4 ALTERNATIVES & DESIGN EVOLUTION

Introduction

4.1 Regulation 18 and Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations require an applicant to provide a:

> "*description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the development on the environment*".

4.2 This chapter of the ES identifies the main alternatives to the Development which have been considered by the Applicant and describes the main reasons for the choices made.

Alternatives

4.3 Alternative options typically comprise:

- The 'Do Nothing' alternative, where the Development is not progressed;
- Consideration of Alternative Locations or Uses; and
- Consideration of Alternative Designs.

The 'do nothing' Alternative and the Consideration of Alternative Locations and Uses

4.4 Under the 'do nothing scenario', the Site would remain in agricultural use and the beneficial and adverse effects identified in the ES would not occur. The opportunity would be lost to develop a new high quality and sustainable neighbourhood, set within a mature landscaping context with high quality open and recreational spaces. The opportunity to delivery both market and affordable housing, which would help address the housing shortfall in WDC, would also be lost.

4.5 The purpose of the planning application is to develop the Site for residential use therefore the 'do nothing' alternative along with alternative locations and uses were not considered by the Applicant.

Consideration of Alternative Designs

4.6 The Development submitted for approval is the result of a thorough analysis of environmental constraints and opportunities, access issues and market demand. Consultation with WDC and statutory consultees has also been a key influence in design evolution.

4.7 The form of the Development has been influenced by a range of factors, including location, surrounding uses and landscape character, environmental impact assessment and input from WDC, statutory consultees and stakeholders. A Design Rationale and Vision were produced for the Development. The Vision states:

> *"Provide a new neighbourhood on the northwestern side of Uckfield which provides a mix of housing and public open space which will support the growth and sustainability of the town*
> *The built form and open spaces will be of a high quality, enhancing the character of the town and local area.*
> *Accessibility will be improved for existing and future residents with the provision of new and enhanced connections to the town centre from the western edge of the town. The potential traffic Impact on existing residential streets will be minimised with primary access connections directly to the strategic highway network.*
> *Accessibility to public open spaces for recreation will be increased for both Uckfield and the wider area with significant areas of green infrastructure including a variety of spaces.*
> *The ecological value of the site will be preserved and enhanced with biodiversity net gain providing a minimum of 10% improvements to the ecological value of the site.*
> *Existing landscape features and woodland will be retained, protected and managed for future generations to enjoy."*

4.8 The Design Rationale was produced after the vison and was based on the Site's opportunities and constraints including those relating to:

- Ecology;
- Housing;
- Movement and access;
- Landscape;
- Place; and
- Sustainability.

4.9 The Design and Access Statement (DAS) which accompanies the planning application sets out detailed information on the design evolution of the Development. As set out in the DAS, the design of the Development has evolved since a previous planning application was submitted for the Site in 2006 (ref: WD/2006/255/MEA), which was taken to appeal following refusal by WDC and subsequently dismissed.

4.10 The proposals now seek to focus development on areas of the Site which are considered least sensitive in landscape, ecological and arboricultural terms, to create a lower density and more sensitively design scheme of up to 424 homes. The proposed access (internal and external) arrangement delivers safe and secure routes through areas of non-Ancient Woodland, in the

case of the primary and emergency vehicular access, or through use of no-loss solutions, in the case of the pedestrian and cycle connection to Rocks Road. Appropriate buffers to Ancient Woodland are also provided throughout the Development.

4.11 There has not therefore been a series of alternative designs for the Development but an evolution of the design of the Development, which is detailed further below. No other alternatives have been considered by the Applicant.

Design Evolution

4.12 The Development has evolved through a series of stages and as a result of a number of factors including:

- The previous planning proposals for the Site;
- The evolving policy framework for the Site;
- Ongoing detailed technical studies carried out by the consultant team;
- Engagement with WDC;
- Discussions with other parties including the Highway Authority and Natural England;
- Discussions with the Town Council; and
- The public engagement exercise and feedback from the local community.

4.13 At each key stage, a number of changes have occurred in relation to key environmental constraints and opportunities on and surrounding the Site.

Appeal masterplan and proposals

4.14 The assessment of the previous planning appeal found a number of issues which needed to be addressed in any future proposals for the Site as follows:

- Impact on existing landscape features in particular the areas of Ancient Woodland within the Site;
- Pedestrian and cycle links to the existing urban area and town centre;
- Landscape impact of the proposals in long distance views to into the Site from the west;
- The quantum and density of development proposed which produced 750 dwellings with an average of 41 dwellings per hectare;
- The scale of development proposed, up to 4 stories; and
- The mix of additional uses including school, employment and commercial / community uses.

4.15 Following a review of the previous dismissed appeal decision, an initial capacity assessment was undertaken to establish the potential capacity of the Site for all land uses including residential, public open space and any ancillary uses. The initial capacity assessment was then refined to consider the provision of other land uses and infrastructure including public open space and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), plus initial options for drainage and pedestrian /cycle connections.

Masterplan Concept V1

4.16 The primary elements of the concept masterplan were as follows:

- Retention of the ancient woodlands and provision of a 15m buffer;
- Provision of areas for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) at the lower parts of the Site (1.8ha);
- Provision of a SANG utilising the existing woodland and the open land in the northern part of the Site. The SANG would include a 2.2km walk which incorporates existing routes and the Public Right of Way (PROW) which runs along the northeastern boundary of the Site;
- Relocation of the primary access further south to avoid the Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat;
- New strategic ecology / landscape buffers in the Site to mitigate the visual impact;
- An area of amenity public open space in the southern part of the Site which incorporates the buffer to the Great Crested Newts (GCN) pond and ancient woodland and has the potential to provide a Locally Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) if required (within 400m of the majority of housing);
- An area of amenity public open space in the northern part of the Site which incorporates the buffer to the ancient woodland and has potential to provide a LEAP if required (within 400m of the majority of housing); and
- Identification of potential future additional ped /cycle links to Lake Wood and Snatts Road.

Illustrative Masterplan (Pre-application submission version)

4.17 The first version of the masterplan was then refined further to provide a masterplan which was submitted to WDC as part of the pre-application submission. A key environmental refinement to the design included the identification of potential edges to the residential development which were more sensitive in landscape / ecology terms, and which would reduce the potential adverse impacts.

Masterplan Concept Scenarios A and B

4.18 Additional work was carried out to consider the disposition of land uses, potential impact on ancient woodland and ecology and two alternative scenarios were developed. The following environmental related changes were made to the design as a result:

- The refinement of the drainage strategy to provide a series of smaller linked basins which would better manage the discharge of surface water into the existing watercourse network and avoid larger, less visually attractive basins. The drainage strategy allowed for a better, more cohesive approach to ecology with opportunities for buffers between existing ancient woodland and residential development; and
- The SANG layout and extent was also refined to maximise its potential for ecological improvements and minimise the potential impact on Ancient Woodland.

Masterplan V2 – Public consultation

4.19 The design of the Development was further developed for the purposes of a public engagement exercise which was carried out at the end of 2020 and included:

- Retention of the existing key landscape features on the Site including woodland and planting on the edges of the Site;
- Buildings which are predominantly 2 storeys with potential for some 2.5 storeys to enhance townscape / legibility;
- The main vehicular access from the A22 via a new roundabout and an emergency only access to A22 at the northern end of the Site in locations which avoid Ancient Woodland;
- Landscape planting across the slopes to help mitigate long-distance views into the Site;
- A landscaped buffer to the pond in the centre of the Site to provide protection for GCN;
- Green ecology links created through new planting to connect the woodland areas;
- A minimum 15m buffer between built development and Ancient Woodland, comprising green and blue landscaping, to ensure arboricultural interests are retained;
- A physical landscape / public open space buffer to reduce impacts on surrounding Listed buildings;
- Sustainable urban drainage using attenuation basins and swales across the Site which will discharge into existing watercourses to the north at the same rates as existing run off, therefore ensuring that there is no increased flood risk arising from the Development elsewhere; and
- New planting to provide connections between existing woodland areas to enhance landscape and ecology.