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Landscape Matters

LAND SOUTH OF THE A271 AND
EAST OF THE A22, LOWER
HORSEBRIDGE, HAILSHAM

Appendix H

**tor&co Knights Farm Review of
Landscape and Visual Effects**

Appellant: Hertfordshire Holdings
Ltd.

Planning Inspectorate No. Appeal:
APP/C1435/W/23/3335625

Wealden District Council Application
No. WD/2022/3222/MAO
March 2024



Review of landscape and visual effects:

Comparison of WDC Employment and Sports sites with Hertfordshire Holding's residential proposals at Lower Horsebridge

Hertfordshire Holdings Ltd
June 2023



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1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 Wealden District Council (WDC) has prepared proposals for the council-owned Knight's Farm sites that lie north and north west of Hertfordshire Holdings' proposed residential development site.
- 1.2 The Knights farm site comprises two parcels. The westernmost part (Knights Farm West), lies north of the A22 and west of the A267. That area is 42.7ha is being marketed by WDC who are seeking a development partner for a future major employment site (see appendix 1 for online marketing information). The advertised form of development is 'industrial /warehouse and ancillary accommodation'.
- 1.3 The easternmost part of the Knights Farm site (Knights Farm East) lies east of the A267 and north of the A271. A Community Sports Hub (see Summer 2021 public consultation material in appendix 2) is proposed for this site, including two full size floodlit pitches, MUGAs, tennis courts, car parking, changing rooms and a cafe.
- 1.4 These proposals were key projects of the Conservative-run council's corporate plan, although it is not clear yet whether the recent change of leadership will change their status. Whilst planning applications have yet to be submitted, the council has advertised for a development partner for the employment development project and has carried out a local public exhibition on the sports hub scheme.
- 1.5 On behalf of Hertfordshire Holdings Ltd, tor&co has prepared this report that assesses the potential landscape and visual effects of these two proposals, and compares this with the potential effects of the proposed residential development adjacent to the Boship Roundabout.
- 1.6 tor&co carried out a site visit in June 2023 to gain familiarity with the sites and their settings. To further inform this site visit, the tor&co GIS team prepared visibility mapping to help understand potential extent of visibility of the proposed WDC site's proposals.
- 1.7 In the absence of detailed information on the proposed development of each site, a development height of 11m was used for this study. This matches the 11m heights used for the residential proposal LVA and so makes the study comparable. 11m is considered to be a conservative estimate of the height of development in a large employment site and also a conservative height for sports pitch floodlighting which is typically 15-16m + high. A site visit was conducted on Tuesday 6th June 2023.
- 1.8 Knights Farm West is accessible as there are public rights of way within it, enabling a large proportion of the site to be viewed.
- 1.9 Knights Farm East is not publicly accessible, but can be partially viewed from the A267 highway land via a field gate and also partially viewed from the public right of way in the woodland belt to the north east.

2.0 Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 2.1 This preliminary appraisal follows the site visit and provides tor&co's initial thoughts on the potential for demonstrating the landscape and visual effects arising from one or both of the WDC proposals is much greater than the effects that might arise from the proposed residential development of the Hertfordshire Holdings site.

Landscape effects

Landscape character - local character assessments

- 2.2 Since the preparation of the LVA for the residential application, WDC has published the first part of a new landscape character assessment dated June 2022 prepared by LUC. All of the sites including the residential site are now within area 'LCA 3A : Uckfield to Hailsham Wooded Clay Vale.
- 2.3 The Uckfield to Hailsham Wooded Clay Vale character area is summarised as: *The Uckfield to Hailsham Wooded Clay Vale is a low-lying landscape, crossed by the narrow river valleys of the Uck and its tributaries in the west and the Cuckmere in the east. The landscape supports a patchwork of arable and pastoral fields, interspersed with areas of woodland, much of ancient origin, and more extensive mixed plantations. Scattered linear settlements and farmsteads are strung along the rural road network. The edge of the LCA is strongly influenced by its proximity to Hailsham and Uckfield.*
- 2.4 Key characteristics are listed as:
- The underlying geology of mudstones, siltstones and sandstones give rise to a gently rolling landscape, dissected by the narrow river valleys of the Uck, Ouse and Cuckmere.
 - A well wooded landscape containing small broadleaved woodland blocks and copses, with extensive mixed plantations at Abbot's Wood and Vert Wood. Much of the deciduous woodland is priority habitat with a high proportion of ancient woodland, including Plashett Park Wood, a designated SSSI.
 - Scattered pockets of remnant semi-natural grassland provide valued habitats for birds and invertebrates, with grasslands at Park Corner Heath designated as a SSSI.
 - Fields are varied in size and origin, ranging from sinuous irregular medieval 'assarts' (fields formed by cleared areas of woodland) located on the edges of existing woodlands, regular or semi-regular medium to large scale fields derived from planned private or piecemeal enclosure around Lower and Upper Dicker, as well as some larger modern fields.
 - The heavy clay soils give rise to a mixed land use of sheep and cattle grazing and arable cultivation. Fields are bound by hedgerows, and mature hedgerow trees are common.
 - A small-scale pattern of historic rural hamlets and villages with scattered farmsteads, many of which are listed buildings. Muddles Green is the only village covered by a Conservation Area, although the Conservation Areas of

Hellingly and Arlington extend into the LCA. Village and farm ponds are common.

- An estate character in places, built by families made wealthy through the Wealden iron industry, with small country houses with parklands at Plashett Park, Bentley Farm and Horsted Place, the latter with gardens designed by Geoffrey Jellicoe, now a Registered Park and Garden.
 - The network of rural roads, lined with clipped hedgerows and mature trees, contrasts with the busy A22.
 - A strong network of public rights of way including the promoted routes of the Vanguard Way and the Wealdway, and public access across Vert Wood and Abbot's Wood.
 - The woodland, hedgerows and trees result in an enclosed landscape, although the distinctive ridges of the South Downs are visible to the south and south-west, while the High Weald provides a wooded backdrop to the north.
 - A rural landscape with areas of tranquillity and dark skies, although this decreases with proximity to Hailsham, Uckfield and the A22/A26.
- 2.5 tor&co particularly notes the final bullet point in the list above, relating to tranquillity and dark skies as both WDC proposals would impact on those existing qualities and extend noise and lighting significantly further into the landscape.
- 2.6 tor&co have also looked for information in relation to the Knights Farm land parcels in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), but these appear to have been added after the 2018 deadline for the published 2019 SHELAA report and therefore no assessment is available.
- 2.7 The sites both lie within Hellingly Parish. tor&co has looked at the Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan. neither site is specifically highlighted. The Hellingly 'Area of Locally Valued Landscape' lies approximately 1.25m to the north east so subject to the detail of the proposals, could be potentially affected. Policy HNBP1 relating to the area contains policies, including relating to lighting and views, stating development will be permitted if it is not detrimental to the landscape.

Knights Farm West

- 2.8 Knights Farm West is a 17.26 ha site which includes fields and farm buildings on the land at Lower Dicker. It lies north of the A22 and west of the A267. Two public footpaths lie within the site. The site is gently sloping to the north.
- 2.9 The character of the southernmost part of the site is influenced to a moderate degree by the proximity of the development including employment and residential concentrated at Boship roundabout and along the A22, but the part of the site extending northwards has a much more rural character in terms of its intrinsic components of pasture and hedgerow and also in terms of its setting, with fields, woodland and hedgerow to the north and west and the A267 tree belt to the east. The detractors to this are limited views of the development at Boship roundabout and Lower Dicker. Although the A267 lies adjacent to its eastern boundary, the earth-shaping and dense planting along the road means

that the traffic is largely screened and traffic noise does not appear significantly intrusive.

- 2.10 The site benefits to a degree from the woodland planting along the A267 and adjacent to the northern boundary and beyond the site to the north west and west. This would limit the probable extent of visibility of development of the site but there remain significant areas of potential visibility.
- 2.11 The ZTV studies suggest that the area of landscape setting that would be most significantly affected by views of development would be the area of small scale fields and woodland edge to the east of the site, up to the edge of Caldicott's Wood and the area to the north towards Boggy Wood and Broad Farm approximately 1km from the site. There are other small pockets of potential visibility from Westenden and Hellingly to the north east, the western edge of Hailsham, Chichele and Hempstead Farms to the south east and the area of Coldharbour Farm from the south west.
- 2.12 In summary, the key landscape impacts would be the removal of a large area of farmland comprising the site, which has a predominantly rural character and setting and the detracting effects of development, particularly employment development on the rural character of the landscape to the west at Caldicotts Farm and Wood and to the north west and north at Broad Farm and Boggy Wood.
- 2.13 The areas of landscape outlined in the paragraph above that would be affected by the proposals are currently very rural in character with a good level of tranquillity and sense of remoteness and have very little influence from the effects of existing development. Therefore introducing new large scale development would significantly detract from that rural character and sense of remoteness.
- 2.14 The development would result in the perception that the developed area of Hailsham is sprawling into areas that are currently predominantly rural.

Knights Farm East

- 2.15 Knights Farm East is a 8.34ha site north of the A271 and development at Lower Horsebridge /Boship and east of the A267. There is no public access into the site, but it is visible from a field gate on the A267 and is also visible through vegetation at some locations from a bridlepath to the north east.
- 2.16 The site appears to be of a farmland character comprising one main undulating field with tree lines partially subdividing it. It slopes gently to the north east where there is a tributary brook that forms the north east boundary of the site.
- 2.17 The site is relatively well enclosed by the mature tree belt along the A267 to the west. To the north east it is enclosed by a mature linear woodland to the north east along the line of a bridleway, combined with additional trees in the patchwork of fields north east of the brook.
- 2.18 To the south, part of the site extends to A271 and there is some minor visibility from a very short section of the A271 through the roadside hedgerow, but otherwise it is effectively screened from the south.

- 2.19 As a result of the physical and visual enclosure of the site, the site itself is relatively cut off from the surrounding landscape in its current state. However, if developed as a sports hub, although much of the development will be relatively low level, the two main pitches will be floodlit and the other facilities will also be illuminated for use during the hours of darkness.
- 2.20 The lighting, particularly the pitch floodlighting will be visible in the landscape beyond the site, both in terms of the lighting masts and also the night time illumination.
- 2.21 The ZTV (based on 11m mast height which is a very conservative height estimate) suggests that the appearance of the proposals would affect the landscape in the area to the north towards Boggy Wood and Broad Farm approximately 1km from the site . It would also impact on the area of small scale fields and woodland edge to the east of the site, up to the edge of Caldicott's Wood as well as the Knights Farm West site. There would also be a small pocket of potential visibility from open spaces on the western edge of Hailsham.
- 2.22 In summary, the key landscape impacts would be the removal of a large area of farmland comprising the site, which has a predominantly rural character although with a limited setting and the detracting effects of development, particularly the lighting associated with the development, on the rural character of the landscape to the west at Caldicotts Farm and Wood and to the north west and north at Broad Farm and Boggy Wood. Noise associated with the sports hub would also detract from the tranquillity of the area.
- 2.23 The areas of landscape outlined in the paragraph above that would be most affected by the proposals are currently very rural in character, with a good level of tranquillity and sense of remoteness and have very little influence from the effects of existing development. Therefore introducing new non-rural elements such as tall lighting masts and a highly illuminated area on the edge of Hailsham would significantly detract from that rural character and sense of remoteness.

Visual effects

Knights Farm West

- 2.24 The paragraphs above describe the extent of visibility of the proposals in the surrounding landscape. Within the areas described the key visual receptors are likely to be people living or working at Lower Dicker; people using the network of public footpaths in the Broad Farm and Boggy Wood areas to the north and Caldicott Wood and Farm areas to the east. Other visual receptors will include road users on the A22. There are also views from the Weald Way at Chichele and Hempstead Farms to the south east, from public open space on the western edge of Hailsham and the eastern edge of Hellingly.
- 2.25 It is probable that the most sensitive visual receptors would be residents of Lower Dicker and users of local footpaths to the east, north east and north of the site. The change in the site from open fields to employment use would result in some large adverse changes in the character of the views.

- 2.26 Lighting and glow arising from the development would affect views from the immediate area of surrounding rural landscape and noise would also detract from the current relative tranquillity of the area.

Knights Farm East

- 2.27 The paragraphs above describe the extent of visibility of the proposals in the surrounding landscape. Within the areas described the key visual receptors are likely to be people living on the west side of the A271 at Lower Horsebridge; people using the network of public footpaths including the bridleway north east of the site and the footpaths in the field north of the bridleway that extends to the west side of Hellingly. Although the ZTV suggests no visibility in that field due to the tree line, site study suggests that the proposals would be visible through the trees.
- 2.28 People using the public rights of way at Broad Farm and Boggy Wood areas to the north and Caldicott Wood and Farm areas to the east would experience views of the lighting masts visible above intervening vegetation detracting from the predominantly rural character of the views from this area . Other visual receptors will include road users on the A22. There are also views from the Weald Way at Chichele and Hempstead Farms to the south east, from public open space on the western edge of Hailsham and the eastern edge of Hellingly.
- 2.29 Visual receptors using the public open space on the west side of Hailsham would experience a change in the view with the lighting masts visible above intervening vegetation in the middle distance. This would detract from the otherwise semi-natural outlook from this area. The proposal would also introduce significantly more high level light sources into the view, currently restricted mainly to highway lighting.

3.0 Summary and conclusions

3.1 The above comprises the preliminary assessment of the impacts of these areas on the landscape and views within the affected areas. It is clear that both proposed developments by the council on its land, whether taken individually or together would extend the perceived extent of development of Hailsham, affecting the rural character of the affected areas and also impacting on views. The lighting aspect, particularly the high floodlighting of the sports hub site would erode the night time dark skies qualities of the landscape. Although the area has not been visited at night to determine the baseline night time conditions, it is reasonable to conject that the areas of affected landscape to the north and east particularly have relatively limited effects from lighting.

3.2 In terms of the comparison of effects from the proposed residential site at Lower Horsebridge, east of the Boship Roundabout, the following paragraphs set out the main points of comparison and make reasonable assumptions about the Knights farm sites in the absence of detail.

Landscape impacts - effects on site landscape resources

3.3 The Lower Horsebridge residential proposal minimises impacts on trees and other vegetation, although a significant area of hedgerow is removed for access /highways and the developed area replaces the field area.

3.3 Knight Farm West would involve a similar pro-rata extent of vegetation and field removal. It is probable that boundary and site trees would be retained.

3.4 Knight Farm East would involve a similar pro-rata extent of vegetation and field removal. It is probable that boundary and site trees would be retained.

Landscape impacts - effects on wider landscape character

3.4 The Lower Horsebridge residential proposal impacts on the setting of the village of Lower Horsebridge to a small degree by reducing the area of open landscape forming the 'gap' between Lower Dicker and Lower Horsebridge. However, the proposal has no significant effect on the wider landscape character as there is existing development concentrated in Lower Dicker and Boship which the proposed development would assimilate with and it would not generate significant additional impacts on the wider landscape than are already generated by existing development. The area already has significant lighting associated with the highways and existing development and any additional lighting associated with the proposals would be minimal in comparison.

3.5 Knight Farm West would extend the developed area of Hailsham into an area that is predominantly rural and in that respect would have very significant effects on the wider landscape both in terms of reducing the area of rural landscape but also in indirect effects of the visibility of the employment site and the effects of lighting and noise on the current dark skies and tranquillity of these areas.

3.6 Knight Farm East would extend the developed area of Hailsham into an area that is predominantly rural (although less so than KF West and in that respect would have significant effects on the wider landscape both in terms of reducing the area of rural landscape but also in indirect effects of the visibility of the

proposals, particularly the lights which would detract from the relatively dark skies and tranquillity of the area.

Visual impacts

- 3.7 The visual impacts of the Lower Horsebridge residential proposal are very localised and the affected views already feature existing development, so that there is not a 'step change' in the character of views.
- 3.8 Knights Farm West will introduce a new area of employment development into views from countryside areas that currently have no significant visible development. This will result in significant visual impacts.
- 3.9 Knights Farm East will introduce a new area of sports development including lighting into views from countryside areas that currently have no significant visible development. This will result in significant visual impacts.
- 3.10 The proposals for both site would undoubtedly include landscape measures to reduce landscape and visual effects but these would take several decades to provide effective screening and it is probable that residual effects, particularly lighting would result in permanent landscape and visual effects

Conclusion

- 3.11 The Knights Farm West and East proposals would both result in landscape and visual impacts affecting areas of countryside, particularly to the east, north east and north which are currently affected only to a limited degree by the developed area of Hailsham.
- 3.12 In comparison, the Lower Horsebridge residential proposals would have no significant effects on those areas, with effects being limited to the immediate localised area.
- 3.13 The Lower Horsebridge residential proposals would therefore result in significantly less landscape and visual impact overall than either the development of Wealden's employment site or the proposed sports hub.