



**Application ref:** DC/24/0771/OUT

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Eleanor

**Ref: Land North-East of Humber Doucy Lane - Landscape Response**

Thank you for seeking Landscape comments on the above application. I have reviewed the documents submitted and include Landscape comments below:

**Proposal**

The proposal comprises a full planning application for the means of external access/egress to and from the site, with an outline planning application (all matters reserved) for a mixed use development for up to 660 dwellings (Use Class C3), up to 400 sq m (net) of non-residential floorspace falling within Use Class E and/or Use Class F2(b), an Early Years facility, and associated vehicular access and highway works, formal and informal open spaces, play areas, provision of infrastructure (including internal highways, parking, servicing, cycle and pedestrian routes, utilities and sustainable drainage systems), and all associated landscaping and engineering works.

**Policy issues**

***Policy SCLP9.6: Sustainable Drainage Systems***

Sustainable drainage systems should be well integrated into the landscaping scheme and green infrastructure provision of the development, and should contribute to the overall design quality of the scheme. At present, the design of the SuDS swales and basins appears overly engineered, with 1 in 4 gradients meaning they are not comfortably accessible for all. Therefore, I would suggest that the current proposals do not integrate well into the landscape and would not constitute effective multi-functional spaces. If dry grass basins are proposed to be used as accessible open space, they need to have shallower access points (preferably 1 in 21) to allow use of the space. The permanently wet basin could make an attractive ecological feature, however, it is currently too small to provide any meaningful benefits. I would suggest that the SuDS design and layout needs to be revisited, with the input of a landscape architect and ecologist, and a more creative approach should be taken to ensure they are well integrated into the landscape.

***Policy SCLP10.4: Landscape Character***

Proposals for development should be informed by, and sympathetic to, the special qualities and features as described in the Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018) and the

Settlement Sensitivity Assessment (2018). The north-eastern part of the site is located within the *N2 Culpho and Westerfield Rolling Farmland* landscape character area, which comprises the elevated farmland on either side of the Fynn Valley. It is an area of flat and gently rolling farmland studded with oak trees and lined with ancient hedges. Passing over the more open agricultural plateaus, and then down into the wooded valleys, is a key part of the experience of the landscape here. The area also acts as the rural setting to the northern edge of Ipswich, and provides important separation between the town and radial villages. Urban expansion proposals should protect the existing network of hedges and trees, and seek opportunities to link and strengthen it where possible. The site is also located within the IP2 peripheral area, as set out in the Settlement Sensitivity Assessment. The value of this area lies in the strategic role it plays in connecting the urban areas of Ipswich to the rural river valley beyond. There is an opportunity to help soften the urban edge by creating green corridors which penetrate the built-up area, improving access to the wider countryside.

The site currently comprises two agricultural fields separated by the Ipswich Rugby Club sports fields. It is located adjacent to Humber Doucy lane, which marks the current built edge of Ipswich, and creates an abrupt transition between urban and rural. Existing field boundary vegetation helps to screen the site, however, in areas where this has degraded, there are clear views in. In some instances, these gaps in vegetation have become important features, such as along Seven Cottages Lane, where views overlooking the adjacent field contribute to the setting to the Seven Cottages non-designated heritage assets. There are also a number of PRoWs which run adjacent to and through the site, providing access into the countryside to the north. An LVIA has been submitted as part of the application which concludes that site 'is capable of accommodating the proposed development without resulting in significant harm to the surrounding countryside's character or views from the wider area'.

At present, views into the site from the existing built edge constitute rural views which are representative of the wider surrounding countryside and contribute to the landscape setting of Ipswich. The changes that result from the development will be significant and difficult to mitigate completely, due to the fundamental change from rural land to residential development. However, the current built edge is very abrupt, and the development of the site provides the opportunity to introduce a better transition between urban and rural. Therefore, I don't necessarily disagree with the conclusions of the LVIA that effects on landscape character can be reduced to 'moderate adverse', however, I do not think that the current layout would successfully achieve this. Similarly, effects on views into the countryside from Humber Doucy Lane will be significantly changed, and in order to mitigate this, I would suggest that strategic views through to green space and tree cover beyond are provided. I would also note that whilst the two eastern parcels relate reasonably well to the existing developed edge of Ipswich, the western parcel is more isolated, and should be treated as a more rural site with higher sensitivity to change. It is questioned whether, with the inclusion of adequate buffer planting and SuDS drainage, there is space for any meaningful development here. If this is the case, would this area not be more effective if it was used to provide a larger recreational, SANG-type space.

## **General comments**

### ***Design and Layout***

The current road layout introduces a new entrance off Humber Doucy Lane opposite Inverness Road, however, it is agreed that a better location for the main site entrance would be opposite Sidegate Lane. This would provide better pedestrian, cycle and public transport connections into town. The current layout of the main access road through the site is also long and meandering, which results in it crossing multiple green corridors and interrupting pedestrian/cycle routes a number of times. The site frontage along Humber Doucy Lane needs to be treated with sensitivity to try and retain its semi-rural character. The current layout does not provide a large enough area of green space along the southern edge to achieve this, and more space should be provided for new tree planting to mature. A number of the existing oak trees along Humber Doucy Lane appear to be in decline, and the site should provide new oak tree planting along its frontage as succession for when older existing trees are lost. Setting the new development further back into the site would also help to ensure it does not dominate the existing development along Humber Doucy Lane, in particular, the prefab bungalows to the western end.

The site serves as a transition between urban and rural, and the development should help to soften and integrate the existing urban edge with the wider landscape by providing green corridors through the site that connect into the existing PRow network. However, it is also important that larger areas of more useable open space are provided so that recreational space is not limited to linear routes. I do not think that the right balance has been achieved on the site, and the design and layout of open space should be revisited to ensure that different typologies are provided for a range of different activities; larger areas of open space should not just be limited to the peripheral areas of the site. The main interior open space is the 'village green' which is located in the centre of four housing parcels. Firstly, for the size of the development, I would suggest that the central open green space is not large enough. In addition to this, I would suggest that the current road layout here does not ensure the space is properly activated; village greens tend to be bounded on at least one side by the main access road through the settlement, providing visual amenity for those travelling through, and allowing good access and overlooking. The introduction of three storey housing around the 'village green' also makes this space feel enclosed, rather than allowing it to become the open heart of the development, with good views in and out from other parts of the site.

The urban/rural transition is a particularly important element of this site, and the northern buffer should help to deliver this change. However, at present, I would suggest that this area is too pinched in places and needs to be more generous; it is housing a number of different uses including swales, footpaths, and dog off lead areas, and it does not appear to be big enough to accommodate all of this activity whilst effectively transitioning to a more countryside character. The buffer is also important to help protect the heritage assets along the northern boundary, and I would suggest that more space and more planting here would be helpful in achieving appropriate protection. The open space along the northern edge of the site provides a good opportunity for a walking/cycling route to constitute part of the wider Green Trail initiative, however, there is an awkward transition between eastern and western site parcels where users will have to cross Humber Doucy Lane twice to continue along the route. A connection between parcels along the northern edge of Humber

Doucy Lane would be much more effective, and it is questioned whether this could be explored with the current landowner.

### ***Planting***

The majority of the existing boundary vegetation will be retained at the site, which is positive; this includes most of the existing rural hedgerow along Humber Doucy Lane which is a particularly important feature, however, a reasonably large section will need to be removed to provide access into the site. New planting should be provided outside of visibility splays here to retain the existing semi-rural character of the lane. New native trees and shrubs are proposed along the site boundaries, which is appropriate considering that they border the open countryside. Non-native trees can be introduced within the site, especially for use as street trees, however, the current proposed mix is pretty limited considering the number of trees which will be required to create the linear planted avenues that are proposed. Improving species diversity will help to ensure a more resilient urban tree population. There is also room in areas of open space for tree species with a larger mature size; large stature species, such as oak, provide a wide range of ecosystems services. Street tree planting should be considered early on in the process to ensure verges are designed to appropriate widths that provide adequate rooting space. I would just note that the AIA identified a veteran oak tree along Tuddenham Road near the junction with Humber Doucy Lane, and it is suggested that no development takes place within this parcel.

### **Recommendations**

- The majority of peripheral open space is taken up with basins and swales and the SuDS scheme needs further input from a landscape architect and ecologist to ensure effective integration into the landscape and provision of accessible, multi-functional spaces.
- The northern buffer needs to be expanded to provide a more generous space between the new development and the existing heritage assets, and further detail should be provided on how this area will deliver an effective transition between the urban and rural areas.
- The site frontage along Humber Doucy Road is particularly sensitive and further attention is needed to ensure that this area is effective. A larger set back should be provided to ensure that the new built edge does not dominate existing residential properties along Humber Doucy Lane, and the retained hedge and new tree planting have adequate space to mature. The provision of more open space along this frontage would also help to soften views from existing development along Humber Doucy Lane, which currently comprise open countryside with a vegetated backdrop.
- The site entrance should be located opposite Sidegate Lane to maximise sustainable connections to the town, and the access road should be reconfigured to reduce its dominance within the scheme and ensure it does not dissect green corridors wherever possible. Where there is interaction between the road and green space, further information is required to clarify how these interactions will be designed e.g., where a road crosses a key green corridor, will there be pedestrian/cyclist priority to encourage active travel over car use?
- The central open space needs to be revisited to ensure that it will create the proposed 'village green' character. To better activate the space, the main access road should be

included along at least one of the edges, and a rethink of building height and density within this area is required to ensure that the heart of the site feels open and spacious.

- Across the site, more generous areas of open space need to be provided to ensure that recreational space is not limited to linear routes and transitional spaces. Some thought should be given to the typology of spaces which should be provided and how these will interact with built edges.
- Opportunities should be taken to introduce a wider range of tree species within the site, ensuring that species with larger mature sizes are proposed within areas of open space to maximise ecosystems services provision.

Yours sincerely,

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