

Our Ref: 18-2826

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Web: [www.lgluk.com](http://www.lgluk.com)13<sup>th</sup> March 2019**LANDSCAPE SUMMARY NOTE – LAND OFF CROSSBY CLOSE, MOUNTNESSING, ESSEX****Brief**

M Scott Properties Ltd (MSP) have appointed Lockhart Garratt (LG) to assess the approximately 1.22ha site located within the village of Mountnessing, Essex. Specifically, MSP have requested a professional opinion from LG as to whether the site's exclusion from the allocation sites listed within the Reg 19 version of the emerging Local Development Plan, is justified.

LG have also been requested to review the site's Special Landscape Area designation in landscape and visual terms.

**The Site**

The site is located to the south-east of Roman Road (B1002), to the west of the A12 Ingatestone Bypass, within the village of Mountnessing, Essex. The site occupies an approximate area of 1.22ha and is broadly rectangular in shape. The site currently comprises rough grassland with overgrown areas of brambles and nettles.

The site is currently included within the London Green Belt and it is therefore noted that any further assessment will need to consider the effect of the development upon this designation in landscape and visual terms. While it is noted that the site is not included within the Green Belt Study produced to inform the Brentwood Local Plan, LG agrees with the assessments made within the Sustainability Appraisal in this regard. This states that "*Site 073 (1.2ha) [...] would appear to be well contained, with built development or mature tree belts on all sides,*" and the site "*does stand-out as a site that potentially has some merit.*"

The site is included in the Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt - Working Draft (Crestwood Environmental, March 2016). Within Appendices L2, L4 and L5, the report states that the site is well contained and would act as an infill development, has no public access, no/limited relationship with an historic town, and would not cause coalescence with other towns or villages. Therefore the assessment rates the site as having a Low overall contribution to the 5 Green Belt Purposes. LG agrees with the assessments made within this study.

## Assessment of the site in relation to the five purposes of the Green Belt

In order to assess the potential effects arising from the site's development upon the Green Belt it is necessary to test the Site against the five purposes of the Green Belt as set out at paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019); namely:

1. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
2. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
3. To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
4. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
5. To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

With regard to Purpose 1, which is to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, it is not considered that the development of the site in question will have an effect upon this purpose. The site is situated within the existing village of Mountnessing and is bound on all sides by a mixture of mature vegetation structure and built form. Beyond the line of mature trees to the south of the site, lies further built form and the Mountnessing C of E School and associated playing fields. It is therefore considered that the development of the site is contained and will not contribute to the unrestricted sprawl of this area.

With regard to Purpose 2, which is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another, it is not considered the proposed development of the site will contribute to this purpose. As previously stated the site is contained within the existing village of Mountnessing and is bound on all sides by built development. The village of Mountnessing itself is largely contained by Roman Road to the north-west and the A12 Ingatestone Bypass to the south-east. Therefore, it is not considered that the site will contribute to Purpose 2 and the merging of neighbouring towns.

With regard to Purpose 3, which is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, as stated in regards to both Purposes 1 and 2, the site is contained within the existing village of Mountnessing and is bound on all sides by built form and mature vegetation. Therefore, it is not considered that the site will encroach into the surrounding countryside and as such will not contribute to Purpose 3.

With regard to Purpose 4, which is to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, whilst it is noted that the site was previously included within a Special Landscape Area designation, this has since been superseded by the Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Chris Blandford Associates in 2005. Whilst it is noted that there are a number of Listed Buildings within the setting of the site, the majority of these lie along Roman Road, the closest of these being 115m to the south west, located beyond the dense, mature vegetation cover which lines the site's southern boundary. The site is also not situated within the setting of any historic towns. Therefore, it is considered that the site will have no significant effect upon purpose 4.

With regard to Purpose 5, which is to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, this is widely considered to be a general principle to encourage the

preferential siting of development within brownfield sites where these are available, and therefore it is not considered to be relevant to this appraisal.

Considering the above appraisal, which concludes that the development of the site will not result in any significant reduction in the contribution of the site to Purposes 1 to 4 of the Green Belt, it is considered that the removal of the site from the Green Belt is acceptable and will not conflict with national planning policy.

### **The Proposals**

The proposals seek to introduce an area of residential development consisting of approximately 20 age-restricted bungalows onto the site.

### **Landscape Character**

The site lies within the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area (NCA 111) and is sub-categorised within the Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council jointly commissioned Landscape Character Assessment as lying within the Doddinghurst Wooded Farmland Landscape Character Type (LCT F8).

The site is an area of rough grassland within the village of Mountnessing and is bounded on all sides by a combination of mature vegetation structure and built form. The Site is not publicly accessible, nor is it accessible for keeping livestock or for equine purposes. The only access gate into the field is via a private driveway owned by the Mountnessing C of E Primary School. The school notably lies to the south-east of the site, beyond the intervening boundary vegetation. The site is therefore considered to be well contained and characterised by the adjacent settlement.

The site's location close to the infrastructure routes associated with the A12 Ingatestone By-Pass, the Great Eastern Mainline railway to the east, and Roman Road to the west, ensure that the site cannot be considered tranquil in this context due to the road and rail noise attributed to these transport routes.

The site and its setting are considered to be partially representative of the F8 – Doddinghurst Wooded Farmland LCT in terms of the key characteristics of mature trees and small, nucleated villages, although the A12 Ingatestone By-Pass exerts a dominant and urbanising influence. The mature farmland and woodland character of the wider context is not apparent within the Site and its immediate setting.

### **Site's inclusion within a Special Landscape Area (SLA)**

Within the previously adopted Brentwood Replacement Local Plan (2005), Special Landscape Areas are described as *“valuable high quality landscapes which are the result of a combination of natural features such as vegetation cover, relief and presence of water.”*

Policy C8- Special Landscape Areas states:

*“A Landscape Character Assessment should be prepared for the Brentwood Borough Council administrative area, identifying the particular character of the different localities within the countryside. Until such time as an assessment has been completed, Special Landscape Areas, where they are defined in the Local Plan, will be taken to identify areas where, in the interim, conservation or restoration of existing character should be given high priority.”*

Although it is noted that the site was previously contained within a SLA, in October 2005 a Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) for the Brentwood Council in addition to other Essex Authorities, which, as stated within paragraph 9.36 of the currently adopted Brentwood Replacement Local Plan, therefore supersedes the previous Special Landscape Area designations.

It is therefore proposed, that only limited weight can be given to the Special Landscape Area designations referred to within the Jan 2019 Sustainability Appraisal, and that the site should instead be judged against the key features identified within the published landscape character assessment, within which the Site is included within Landscape Character Type (LCT) F8 – Doddinghurst Wooded Farmland. In any case, the evidence presented above demonstrates that the site does not meet the descriptive criteria as set out within the Brentwood Replacement Local Plan on account of its containment within the settlement of Mountnessing and the adverse effects of major infrastructure routes to the east.

### **Review of Historic Evidence Base Documents**

In undertaking a review of the previously published evidence base documents, namely the SHLAA published in October 2011 and HELAA published October 2018, Lockhart Garratt have noted that within both these previous assessments the the proposed site at Mountnessing has been identified as being suitable, available and achievable. The SHLAA specifically notes that development on this site would result in a minimal impact upon the open countryside and as such that the development of the site would be suitable.

Therefore, following the assessments made within the SHLAA 2011 and HELAA 2018, that have identified the site as being acceptable, suitable and available for immediate development is considered that there is no justification for the omission of the proposed development site from the allocated site's within the emerging Local Development Plan and Sustainability Appraisal.

## Summary and Conclusions

We support the Council's assessment that the site represents an area of some merit, is well contained and its development is only likely to have a limited impact upon the Green Belt and the wider landscape setting. This aligns with the findings within the Assessment of Potential Housing, Employment and Mixed Use Sites in the Green Belt - Working Draft (Crestwood Environmental, March 2016), which identifies the site as having an overall Low Contribution to the 5 purposes of the Green Belt. It is our view that the built form and mature vegetation structure that bounds the site on all sides, coupled with the proposals to only input bungalows on site, will serve to limit the effect of development on site and will ensure that views from the wider landscape are, for the most part, imperceptible.

With regard to the site's inclusion within the Special Landscape Area designation it is noted that there is some discrepancy between the Sustainability Appraisal, which identifies this designation as a factor against which the site has been judged, and the currently adopted Brentwood Replacement Local Plan 2005, which notes that the production of a Landscape Character Assessment for the district will supersede this designation. It is understood by LG that a Landscape Character Assessment has now been produced for the area within which the site is set and therefore that the site's inclusion within the SLA should only be attributed limited weight in this context. LG have therefore undertaken a review of the site in relation to Landscape Character Type F8 - Doddinghurst Wooded Farmland, which notes that the site is only partially representative of this character area, exhibiting only a limited relationship with the key features of this landscape character type. It is therefore considered that the site is acceptable for development when measured against these criteria.

As requested by MSP, LG have undertaken a brief review of the site in relation to a number of allocated sites, noted to be within areas of the same settlement hierarchy as Mountnessing, based upon the findings of the published Sustainability Appraisal. Within this brief review, it is our assessment that the proposed site will result in only a limited effect upon those criteria listed as being of significance within the appraisal. As such, the only criteria noted as being of significance within the Sustainability Appraisal with regard to the site is that of the site's location within the SLA, which as noted above can only be afforded limited weight within this assessment.

It is therefore our view, that the site's omission within the Sustainability Appraisal is not justified on landscape, visual and Green Belt grounds, and that an amendment should be made to include the site among those allocated as a suitable location for development within the Brentwood Borough.

## Recommendations

- Retain and enhance the existing vegetation structure along the site's southern boundary to limit views onto the site and maintain a degree of visual containment afforded to the site in views from the south;
- Include good quality tree, shrub and hedgerow planting within the proposal to help integrate the development into the receiving landscape and filter views from residential built from adjacent to site's north, east and western boundaries; and
- Promote use of locally native plant species, where appropriate, to ensure that the proposals are in keeping with the character of the site and its setting, and contribute to the overall biodiversity value of the area.

Yours sincerely



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