. The majority of the identified and assessed viewpoints and receptors would not be subject to any visual effect.

Effect on Residential Visual Amenity

- 1.41. The Case Officer considered that the proposed development could be accommodated on the site without undue impacts on the existing neighbouring properties, subject to appropriate house types, appropriate land levels and scale, appropriate design, and distances to the northern boundary and to the individual residential units within the site. I have undertaken a site visit and looked at the properties adjacent to the site and reviewed these in the context of the proposed scheme and consider that the proposed scheme would not breach the public interest test with regard to this proposed scheme and is common ground with the Case Officer's Report as set out in this section of my Proof.

Conclusion

- 1.42. For the reasons stated above, it is my view that on landscape and visual grounds there are no substantive reasons for refusing planning permission for the proposed residential scheme on Land North of Colwell Farm, Haywards Heath. Therefore, the Inspector is respectfully requested to uphold the scheme and allow the grant of planning permission as far as landscape and visual issues are concerned as it relates to the appeal scheme.

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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