

## LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

prepared on behalf of

**Mr R Black**



**Change of use of land for 5no. Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising 1 mobile home, 1 touring caravan and 1 utility building per pitch**

Land south of

**SANDHILL, HERMITAGE, THACHAM RG 18 9XU**

Report prepared by

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## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 My name is Adrian Draffin. I am a chartered Landscape Architect and have over forty years experience with landscape planning and related issues. My company - Draffin Associates Limited, Landscape and Environmental Planning Consultancy - has been instructed by the applicant, Mr R Black at land south of Sandhills, Hampstead Norreys Road, Hermitage in June 2023 to prepare a landscape visual assessment based on *The Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment 2013*. Observations with regard to visual boundary screening were also given with regard to the potential landscape mitigation measures to accommodate the proposed traveller pitches. This document forms part of the supporting information for the current planning application on behalf of the applicant to West Berkshire Council (WBC) **ref (23/00815/FUL)**.

1.2 The study site lies east of Hampstead Norreys Road, Hermitage. The purpose of this report is to identify the special characteristics of the existing landscape, to assess the likely impacts of the proposal and to consider the most appropriate mitigation measures and their residual impact to integrate the proposal with the local context.

1.3 An initial site walkover and visual appraisal was undertaken during July 2023. Reference is made to the base OS contour map data and to the indicative layout supplied by WSP Architects. Reference (dwg no.4472-DD-05)

1.4 A desk study was also undertaken of the Development Plan policy and map data available from the WBC website. Local landscape protection issues were 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 extending to approximately 0.04 ha, lies east of B4009 Hampstead Norreys Road in countryside north of Hermitage.

#### 3.2 Land Use

The elevated site lies in a rural edge of settlement location. The site is an open field enclosed by mature hedgerow to Hampton Norreys Road and a wooded cutting to the rear eastern boundary. Access is from an existing driveway opening along Hampstead Norreys Road.

#### 3.3 Settlement

The site is located at the northern edge of Hermitage settlement between roadside properties Sandhills and Torcove. The land opposite along Hampstead Norreys Road has commercial agricultural use set beyond open fields. Hermitage Parish Hall and recreation ground are located on Furze Hill beyond the eastern boundary. Hermitage centre lies 1km to the south. The villages of Hampstead Norreys and Curridge lie 3km further afield to the south west and north east.

#### 3.4 Topography

The site lies on the 120m contour AOD.

#### 3.5 Drainage & Vegetation

The site has reasonable permeability. The Pang valley lies approximately 3km to the east. The site is a combination of grass and recently permeable hardstanding with gravel access driveway. There are broken field boundary hedgerows along Hampstead Norreys Road and at the rear eastern boundary with grass verge and low fencing enclosing the site and creating new pitches. The mature broadleaf tree screen dominates the skyline along the eastern boundary. Further afield there is a regenerating woodland at Furze Hill near the site of a former brickworks that closed in 1967.

3.6 Landscape

The existing site setting consists of mature broken field hedgerow boundaries. The inner site consists of grassland and recently deposited permeable hardstanding parking with static caravans and low pitch division fencing. Outward views are limited to the frontage looking along Hampstead Norreys Road.

3.7 Public access

There are no public footpaths crossing the site. There is a local footpath, Eling Way, located in cutting immediately beyond the eastern boundary. This footpath, sited on the former Didcot – Newbury railway, links Hampstead Norreys, Eling and Hermitage villages.

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

The site is largely enclosed by existing landform and mature vegetation. There are limited boundary public views from the entrance driveway along Whitfield Road.

3.9 Inward views – entrance driveway (**Appendix D – sht 1 photos 1-4**)

The view from Hampstead Norreys Road shows the entrance driveway with existing post and rail timber fencing set back between the mature boundary hedgerow.

3.10 Inward views – Hampstead Norreys Road (**Appendix D – sht 2,3 photos 5-12**)

There are glimpses of the site between gaps in the existing roadside boundary hedgerow. The local context of the Sandhills and Torcove properties north and south of the application site together with the local countryside to the west are shown.

3.11 Inward views – Eastern boundary - Eling Way footpath (**Appendix D – sht 4 photos 13-16**)

There are views of the eastern section of the site above the regenerating embankment vegetation along the Eling Way verges.

3.12 Site views – (**Appendix D – sht 5,6 photos 17-22**)

The site views show caravans set within new pitches. There is permeable gravel hardstanding with cars and static caravans. There is low timber pitch division fencing. The mature boundary tree screen is evident on the skyline.

### 3.13 Visual appraisal - summary

Visually the study site is largely enclosed by mature vegetation and landform.

There are filtered views from the entrance driveway at Hampstead Norreys Road and along Eling Way footpath.

There are no distant views of the site from the wider footpath network. These are filtered by the M4 embankment, landform and mature vegetation.

## 4.0 Planning Policy Landscape Designations

4.1 The study site lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB. (NWDAONB)

### 4.2 Landscape Character

4.3 The site lies within the “Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic WH4” landscape character area of the WBC 2019 Landscape Character Assessment.

4.4 This policy describes the character area:

- *An area dominated by an east-west orientated, heathland ridge. Woodland is a key component in the varied land cover mosaic containing settlement within the area and contributing to the rural character. The B4009 marks a transition to a belt of open arable farmland.*
- *There is a varied field pattern with irregular fields. The field boundaries include dense and intact hedgerows with large trees.*
- *An accessible landscape with an extensive network of footpaths connecting the small settlements.*

4.5 The same document includes a 'landscape strategy' section including the following recommendations:

- *Conserve and enhance the valued features of the NWDAONB including the varied landscape of woodland, heathland and farmland. Ensure that changes in the landscape are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the existing landscape.*
- *Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements. Encourage restoration/ reinstatement/ on-going management of hedgerows around horse paddocks. Preserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.*
- *Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way.*

## 5.0 **Assessment of Landscape Character**

5.1 The study site contains landscape features that are typical of the WBC Landscape Character Assessment.

5.2 The site, in its present form, makes a *negative* contribution to the overall character with some significant discordant features. The existing landscape resource is visually compromised but the guidance recommends that the character should be enhanced.

5.3 Positive change by appropriate sensitive development is encouraged. This should include the restoration of existing landscape boundary features and improved bio-diversity by appropriate land management.

5.4 The LCA area is classed as having moderate sensitivity because of the established AONB status. The capacity for change of land use can be described as moderate but any proposal should have regard to the rural status.

## 6.0 **Proposals (Appendix E)**

6.1 In view of the current site condition a landscape strategy is proposed.  
**(Appendix E)** This will be supported by a long-term Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) to be agreed by condition.

- The enhanced 5 pitch travellers layout is shown on the attached indicative landscape strategy. The layout includes single storey static caravans with associated hardstanding and linked driveway using the existing driveway access from Hampstead Norreys Road to the west of the site. To improve bio-diversity 5m wide marginal meadow verges will be introduced around the north, east and south boundaries. Mixed age native hedging and tree group planting will also be added to provide further enclosure and filter inward views.
- 6.2 Noting the rural location with open countryside, the proposed new pitch division hedging and boundary treatment will provide a visual and landscape transition zone integrating the proposed layout with the local context.
- 6.3 The outer landscape boundary elements will be largely retained, managed and enhanced as an appropriate setting for the proposal. This includes reinforcing outer boundary hedgerows. The boundary landscape zones treatment will be designed to provide the appropriate visual amenity to accommodate the new layout into the rural context. External lighting will be designed to minimise light pollution with controlled operation and LED fittings positioned and selected to reduce unwanted light overspill and impact on adjacent wildlife habitats.
- 6.4 The proposed site layout can be divided into two landscape areas. The inner proposed pitch layout with static caravans on permeable hardstandings is subdivided by low fencing/ gates and 1m wide clipped native hedging with small tree groups along the existing shared access driveway. The outer boundaries will include enhanced green enclosure with 5m wide meadow margins and mixed age native planting. Along Hampstead Norreys Road infill mixed native tree groups and hedging will be added all managed for conservation around the existing mature roadside landscape buffer. The existing roadside hedgerows will be managed for highway safety and the collective frontage will provide an enhanced transition between countryside and the inner traveller layout. To the rear eastern boundary the enhanced managed mature tree screen will continue to provide a visual and landscape buffer between the adjacent Eling Way public footpath and the proposal.
- 6.5 The recommendations of the project ecologist will be followed to enhance extended marginal hedgerow, and meadow areas with links to local habitats (see detailed ecology report).
- 6.6 The main components of this proposal that will have a landscape and visual effect will be the construction of the new pitches and enhanced marginal green space envelope within a long-term landscape and ecology management plan.

## 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 – Eling Way
- Local Residents
- Users of the roads in the vicinity.

## 8.0 Impact of Proposals

8.1 The study site has a rural edge of settlement character with open countryside. The site has a rectilinear form with field hedgerow and wooded enclosure forming the outer boundaries. The key public views are to be found from Hampstead Norreys Road on the western edge of the site. The receptor groups include pedestrians, motorists and local residents.

8.2 Pedestrians will have filtered views of the entrance layout from Hampstead Norreys Road. An enhanced landscape/ ecological zone will be created along the roadside with new infilled and managed hedgerows, native tree planting and meadow margins. The inner traveller pitch layout including enclosure clipped hedging/ low fencing will be set within the enhanced boundary landscape treatment.

8.3 Passing motorists will have a fleeting glimpse of the enhanced road frontage along Hampstead Norreys Road. No further views are apparent to motorists.

8.4 Local residents at Sandhills and Torcove adjacent the study site will have restricted views to the proposed development through any gaps in the existing boundary hedgerow and tree screen. Residents at Stronvar located 100m to the west of the appeal site will be screened by mature vegetation.

8.5 There will be disturbance from construction traffic during static caravan delivery and installation but once complete the proposed layout will have an internal road layout visually containing vehicle movement with outer structural landscape features.

8.6 Local walkers and residents using the local footpath network along Eling Way will have filtered views into the site. It is envisaged that the applicants will appoint a retained landscape contractor who will oversee the enhancement of all green boundary areas including ongoing management arrangements. A separate landscape management programme will be drawn up for the landscape and ecological zones to encourage bio-diversity.

### **Landscape impact assessment**

8.7 The magnitude of the landscape 'effect' from the proposal should take account of the existing land use with built form enclosed by natural features. Noting the rural AONB location, the proposed traveller layout and static caravan siting has been given careful design. The collective site layout has been designed to integrate the proposal within the local setting with no greater harm to the wider countryside setting.

8.8 The proposal will have a transition zone between the traveller layout, Eling Way and Hampstead Norreys Road with the use of mixed-age native hedging, tree spinneys and managed marginal meadow habitats. Site management will be undertaken for the new landscape margins and other green areas to ensure full establishment of the proposed landscape areas. The cumulative effect will deliver a proposal of **short term slightly adverse** landscape impact particularly at the western driveway entrance zone to the travellers layout during new caravan installation. This will diminish with the new landscape structure establishment and create a **slightly beneficial landscape impact** subject to appropriate landscape management.

8.9 The impact of external lighting and vehicle movement will need careful consideration noting the proximity of adjacent residents and the wider rural context. The existing context of the site will inform the baseline condition to measure the potential impact on lighting and landscape management.

### **Visual impact assessment**

8.10 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. I describe the likely degree of visibility of the proposal and assess their impact against the GLVIA criteria (**Appendix C**).

8.11 My selected viewpoints are indicated on the attached OS reference plan with the visual appraisal (**Appendix D**).

*Viewpoints 1-4 – Hampstead Norreys Road – entrance driveway.*

In my opinion the proposal would have an initial **slightly adverse** effect on this view.

The viewer is adjacent to the majority of the development to be located in the middle ground behind the roadside hedgerow. The new static caravans in the proposal with enhanced enclosure treatment will initially have a slightly negative impact on the view without mitigation. This is during new caravan installation. Approximately 20% of the view will be altered while new roadside hedging infill and inner pitch enclosure planting establishes.

8.12 *Viewpoints 5-8 – Hampstead Norreys Road – roadside context.*

In my opinion the proposal would have an initial **slightly adverse** effect on this view.

The viewer is adjacent to the majority of the development to be located in the background behind the roadside hedgerow. Approximately 10% of the view will be altered while new roadside hedging infill and inner pitch enclosure planting establishes.

8.13 *Viewpoints 13-16 – Eling Way - public footpath.*

In my opinion the proposal would have an initial **slightly adverse** effect on this view.

The viewer is below to the majority of the development to be located in the background skyline above the foreground embankment vegetation. Approximately 5% of the view will be altered while infill native planting infill establishes.

8.14 *Viewpoints 17-22 - Other site views*

Further site views are attached to show the application site and current condition with the new pitch layout with the mature tree screen backdrop. The site is physically and visually well contained by mature vegetation and landform.

## 9.0 Mitigation

- 9.1 Any mitigation proposals should take account of the current site condition. Taking account of the existing planning policy and landscape constraints, if the study site were to be developed sensitively with the traveller pitch layout carefully sited then **localised landscape mitigation** would be necessary. This would be concentrated principally on the Hampstead Norreys Road frontage with enhanced inner plot and outer boundary treatment bordering the adjacent properties, public footpath and woodland.
- 9.2 In order to maintain and enhance the existing site character, natural landscape features would need to enclose ground engineering works. The existing outer boundaries of the site would require appropriate landscape protection, management and enhancement. Once established this feature will then provide a long-term all year-round transition zone between the new traveller layout and the countryside (**This should include a long-term management plan, native mixed-age screen planting and improved marginal habitats.**)
- 9.3 The outer boundaries and associated marginal habitats will require long-term regular management and appropriate access. This will be undertaken by the appointed landscape management staff. Landscape mitigation will include **tree and hedgerow buffer planting management, boundary margin improvements with new fencing/ hedging** to maintain the site character. **Ecological management proposals will also be adopted for the marginal habitats to improve site biodiversity.**
- 9.4 The site will require appropriate landscape enclosure along Hampton Norreys Road including the vehicle entrance to mitigate views from existing highways. This treatment will include **sustainable driveway design with new mixed-age native screen planting, boundary hedging, fencing and tree management.** External lighting and services design will be appropriate to the location of the site to minimise impact on retained natural features and habitats.
- 9.5 The traveller layout will include a landscape treatment to link with the existing outer landscape framework/ green infrastructure. A combination of boundary enhancement together with enclosure planting within appropriate hard and soft landscape design will form the basis of the new layout.

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

- Restoration and enhancement of key existing vegetation in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries)
- Restoration and enhancement of key existing habitats in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries)
- The adoption of a landscape strategy and long-term Landscape & Ecological Management Plan
- Agreement with key stakeholders on an enabling works programme for the landscape management plan (WBC/ Owner)

## 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. Once constructed these have been described as **short term slightly adverse** in sect 8.11-13.

10.2 As the proposal site is within a rural location it has the potential to result in moderate landscape impact resulting from the construction works and new land use. This would include the site installation phase, landscape management and engineering works.

10.3 The site works will involve additional tree cover to enhance the new traveller layout.

10.4 The construction phase will involve construction traffic, site setup and the normal construction site activity.

10.5 The landscape management plan will include an enabling works programme.

10.6 **Visual Context and Existing Views** - Existing mature vegetation and settlement obscure wider views of the site, but the site is partially visible locally from the immediate roadside boundary and adjacent caravan park site.

10.7 The proposal site and the mature existing tree screen and hedgerow to the outer boundaries mean that existing direct views into the site are limited to the vehicular entrance. Potential views of the proposals are described below.

10.8 *Hampton Norreys Road* – The entrance driveway will alter the immediate streetscape to the western boundary.

- 10.9 Here the enhanced landscape and ecological zone will be created including reinforced enclosure with native tree and hedge planting and wildflower meadow marginal habitats.
- 10.10 *Eling Way* – The rear eastern boundary will include a minimum 5m wide meadow margin with mixed native tree and hedge planting. This will reinforce the boundary screen and improve the bio-diversity around the site. A similar treatment will be adopted to the north and south boundaries bordering Sandhills and Torcove properties.
- 10.11 These features are designed to encourage early establishment, bio-diversity gain and visual containment to be created. Sensitive controlled LED lighting design will limit light overspill.
- 10.12 The long-term landscape and ecological 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 roadside ecological corridor setting. In addition, the owners will adopt an ecological management regime that will create an appropriate transition zone between the traveller layout and countryside.
- 10.13 The overall principle of restore, manage and enhance is encouraged by WBC and an enabling works landscape programme for this site will be agreed as part of the planning proposal.
- 10.14 To summarise, the proposed development will have a **short-term slightly adverse impact** on the character of the site during construction. This is largely on account of the visual impact of the proposed traveller layout, hardstanding and boundary fencing while the landscape and ecological boundary transition zone enhancements are undertaken. In the long-term, subject to a continued regular management regime, there will be a **‘slightly 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 which will enhance the character of the local area.

## **11.00 Residual Impacts**

- 11.01 Once constructed to the agreed site layout and landscape specification, the key ongoing element affecting the landscape impact will be the Landscape & Ecological Management Plan. The main features of this plan will include
- the site improvements comprising mature boundary tree, hedgerow and undergrowth management with arboricultural, ecological issues addressed.

- the improved green infrastructure scheme managed locally to promote marginal species, bio-diversity and ecological benefits with wildlife corridor links.
- the new landscape designed to integrate the traveller layout and hardstanding into the wider local context.
- management operations to be agreed with the owners management contractor and any special landscape drainage features.

## 12.00 Conclusion

- 12.01 The assessment identifies that the development will be directly visible from limited public locations to the west of the proposal. The impacts resulting have been classed as **short-term slightly adverse** during installation. These will revert to a no-change effect as the mitigation proposals establish and eventually have a potentially **slightly beneficial impact**. Inward residents views are limited to the two properties bordering the site.
- 12.02 With a sensitive layout and landscape design the character of the site is respected with static caravan form broken up visually by strong landscape enclosure. The proposal utilises retained mixed age tree, hedgerow screening with new framework planting. The traveller layout will create an accessible, manageable landscape.
- 12.03 The landscape proposal has been specifically designed to enhance the impact of the established traveller layout within the wider countryside context.
- 12.04 The long-term Landscape & Ecological Management Plan will guide the establishment of the reinforced and landscape transition zone with improved marginal habitat.
- 12.05 The proposal will initially have a slightly adverse impact on the character of the site. However, this impact will be localised and for a temporary period only. Once the long-term management plan is implemented then there is a vision for the successful integration of the proposal into the local community and wider ANOB.

**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 strategy