OBSIDIAN STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD

LAND AT MOCKBEGGARS FARM, LONDON ROAD, BUDLETTS COMMON, UCKFIELD, TN22 2EB

Landscape & Visual Appeal Statement

Chris Jenkinson BA (Hons) DIP LA CMLI

Local Authority Reference:
WD/2022/0648/MAO

Appeal Reference:
APP/C1435/W/23/3330872

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1. Experience and Qualifications

1.1.1. My name is Chris Jenkinson. I hold a Bachelor of Arts with Honours Degree in Landscape Architecture and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Gloucestershire. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). I am an Associate Director at Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd, a practice that provides landscape planning and design services to the private and public sectors.

1.1.2. I have been with Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd since 2005 and soon after its inception. Over the past 18 years I have advised on landscape issues relating to renewables, health care, residential, retail, commercial and employment schemes. Many of the sites I have advised clients on are in, or adjacent to, sensitive areas including Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Historic Parks and Gardens, National Parks, Conservation Areas, and areas containing Listed Buildings.

1.1.3. As part of my work at Aspect, I regularly prepare detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA's) either as stand-alone documents, evidence for presentation at public inquiry or hearing, or as chapters within wider Environmental Statements together with broader landscape planning advice. In addition to the preparation of LVIA's, I am also regularly involved with a number of landscape design projects, which range from high level strategic proposals, down to detailed planting and hard landscape design associated with the discharge of planning conditions and technical construction drawings.

1.1.4. My time at Aspect has allowed me to develop a thorough understanding and appreciation of how landscape character and the visual environment work in combination and how the perception of development can be moderated by variations in character and the presence of landscape features and high-quality landscape design, which not only assists the integration of development but in placemaking and the creation of useable, high quality spaces.

Declaration

1.1.5. The information I have prepared represents my professional opinion on the objective and subjective aspects of the development in relation to landscape and visual effects. Based on my knowledge, I believe the facts stated in this statement are true and accurate and I have complied with my professional Code of Conduct.

2. Background and Scope of Statement

Appeal Background

2.1.1. The Appeal relates to an outline planning application WD/2022/0648/MAO on land at Mockbeggars Farm to the east of London Road, Uckfield. The description of development is as follows; ***"Outline application for the development of 60 no. dwellings, access and internal roads, parking, ancillary structures, landscaping and open space, drainage and other associated works. All matters reserved apart from access"***.

2.1.2. The application was recommended for approval by Officer's (**CD5.1**) however was subsequently refused by Wealden District Council's (WDC) Planning Committee on 15th June 2023, with a number of the Reasons for Refusal relating to landscape and visual matters. Reason for Refusal 1 alleges the adverse environmental impacts of the development significantly and demonstrably outweigh its social and economic benefits. Reason for Refusal 2 alleges the developable area does not represent an efficient use of the land. Reason for refusal 3 relates to ecology matters but also states the Site currently provides connectivity in the landscape. Reason for Refusal 4 relates to the loss of landscape hedge and vegetation in order to provide the necessary access, opening up the Site to development. Reason for Refusal 5 alleges the development would be out of character with the local area.

2.1.3. It is however noted that during the course of the appeal, the Council has elected to not defend the Reasons for Refusal and have withdrawn from the appeal.

2.1.4. The application was supported by a GLVIA3 compliant Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Landscape Strategy Plan prepared by Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd (**CD3.11**).

2.1.5. During the course of the application, no landscape related consultation comments or request for further landscape information were received from the Council, WDC Officer's concurred with the findings of the submitted Aspect assessment and there was no objection by WDC Officer's on landscape and visual grounds.

2.1.6. An updated indicative Landscape Strategy Plan (Rev C) has been prepared based on the amended site layout and includes additional woodland planting within the southern portion of the Site. This is included within **Appendix CJ4** of this hearing statement.

2.1.7. A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) (**CD13.1**) has been agreed between the main parties and this includes key points on landscape matters.

2.1.8. I am very familiar with the Appeal Site and the proposed development and was involved with the preparation of the original LVIA and visited the Appeal Site and landscape setting a number of times during the preparation of this work. I support the content and conclusions made in respect of landscape and visual effects within the submitted GLVIA3 compliant LVIA (**CD3.11**) and reference this in my statement to avoid repetition or duplication of material before the Inspector.

Scope and form of Hearing Statement

2.1.9. I am instructed by Obsidian Strategic Asset Management Ltd (the Appellant) to provide specialist landscape and visual advice for the Appeal in respect of land at Mockbeggars Farm, London Road, Uckfield, Wealden.

2.1.10. The Appeal Site does not contain any notable landscape features that elevate it above that of ordinary countryside, and its contribution to the wider landscape is limited due to the visually and physically enclosed nature of the Site. The proposed development will not result in significant adverse effect on the landscape at either a national or district level and WDC Officer's concurred with the findings of the submitted LVIA within the Committee Report (**CD5.1** *pdf Pages 70-71 and 82*).

2.1.11. Notwithstanding the Council's decision to withdraw from the Appeal and not to defend the Reasons for Refusal, I have prepared my hearing statement to assist the Inspector in determining the merits of the proposed development, having regard to the interested parties and objections to the planning application, most notably those on behalf Uckfield Town Council (UTC), Buxted Parish Council (BPC), and Mockbeggars Residents' Steering Group (MRSG). It is noted that none of the objectors are a formal Rule 6 party.

2.1.12. My statement briefly sets out the background to the landscape work and provides an overview of the landscape and visual effects, with reference to the originally submitted Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (**CD3.11**) prepared by Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd. I will then address the landscape related issues identified within the Reasons for Refusal / interested parties.

2.1.13. My statement is based upon the relevant guidance and established methodology within the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA3) (**CD10.1**) published

by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment in April 2013. I would note that the GLVIA is a guidance tool relating to best practice and is not prescriptive.

2.1.14. My hearing statement should be considered alongside the other statements prepared on behalf of the appellant, particularly that of Dr Dan Simpson of Aspect Ecology (dealing with ecology matters) and Mr Mark Bewsey of DHA Planning (dealing with planning matters).

3. Review of the Application and the Proposals

3.1.1. In this section I review the application and proposals and address the approach promoted in Chapter 4 of GLVIA3 (**CD10.1**) in order to demonstrate the way in which the proposals have positively responded to the site and its landscape and settlement edge context. Reference will be made to the submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**) and the baseline landscape plans contained within **Appendix CJ1** as well as the amended Landscape Strategy Plan and Context Landscape Masterplan included within **Appendix CJ3** for reference.

Understanding the Context

3.1.2. The baseline analysis is a key component of the design process and achieving the successful outcome of the layout and landscape strategy and ensuring a landscape led approach. This is considered in Chapter 4 of GLVIA3 (**CD10.1**) within Paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 which state;

"Design plays an increasingly important part in the development planning process. This has been emphasised by the introduction of statutory requirements for the production of design statements, or design and access statements, for many planning proposals in different parts of the UK. Such Statements explain the design principles and concepts underpinning the proposal and process through which is has evolved. This includes the ways in which the context of the development, including the landscape, has been appraised or assessed and how the design of the development takes that context into account in relation to its proposed use."

"EIA itself can be an important design tool. It is now usually an iterative process the stages feed into the planning and design of the project. The iterative design and assessment process has great strength because it links the analysis of the environmental issues with steps to improve the siting, layout and design of a particular scheme."

3.1.3. Clearly this contextually informed iterative process is key in understanding the baseline situation, landscape components, built up context and delivering an appropriate and complementary settlement edge scheme.

3.1.4. The Appeal Site is located between Ringles Cross and Budlett's Common, on the northern edge of the built up area of Uckfield and to the south of Maresfield. The Appeal Site currently comprises approximately 3.62 hectares of agricultural land on the eastern side of London Road. The Site is currently in pastoral use and consists of two separate fields separated by an existing hedgerow running north – south.

3.1.5. The Appeal Site is bound by mature hedgerow, trees and woodland creating a high degree of visual and physical enclosure from the adjacent land uses and surrounding local and wider landscape. The Site is also influenced by multiple urbanising features including the London Road corridor which runs along the western Site boundary and existing residential development adjacent to the eastern, southern and partly northern boundary. The residential properties surrounding the Site predominantly consist of large detached residential dwellings set within large plots with mature vegetation structure. Agricultural buildings adjoin the Site to the north west, beyond which is a caravan dealership and a used car dealership with large areas of hardstanding.

3.1.6. The immediate and local landscape contains a notable amount of mature woodland, with areas of Ancient Wood, including Round Wood immediately adjacent to the south eastern Site boundary, Playgate Wood to the south west on the western side of London Road and Views Wood forming part of Buxted Park a short distance to the east.

3.1.7. Whilst currently undeveloped and agricultural in nature, the Appeal Site has a settlement fringe character, surrounded by development on three sides with the urbanising components exerting an influence on the Site. It has a stronger relationship with the adjacent settlement edge than that of the wider rural landscape to the west.

3.1.8. Overall, the Appeal Site is visually and physically well contained as a result of the adjoining residential built form, established mature woodland and robust vegetation structure. The proximity of the existing built form immediately to the north, east and south of the Appeal Site, alongside the other urbanising components within the context provides a settlement fringe character and urbanising influence on the Site. The presence of the existing built form and urban features reduces the perceived tranquillity and ruralness of the Site.

3.1.9. In addition to the adjacent built-up edge, the degree of established vegetation structure to the Appeal Site boundaries and established mature woodland within the localised context limits visibility of the Site from the local and wider landscape. This level of visual containment is agreed as a matter of common ground between parties within the SoCG (**CD13.1**) and OR (**CD5.1**) and is demonstrated on the Photographic Record contained within **Appendix CJ2**.

3.1.10. The full baseline situation and Appeal Site's setting is set out in section 3 of the submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**).

Overview of the Proposals & Landscape Strategy

3.1.11. The application was outline with all matters reserved, except for access. The application was accompanied by an Indicative Sketch Layout Plan and Parameters Plan (**CD3.1**) which was prepared by OSP Architects which illustrated an indicative layout of how 60 dwellings could be incorporated within the site. The submitted Design and Access Statement (DAS) (**CD3.3**) provides further detail on matters of design and the layout of the scheme. As set out in Section 4 of GLVIA3 (**CD10.1**) the LVIA work fed into the development of the layout to ensure that the landscape constraints and opportunities informed the emerging masterplan and a landscape led approach is achieved. This included the retention of the vegetated boundaries where feasible and incorporation of appropriate buffers including a minimum 15m buffer to the offsite Ancient Woodland.

3.1.12. A Landscape Strategy Plan was prepared as part of the scheme to illustrate the opportunities for landscape mitigation as well as the creation of landscaped public open space including the opportunity to introduce new native planting and areas of species rich wildflower grassland within the immediate context of the proposals. The Landscape Strategy Plan (Rev B) was appended to the submitted LVIA and for ease is included within **Appendix CJ3**. An amended Landscape Strategy Plan (Rev C) (**CD10.4**) has been prepared and included within **Appendix CJ4** which reflects the amended layout and introduces further woodland planting to provide beneficial links between the existing offsite Ancient Woodland to the south east and south west. The landscape approach behind the proposals is set out under Paragraphs 4.1-4.8 of the submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**).

3.1.13. The open spaces incorporating additional landscaping and development setbacks from the boundaries allow for the retention and enhancement of the existing vegetation structure and are integral components of the scheme that have driven the design response to achieve policy objectives and LCA guidelines in respect of;

- Responding positively to local character and context.
- Respecting the character and appearance of the landscape and built environment.
- Minimising effects upon visual amenity and the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- Creation of development that is well integrated with the surrounding landscape and appropriate to the settlement setting which responds to the settlement pattern.
- Retention and enhancement of the existing boundary green infrastructure network.
- Provision of a net increase in native tree and hedge planting.
- Creation of a sustainable well-designed neighbourhood.

- ❖ Enhancing biodiversity and achieving net gains.
- ❖ Enhancing the existing grassland and woodland habitats through the design and long-term management of the space and level of public access.
- ❖ Provision of SUDS and networks of green blue infrastructure connecting with the existing retained green infrastructure.
- ❖ Ecologically sensitive landscape proposals and new habitat creation through a wider variety of landscape and open space typologies.
- ❖ Inclusion of mixed native woodland planting to link with offsite adjacent woodland.
- ❖ Delivery of integrated and connected network of multifunctional green spaces.

3.1.14. This ensures that proposed development responds to its context and creates a high-quality landscape led residential development on the edge of the existing settlement.

3.1.15. In terms of new landscaping, this includes a variety of native species woodland, shrub, scrub, hedge and wildflower planting throughout the open spaces and boundaries, as well as extensive standard tree planting within the open spaces and throughout the residential development. Street tree planting has been included throughout the development with large canopied species used where feasible.

3.1.16. In addition, the Landscape Strategy Plan and Illustrative layout both indicate space for the retention and/or replacement of the western boundary hedgerow. It is acknowledged that a proportion of the existing hedgerow adjacent to London Road will require to be removed as part of the access proposal and associated visibility splays. However, where this will be removed there is scope for replacement mitigation hedge and tree planting set behind the visibility splays and elsewhere in the scheme. A gap will remain for the access road which forms a very small proportion of the total vegetated western boundary – 15m gap of the total 208m western boundary. This ensures the current green corridor and character of the London Road corridor will be maintained and the screening function of the boundary planting is retained.

3.1.17. Whilst the full extent of hedgerow removal and replacement has been shown indicatively due to the illustrative nature of the proposals, it is clear that the principles of a hedged road frontage and green corridor can be maintained. Replacement planting is anticipated to be proposed as ready grown specimens to enable immediate impact to the mitigation planting.

3.1.18. WDC Officer's recognise within the Committee Report (**CD5.1** *pdf Page 7*0) that there will be some hedgerow lost as part of the access and associated visibility splay however, Officer's concluded that

overall the proposal ***"..is not considered materially harmful to a degree that would constitute a reason to refuse planning permission."*** (**CD5.1***, pdf Page 81*).

3.1.19. In order to assist the Inspector on this matter and fully demonstrate the extent of hedgerow removal and retention to the London Road corridor, a further plan has been prepared and is included in **Appendix CJ9**.

3.1.20. The illustrative landscape strategy for the scheme will result in a net increase in native tree and hedge planting and includes further positive benefits in terms of landscaping and biodiversity.

3.1.21. The summary of the landscape approach and proposed layout identified that it has been carefully developed to ensure that a comprehensive scheme of landscaping can be achieved alongside the retention and enhancement of the boundary vegetation structure. Whilst the layout and landscape strategy are illustratively shown, it is considered that the full details of the proposed landscaping can be secured through an appropriately worded condition and the principles of the Landscape Strategy Plan are sound and can be applied.

4. Review of Published Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Evidence Base Documents

4.1.1. The full details of the published landscape evidence base were reviewed as part of the LVIA process and are detailed within the LVIA Paragraphs 3.8 – 3.22 (**CD3.11**).

National and Regional Landscape Character Assessments

4.1.2. By way of an overview of published Landscape Character Assessments, the Appeal Site is located within ***National Character Area 122 High Weald (NCA 122)*** (**CD10.4**).

4.1.3. At a County level The East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment published in 2016 (**CD10.5**) identifies the Appeal Site and its surrounds as lying within ***Upper Ouse Valley*** Landscape Character Area 3. This contains similar key characteristics to the NCA and is a broad-brush assessment covering a large area around Uckfield extending as far as Danehill and Chelwood Common to the north west.

4.1.4. It is however agreed with WDC that the National and County level assessment are broad brush and landscape and visual effects associated with the Appeal proposals are localised only due to the high degree of containment afforded to the Appeal Site. Therefore, the relevance of these broader scale National or County LCA's are of limited significance to this Appeal.

Wealden District Council Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment October 2014 (Chris Blandford Associates)

4.1.5. At a more local level the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment prepared in October 2014 (LSCA) (**CD10.6**) in order to guide development with regard to the landscapes within the district. An extract is included within **Appendix CJ5**.

4.1.6. The submitted LVIA set out that the Appeal Site is identified to be within the Local Landscape Character Type (LLCT) of ***A: Ridges & Valleys***, and the Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) of ***A2: Budlett's Common & Five Ash Down.*** The urban area of Uckfield is identified immediately east and south of the Appeal Site and LLCA A2 which is not part of the landscape assessment.

4.1.7. Paragraphs 3.12 -3.14 of the LVIA provide further detail on LLCT A and LLCA A2, and an extract is included in **Appendix CJ5** so I do not repeat it here.

4.1.8. It is noted that as part of the evidence base for the LSCA the character assessment takes into account historic and cultural factors in defining landscape character (which is typical to all such assessments). This is set out in the LCSA methodology at Paragraphs 2.2.12 and 2.3.2.

4.1.9. The Appeal Site is also identified within the northern portion of the ***"Landscape Setting of Uckfield"*** (Landscape Setting Area 8) as identified within the LSCA and discussed in the submitted LVIA. The distinctive characteristics that define the Landscape Setting Area are described on Pages 139 – 140 of the LSCA (extract of which is within **Appendix CJ5**). As noted in the LVIA (Paragraphs 3.17 – 3.19), the Appeal Site forms only a small portion of the wider area and is located within the eastern portion of 'Landscape Setting Area 8' which is more closely associated with the northern settlement limits of Uckfield. The assessment identifies the Landscape Setting Area 8 as having a *"Moderate Landscape Capacity"*. This is due to the *"strong pattern of mature woodland"* which is considered to be important features as well as the *"meandering Ouse Tributary".*

4.1.10. It is clear that there are no overriding landscape constraints identified in the published LSCA to entirely restrict development in this location, which also considers all relevant historic and cultural factors in identifying and classifying landscape character.

Wealden District Council Landscape Character Assessment May 2022 (LUC)

4.1.11. In addition to the 2014 Landscape & Settlement Character Assessment, WDC have prepared a more recent Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) published in May 2022 (**CD10.7**). The preparation of the original LVIA and application submission pre-dates the publication of this document and as such was not included in the submitted LVIA.

4.1.12. An extract from the 2022 LCA is included within **Appendix CJ6.** The Appeal Site is identified to be within Landscape Character Type (LCT) ***6 Wooded Slopes (High Weald)*** and Landscape Character Area (LCA) ***6D High Weald: Ouse Catchment***.

4.1.13. Whilst this LCA is more recent than the 2014 LSCA, it provides limited further information on the landscape character of the Appeal Site and localised landscape setting and does not alter the conclusions of the submitted LVIA.

Wealden Green Infrastructure Study (May 2017)

4.1.14. As part of the evidence base to guide development WDC have also produced a Green Infrastructure Study (GIS) (**CD10.8**). An extract is included within **Appendix CJ7** identifying the location of the Appeal Site in relation to the strategic GI corridors.

4.1.15. The submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**) sets out in Paragraphs 3.20 – 3.22 that the Appeal Site is identified to be on the edge of the Strategic Green Blue Corridor – *'5. Uck Valley'* which is a priority area with key opportunities for strategic GI enhancement, linkages and creation (refer Figure 5.1 extract in **Appendix CJ7**). It is noted that this is a broad illustrative corridor and Paragraph 5.2.11 of the Study states ***"The width of the Strategic Green Corridors illustrated schematically on Figure 5.1 are indicative; they are not intended to be rigid, and should be responsive to local circumstances."***

4.1.16. The key aim is for developments to provide accessible natural greenspaces through the provision of connected, multifunctional and "***high quality green spaces***" that will deliver "***long-term benefits for people and nature***". As set out in the submitted LVIA, it is considered that the Appeal Proposals comply with the aims and objectives of the GI Study and the scheme offers a number of GI benefits.

5. Overview of the Landscape and Visual Effects

Appeal Site Landscape Character

5.1.1. The published character assessments represent a useful introduction to the wider landscape context in which the Appeal Site is set. To assess the potential effects of development upon the character of the Appeal Site and its immediate context, Aspect undertook its own assessment as part of the submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**), which has been informed by the Natural England, East Sussex, and Wealden District landscape appraisals as well as a number of Site visits.

5.1.2. By way of an overview, the submitted LVIA (Section 3, **CD3.11**) summarised that the Appeal Site and immediate surrounding area are located in a gently undulating landform, with the Site set low down in the landscape. The main settlement edge of Uckfield to the south is situated on slightly higher topography than that of the Site and localised landscape (refer to ASP5 Topography Plan within **Appendix CJ1**). The Site is physically and visually well enclosed as a result of the mature vegetation that bounds the Site boundaries and although there is some intervisibility into the Site from the western boundary, on approach from the north the Site is seen within the context of the surrounding built form associated with the garage and caravan sales immediately to the north-east of the Site and the residential properties south of the Site and fronting London Road. The Site is further bound by the northern settlement fringe of Uckfield along the southern and eastern boundary with the northern Site boundary partly backing onto existing built form.

5.1.3. The nature and extent of the built development surrounding the Appeal Site and within the immediate context is illustrated on Plan ASP1 and Plan ASP2 within **Appendix CJ1**.

5.1.4. Overall, the Site is well enclosed with the existing woodland and vegetation structure as well as the extent of residential development providing containment, alongside the low lying setting and gently undulating level topography, creating a high level of visual and physical separation from the wider landscape. As such the urbanising influences to the north, east and south and London Road corridor to the west create a settlement fringe character.

5.1.5. The degree of visual and physical containment and limited contribution to the wider landscape is also agreed as a matter of common ground as set out in the SoCG (**CD13.1**) and OR (**CD5.1**).

Landscape Susceptibility

5.1.6. In terms of landscape susceptibility, as set out in the submitted LVIA, I consider that the Appeal Site has a **Medium / Low** susceptibility to change as a result of the introduction of residential built form. This is fully detailed in Paragraph 3.29 of the LVIA (**CD3.11**).

Landscape Value

5.1.7. In terms of landscape value, I consider that the Appeal Site is of **Medium / Low** value as set out in the submitted LVIA. This was based upon an assessment of various criteria and GLVIA3 Box 5.1 (**CD10.1**) which was not disputed as part of the original application and is illustrated in Table 1, Paragraph 3.31 within the submitted LVIA (**CD3.11**). I have also had regard to the LI TGN 02/21 (**CD10.2**) with regard to landscape value criteria and confirm that this does not alter the conclusions reached.

5.1.8. It is a matter of common ground that the Appeal Site and its local landscape setting is not covered by any qualitative landscape designations at a national or local level and is not considered to represent a "valued landscape" with reference to paragraph 180(a) of the NPPF.

5.1.9. It is clear therefore that the Appeal Site is not within or adjacent to a valued landscape, does not contain any landscape features or qualities that elevate it above ordinary countryside and is therefore of no higher landscape value than **Medium / Low** as set out in the submitted LVIA.

Landscape Sensitivity

5.1.10. Taking into account the value and susceptibility to development of the Appeal Site, it was concluded in the submitted LVIA that the landscape sensitivity is **Medium / Low** and has potential to accommodate sensitively designed change as a result of the type of development proposed.

5.1.11. The assessment of landscape susceptibility, landscape value and landscape sensitivity of the Appeal Site were not disputed by the Council during the course of the application or within any consultation response and are agreed within the SoCG (**CD13.1**).

Overview of Effect upon Character

5.1.12. In terms of the effect of the proposals upon the character of the landscape, this assessment is set out in detail within the submitted LVIA (Section 5, **CD3.11**) and identified there will be no significant adverse effects on key characteristics and sensitivities of the relevant LCAs at a national, county and district scale. In the interest of avoiding duplication of information contained within the submitted LVIA, I have provided a summary below.

5.1.13. In terms of the landscape character effects, the submitted LVIA identified that whilst some harm is acknowledged to the immediate landscape character of the Appeal Site itself as a result of the proposals, the harm is restricted to the Site and immediate setting only and reduces within the localised setting and furthermore in the wider setting. This degree of harm on the Site itself is inevitable with all greenfield developments.

5.1.14. It is accepted that the appeal proposals would change the character of the Site, however, the development of the Site would not result in the loss of any important landscape features and would introduce a land use which is characteristic in this localised landscape setting and respects the settlement edge location. The Officer's Committee Report (**CD5.1***, pdf Page 81*) agrees stating that ***"It is noted that the loss of the two fields to the proposed development would permanently change the character of the immediate area but given the proposed boundary enhancements and the existing landscape character, the change is not considered materially harmful to a degree that would constitute a reason to refuse planning permission."***

5.1.15. Whilst the scheme is in outline, the illustrative landscape proposals (refer **Appendix CJ4**) include a substantial degree of new planting that will assist in integrating the built form, providing landscape mitigation, and creating robust landscaped edges to the Appeal Site. The proposals include areas of POS, SuDS and buffer to the Ancient Woodland that would include further structural landscape planting consisting of species rich wildflower meadows, native shrub and tree planting. A large area of mixed native deciduous woodland is proposed within the southern portion of the Site in order provide enhanced GI and ecological links with the existing offsite woodland. The landscape proposals seek to provide an enhanced degree of amenity to the surroundings, and to ensure that the proposals can be integrated into the localised landscape setting. Further enhancements include ecological habitats and biodiversity gains.

5.1.16. It is a matter of common ground that the extent of the landscape effects upon the wider landscape is not a material consideration in the determination of the Appeal, and such I have not included an assessment on the National or County LCAs.

5.1.17. In terms of the effect at a district level and upon the LCA, as set out in the submitted LVIA, the significance of the effect upon the *Type A Ridges & Valleys LLCT*, and the A2 *Budlett's Common & Five Ash Down LLCA* within the immediate context of the Site would be **Moderate / Minor - Minor Adverse** at Year One and Year 10. This ensures that the proposals would not give rise to any significant adverse effects upon the *LLCA A2* in the long term. Within the wider context, the proposals would be perceived as part of the existing settlement and would not affect the character

of the wider *LLCT A* . This is predominantly due to the highly enclosed nature of the Appeal Site, very small zone of visual influence and minor component the Site forms within the broader scale assessments. As noted, this assessment also takes into account consideration of the relevant historic and cultural factors in identifying and classifying landscape character of the published LSCA.

5.1.18. In addition, it is noted that since the submission of the application a more recent LCA has been published in May 2022. Whilst this is more recent than the 2014 LSCA, it provides limited further information on the landscape character of the Appeal Site and localised landscape setting and I do not consider any changes are required to the assessment of effects set out above and within the submitted LVIA.

5.1.19. For the Appeal Site itself and immediate landscape character, the LVIA acknowledged there would inevitably be a high degree of change that would alter the character of the Site itself, albeit this is inevitable as a result of any development on greenfield land and is highly localised. This significance of effect was identified initially as **Major / Moderate – Moderate Adverse** at Year One and **Moderate Adverse** over the longer term.

5.1.20. The main effect will be the loss of the two agricultural fields and their replacement with residential dwellings and related infrastructure enclosed by existing and proposed landscaping and new open spaces. The southern portion will contain extensive woodland planting resulting in positive benefits as highlighted earlier in my hearing statement. The geographical extent of adverse landscape effects arising from this will be restricted to the Site and its immediate context only by the pattern of established vegetation structure in the surrounding area and the built form of Uckfield itself.

5.1.21. In terms of landscape features, due to the Appeal Site being of ordinary nature in agricultural use and does not contain any landscape features or qualities that elevate it above ordinary countryside, the effect upon the local landscape features will be minimal. This primarily relates to the loss of the two agricultural fields however in addition there will be a proportion of hedgerow removal both associated with the western boundary for the access and visibility splays as well as the internal hedgerow in order to gain access to the eastern parcel. The extent of loss of both of the hedgerows has been minimised through the careful design of the scheme and includes sufficient scope to offer an appropriate level of replacement hedgerow planting that will mitigate for the removal. Further detail of the landscape strategy is set out in Section 3 above.

5.1.22. A key landscape feature of note within the localised landscape is the Ancient Woodland which is located offsite. The Appeal Proposals have considered the Ancient Woodland in closest proximity

including that of Round Wood which lies just beyond the south eastern Site boundary, and that of Playgate Wood to the south west of the Appeal Site and west of London Road (refer Site and Setting plan within **Appendix CJ1**). The development has included a minimum 15m buffer zone to all offsite Ancient Woodland which includes proposed semi-natural habitat and native planting. This was acknowledged by WDC's Biodiversity Officer on 25/05/2023 to be acceptable subject to a number of Conditions. Further detail on the Ancient Woodland is set out in Dr Simpson's Hearing Statement on Ecology Matters.

5.1.23. In terms of the localised landscape setting, beyond the Site's boundaries, it is considered that the magnitude of change would be lower and reduce further with distance. The significance of the effect upon the localised landscape context is concluded as initially being **Moderate / Minor Adverse** and reducing to **Minor Adverse** over the longer term due to the high level of visual and physical containment from the localised landscape setting to the north, east and west.

5.1.24. The LVIA (**CD3.11**) concluded the that the proposals can be accommodated without significant adverse effects upon the localised or wider landscape setting which the appellant maintains is an accurate assessment.

5.1.25. On reviewing the submitted LVIA, the Officer's Committee Report (**CD5.1,** *pdf Page 71*) concurs with this assessment and summaries that ***"The development of the scale proposed could deliver a low key landscape dominated scheme that would be appropriate within the setting of Uckfield and would provide much needed residential development in the Low Weald that would be capable of conserving the landscape."***

5.1.26. I therefore conclude that the submitted LVIA provides a thorough and accurate assessment of the landscape effects and conclude that the Appeal proposals can be integrated without significant adverse effects upon the localised or wider landscape.

5.1.27. It is noted that there was no objection on landscape character grounds during the course of the application and the Council has since confirmed that they no longer intend to pursue the Appeal or Reasons for Refusal, and as such the landscape effects are not being disputed by WDC.

Visual Environment

5.1.28. The LVIA was supported by a series of photographs from publicly accessible viewpoints to illustrate the visual environment within which the Appeal Site is set. The photographs were taken in May 2021 by Chartered Landscape Architects and illustrate the visual environment in which the Site is

set. The photographs were taken using a 35mm equivalent digital SLR camera at a focal length of 50mm in line with current Landscape Institute guidelines and TGN 06/19 (**CD10.3**). The Photographic Record is included within **Appendix CJ2**.

5.1.29. As an overview, views of the site are highly localised given the low lying nature of the Appeal Site, the gently undulating topography of the localised landscape, alongside the extent of mature robust vegetation structure including a high degree of woodland within the localised landscape. The degree of containment is further compounded by the extent of the built up areas to the east, northeast and south, which characterises the immediate local setting of the Appeal Site. As a result, views generally are only available from in closer proximity to the Site and along the main London Road corridor which bounds the Site to the west.

5.1.30. Localised views of the site are from the A281 and Five Oaks Road where the primary receptors will be motorists. These are considered to be less sensitive to change and are transient, passing through the landscape at speed. The existing built form along the road corridor and beyond the Site boundaries is evident within localised views and characterises the context of the site.

5.1.31. Similarly, views from the majority of the PROWs within the localised setting are largely restricted, however some localised short / mid-range views from the PRoW UCK 1/1 immediately to the west are available, albeit glimpsed and partial views due to the robust vegetation structure which exists.

5.1.32. There was no request for additional Viewpoints during the application process and it is common ground that the selection of Viewpoints contained within the LVIA are considered to be representative of the Site and its landscape context.

5.1.33. A Zone of Visual Influence Plan has been prepared and verified during Site visits to the locality. This is included within **Appendix CJ1** and demonstrates the high degree of visual and physical containment afforded to the Site and thus the limited zone of visual influence as a result of the Appeal Proposals.

Overview of Effect upon Visual Environment

5.1.34. In terms of the effect of the proposals upon the appearance of the localised setting, the submitted LVIA undertook a detailed assessment of each viewpoint and the potential effect that the proposals would have within Section 5 (**CD3.11**). This was based on an established and robust methodology and is GLVIA3 compliant.

5.1.35. As an overview, the submitted LVIA concluded that the proposals can be integrated within this context and would not give rise to significant long term adverse effects upon the localised or wider visual environment, a conclusion which I support and is further demonstrated within the submitted Photographic Record (**Appendix CJ2**) as well as the Illustrative Wireframe Visualisation of VP6 contained within **Appendix CJ8**.

5.1.36. It is acknowledged that the proposals would change the visual environment within the immediate context of the Appeal Site. However, the proposals have been carefully developed to incorporate areas of landscaped public open space and includes substantial areas of structural landscape planting to the perimeters, particularly the woodland planting to the southern portion. The set back from London Road allows for the retention and reinforcement of the roadside hedgerow as well as scope for mitigation planting for a proportion required for removal to accommodate the access and associated visibility splays. As the planting matures it would create a robust verdant setting for the proposed development and soften views of the built form within the immediate visual environment. The type of development proposed is not unusual in this landscape context, with a variety of built form present to the north, south and east, forming the existing settlement edge and characterising the localised setting. The proposals would be highly localised, not be prominent over medium or long distances and would not harm the public's enjoyment of the countryside from the local or wider PRoW network.

5.1.37. In terms of the visual environment, the LVIA acknowledged there would be a degree of change to a number of the closest Viewpoints, however, the inclusion of a carefully designed scheme and incorporation of additional landscaping helps to moderate the visual effects.

5.1.38. As identified by the visual assessment, views of the Site are localised as a result of a combination of low lying, gently undulating landform, existing mature vegetation structure and existing built up settlement which characterises the immediate and local setting of the Site. By way of an overview, of the six Viewpoints identified in the submitted LVIA, the long term effects were assessed as being predominately **Moderate / Minor Adverse** or **Moderate / Minor to Minor Adverse**.

5.1.39. In terms of the visual environment, the LVIA (**CD3.11**) concluded that the proposals can be integrated without significant long term adverse effects to the receiving visual environment, a conclusion which I support.

5.1.40. On reviewing the submitted LVIA, the Officer's Committee Report (**CD5.1,** *pdf Page 70*) agrees that the visual effects are highly localised stating that ***"The site would not be prominent in longer terms***

views due to the topography of the site surroundings as well as exiting built from around parts of the site. The extent of the impact upon visual amenity would be chiefly limited to close term views from London Road where is likely that the provision of the access and associated visibility splays would result the removal of existing vegetation."

5.1.41. It is also noted that there was no objection on visual grounds during the course of the application and the Council has since confirmed that they no longer intend to pursue the Appeal or Reasons for Refusal, and as such the visual effects are not being disputed by WDC.

6. Response to Interested Parties

6.1.1. As noted, the Council has elected to not defend the Reasons for Refusal and have withdrawn from the appeal.

6.1.2. Notwithstanding the Council's decision to withdraw from the Appeal and not to defend the Reasons for Refusal, I have prepared my statement to assist the Inspector in determining the merits of the proposed development, having regard to the interested parties and objections to the planning application. The main issues identified by interested parties have been summarised and are addressed below.

6.1.3. It should be noted that it does not appear that the interested parties have undertaken their own qualitative landscape assessment or had any input from a Chartered Landscape Architect to support their statements in relation to landscape and visual effects in their respective objections.

6.1.4. The Appeal Site does not contain any notable landscape features that elevate it above that of ordinary countryside, and its contribution to the wider landscape is limited due to the visually and physically enclosed nature of the Site. The proposed development will not result in significant adverse effect on the landscape at either a national or district level and WDC Officer's concurred with the findings of the submitted LVIA within the Committee Report (**CD5.1** *pdf Pages 70-71 and 82*).

Landscape and Visual Matters

6.1.5. As already set out earlier in this Appeal Statement and the submitted LVIA, the visual change experienced will be highly localised and limited. Whilst a number of interested parties have cited concerns as to the landscape and visual effects of the Appeal Proposal, these do not appear to be based on any specific qualitative assessment.

6.1.6. Indeed, WDC Officer's did not raise any concerns with the visual impact of the Appeal Proposals during the course of the application and concurred with the findings of the submitted LVIA. It was concluded that the proposals can be integrated within its context and would not give rise to significant long term adverse effects upon the localised or wider visual environment.

6.1.7. MRSG at Paragraph 2.8 of their statement suggest that the proposals *"will dominate the landscape and directly affect the wider landscape character and visual environment"*. Within the same

Paragraph MRSG have used Viewpoint 6 from the submitted LVIA and inaccurately represented the proposals in a highly exaggerated manner.

6.1.8. Firstly, it is well documented within the WDC published landscape evidence base, and as identified in the submitted LVIA, the localised landscape is characterised by large areas of woodland resulting in a high degree of enclosure and compartmentalisation. The Appeal Site itself is also visually and physically enclosed by the adjoining landuses, and thus any impact as a result of the proposals is highly localised and would not affect the wider landscape – a matter of common ground with WDC.

6.1.9. The extent of visual influence is also illustrated on Plan ASP6 within **Appendix CJ1**. As already set out in Section 6 of this hearing statement, the Officer's Committee Report (**CD5.1,** *pdf Pages 70 - 71*) concurs with the LVIA, and that the degree of visual containment means that impacts are localised. It is clear therefore that MRSG's view is completely at odds with the GLVIA3 compliant LVIA and that of WDC Officer's.

6.1.10. Secondly, in order to address the inaccurate representation on Viewpoint 6, a more accurately prepared Illustrative Wireframe Visualisation is contained within **Appendix CJ8**. This includes a robust and transparent methodology in line with recommended guidance on photography and visualisation, and which accurately reflects the development proposed (notwithstanding the scheme is illustrative). This clearly demonstrates that whilst some views of the proposal will be available, the proposed built elements will not dominate the landscape, will be set within a well vegetated context and would not be out of character. Again, as set out in the submitted LVIA, this can be accommodated without significant adverse effects, which WDC Officer's agreed with.

6.1.11. In terms of the landscape effects, MRSG in Paragraph 2.2 state that they disagree with the findings of the LVIA and disagree that Site and its immediate setting do not represent a "valued landscape". However, no evidence or additional qualitative assessment has been prepared to support these claims and indeed it is a matter of common ground between the Appellant and WDC. Therefore, MRSG's view is completely at odds with the GLVIA3 compliant LVIA and that of WDC Officer's.

6.1.12. MRSG go on to reference the NCA profile in their Paragraph 2.3 and elements contained in the landscape which reflect the profile. It should however be noted that the NCA is the National Landscape Character Assessment which is broad brush and covers an expansive area (**CD10.4**). As such it is widely recognised as being best practice to also examine the more localised published landscape character assessments, which the submitted LVIA does, a summary of which is included in Section 4 of this hearing statement. As set out above and within the LVIA, the effects upon the

wider NCA 122 are highly localised and it is agreed with WDC that both the National and County level assessment are of limited relevance to this Appeal.

6.1.13. At a more localised level the submitted LVIA acknowledged that there would be an unavoidable and inevitable change to the Site itself, however this is restricted to the Site and immediate adjoining landscape only due to the high degree of physical and visual containment afforded. As a result, the landscape effects would be highly localised.

6.1.14. Given that such limited harm is unavoidable and accrues wherever new development replaces undeveloped fields, it is also key to understand the extent of any wider landscape effects. In this regard as set out in the submitted LVIA and earlier in this Appeal Statement, the Appeal Proposals are well related to the existing surrounding built form and does not affect the landscape setting of Uckfield, or the ability to understand and appreciate the form and fabric of the wider landscape. The settlement edge and built components in the immediate vicinity itself is part of the localised landscape, and I consider that the development of the Appeal Site to be a logical extension in this context.

Geodiversity in the Landscape

6.1.15. MRSG's statement at Paragraph 2.3 and 2.10 refers again to the NCA profile and the presence of 'sandrock' outcrops in the vicinity of the Appeal Site. Paragraph 2.4 suggests these features have been overlooked within the application submission.

6.1.16. It is noted that as part of the evidence base for the published WDC assessments, most notably the 2014 LSCA, the character assessment takes into account geological factors in defining landscape character. On the basis that the submitted LVIA used this published assessment, it in turn includes consideration of all relevant geological factors. It is also noted that the geological elements MRSG refer to are within the localised and wider landscape setting to the Appeal Site, rather than within the Appeal Site itself (Budlett's Common Rocks Local Wildlife Site (LWS) is situated approximately 50m north of the Appeal Site) and thus it is unlikely the appeal proposal will result in any adverse landscape effects. In terms of ecological matters of this LWS designation, this is dealt with by Dr Simpson.

Historic Landscape Matters

6.1.17. Whilst a number of the interested parties have raised issues relating to heritage matters and historic landscape factors including suggestions that the submission has not appropriately considered the

medieval heritage landscape and that the Appeal Site is part of Budlett's Common and once formed part of Buxted Park estate (MRSG Paragraphs 2.6, 2.9 and 7.4 and Buxted Parish Council Response **CD11.2**).

6.1.18. It should be noted that there is some overlap between landscape and heritage matters and the submitted Heritage Statement undertaken by Savills (**CD3.10**) deals with the key heritage matters. The WDC Conservation Officer also raised no objection to the application.

6.1.19. It is recognised that the Appeal Site and local area are part of an area rich in history and that there are number of designated and undesignated assets within proximity to the Appeal Site. This is typical of much of the Country's landscape, nearly all of which has some form of historic use. Yet, the Appeal Site and immediate setting is not formally designated either as part of a qualitative landscape designation nor as part of any designated or undesignated heritage asset. Budlett's Common is also not designated and Buxted Park Registered Park and Garden is located to the east of the Appeal Site (refer ASP1 and ASP2 within **Appendix CJ1**) and is visually and physically divorced from it with intervening residential development along Coopers Green Road and vegetation structure.

6.1.20. It is clear that as part of the evidence base for the published WDC assessments, most notably the 2014 LSCA, the character assessment takes into account historic and cultural factors in defining landscape character (which is typical to all such assessments). As noted, this is set out in the LCSA (**CD10.6**) methodology at Paragraphs 2.2.12 and 2.3.2 (extract included within **Appendix CJ5**). On the basis that the submitted LVIA used this published assessment, it in turn includes consideration of all relevant historic and cultural factors. Whilst the commentary provided by third parties on the historic landscape of the area s is interesting and useful background, it does not change the basis of the assessments nor does it alter that conclusions of the submitted LVIA or Heritage Statement.

6.1.21. It should however be noted that, as with the majority of the Country's landscape, the localised landscape setting to the Appeal Site has undergone a significant degree of change since medieval times and the landscape assessment is undertaken based on the existing context and present time to which it is situated. Whilst it is recognised there is some historic associations with the localised landscape setting to the Appeal Site, as already set out, the Appeal Site does not form part of a Registered Park and Garden, is not designated as part of a qualitative landscape designation at a national or local level, does not represent a "valued landscape", and contains no landscape features that elevate it above that of ordinary countryside. The designated High Weald National Landscape

(AONB) is located some 2km further north and north east of the Appeal Site and will remain unaffected by the Appeal Proposals.

7. Summary and Conclusions

7.1.1. My name is Chris Jenkinson and I am an Associate Director at Aspect Landscape Planning Ltd. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI).

7.1.2. I am instructed by Obsidian Strategic Asset Management Ltd (the Appellant) to provide specialist landscape and visual advice for the appeal in respect of land at Mockbeggars Farm, London Road, Uckfield.

7.1.3. Whilst the original Decision Notice included matters on landscape and visual impacts, the Council have since confirmed that they no longer intended to pursue the appeal or defend the Reasons for Refusal.

7.1.4. The application was supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (**CD3.11**) that was drawn up and accords with GLVIA3, which fed into and informed the development of the layout to ensure a landscape led approach is achieved. At no time has the Council challenged the methodology within the LVIA during the application, the conclusions of which I support.

7.1.5. Not only has the LVIA work fed into and informed the development of the layout to ensure a landscape led approach is achieved but the appellant actively engaged with the Council throughout the application process in order to respond to and address concerns and queries raised in relation to landscape considerations.

7.1.6. The Appeal Site does not contain any notable landscape features that elevate it above that of ordinary countryside, and it's contribution to the wider landscape is limited due to the visually and physically enclosed nature of the Site. The proposed development will not result in significant adverse effect on the landscape at either a national or district level and WDC Officer's concurred with the findings of the submitted LVIA within the Committee Report (**CD5.1** *pdf Pages 70-71 and 82*).

7.1.7. The LVIA concluded the that the proposals can be accommodated without significant adverse effects upon the localised or wider landscape setting which the appellant maintains is an accurate assessment.

7.1.8. Whilst it is acknowledged that the development will be notable within the context of the Appeal Site itself as it will change from a currently green field to that of a high quality residential scheme forming a logical extension to the exiting settlement. It is however clear that the level of visual harm

will be limited given the extent of containment afforded to the Site and therefore the extent of visibility will be highly localised and limited. This change will affect the Appeal Site and immediately adjoining areas only. Where glimpsed and filtered views of the proposals will be available the existing built form and settlement edge already characterises the context of the view and the proposed scheme will not appear out of context or cause an unacceptable level of visual intrusiveness.

7.1.9. In terms of the visual environment, the LVIA concluded that the proposals can be integrated without significant long term adverse effects to the receiving visual environment, a conclusion which the appellant maintains.

7.1.10. The proposals provide the opportunity to create a new, high quality residential development of an appropriate scale in relation to the existing settlement of Uckfield which will: integrate with the existing settlement; make a positive contribution to the character; retain and reinforce existing landscape features; and deliver a biodiversity net gain.

7.1.11. In terms of interested parties, as set out in my statement it is clear that all perceived concerns and issues in terms of landscape matters have been dealt with in the original LVIA submission, the conclusions of which were supported by WDC Officer's. Nothing further has been raised that alters the original LVIA conclusion in terms of landscape and visual effects.

7.1.12. The landscape and visual impacts of the proposals are localised and very limited due to the ordinary nature of the landscape and strong visual containment of the Appeal Site.

7.1.13. In conclusion, in my professional opinion, the proposals can be integrated without significant harm to the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement edge. The proposals will not cause an unacceptable level of visual intrusion beyond the boundaries of the Appeal Site and will conserve and enhance the key landscape features of the LCA.

7.1.14. It is concluded that the proposals are supportable from a landscape and visual perspective. I therefore respectfully request that the appeal be upheld, and planning permission granted.

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