

Landscape Statement

June 2025

Land at Bird in Eye Farm, Uckfield

Prepared by

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On behalf of:

Croudace Homes Ltd

PINS Ref: APP/C1435/W/24/3356658

LPA REF: WD/2024/1799/O

Report No: CSA/2646/25

Report Reference	Revision	Date	Prepared by	Approved by	Comments
CSA/2646/25	a	19/05/2025	CS	CA	First Issue
	b	02/06/2025	CS	CA	Second issue
	c	04/06/2026	CS	CA	Final



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1.0 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared by Clive Self who is a Chartered Landscape Architect and an Urban Designer at CSA Environmental.
- 1.2 This Statement is submitted on behalf of Croudace Homes Ltd in respect of an appeal against Wealden District Council for non-determination of an outline planning application for up to 190 dwellings, with all matters reserved save for access.
- 1.3 The Site extends to approximately 20 hectares and lies on the eastern edge of Uckfield, immediately to the south of Bird in Eye Hill. The Site surrounds the buildings and hardstanding at Bird in Eye Farm, which includes the Grade II listed Bird-in-eye Oasthouse, but this area is excluded from the redline boundary of the Appeal Site.
- 1.4 CSA have been involved with the Site for several years and prepared the LVIA that accompanied the planning application. As the LVIA provides a detailed assessment of the baseline conditions, the context of the Site, and the anticipated effects of the proposed development, that information is not duplicated here.
- 1.5 An illustrative Landscape Strategy was also submitted with the application which shows the intended approach to the landscaping of the Site and the SANG.
- 1.6 This Statement addresses landscape matters and is relatively short as the Local Authority are not objecting to the proposed development on landscape grounds. This matter is clarified in Section 5 of the Planning SoCG which states:

It is agreed there are no landscape objections to the areas of the Site shown for housing and SANG.

- 1.7 It is also agreed in the SoCG that the package of works for the Ancient Woodland, which borders part of the Site, can be secured through a S106 agreement and as a result there would be no overall harm to that habitat and the ecology within it.
- 1.8 Given that the Local Authority did not identify landscape harm as a reason for refusal and that the SoCG acknowledges that there remains no objection to the current Appeal Scheme on landscape grounds then this Statement primarily addresses the landscape matters raised by Town Legal LLP, acting on behalf of Kassie Smith KC who submitted Written

Representations to the Inspectorate. Objections were also made by third parties on a variety of topics. I have also briefly responded to the main landscape matters raised by third parties, under a series of subheadings. Where these matters are similar to those raised by Kassie Smith KC, I have not duplicated my response.

Previous Planning Application for 290 dwellings

- 1.9 The Site, and in addition, the neighbouring ancient woodland which lies immediately to the south of it, and a field further to the south, were the subject of the previous planning application for 290 dwellings and a strategic SANG. That application was appealed for non-determination and subsequently refused planning permission by the Planning Inspectorate. Landscape and visual matters were not listed as part of the Inspector's reasons for refusing the application and were not contested at the Appeal by the Local Authority.
- 1.10 The Inspector's decision on the 290 dwelling scheme, primarily identified harm in respect of the ancient woodland, highway safety, flood risk and heritage.
- 1.11 To address the matters raised by the Inspector, the current scheme was amended to occupy a significantly smaller site, than the one that was considered by the Inspector, and the number of dwellings reduced. The current development was also reconfigured to provide a more open landscape setting to the Grade II listed Oasthouse which lies in the centre of the Site.
- 1.12 The red line boundary of the previous scheme also included the ancient woodland that borders the southern part of the Site, and the arable field that lay beyond it. Those areas are now excluded from the Appeal Scheme.

2.0 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

- 2.1 As the submitted LVIA provides a detailed assessment of the Site and neighbouring area, I have not replicated that information here, rather I have summarised the most pertinent points.

Designations

- 2.2 The Site lies outside of the settlement boundary of Uckfield, but it is not covered by any statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality.
- 2.3 There are no trees on the Site covered by Tree Preservation Orders ('TPO').
- 2.4 Given the varied character of the Appeal Site, its relationship to Uckfield, and the lack of any rare or unique features within it, it is not considered to be a Valued Landscape in respect of para 187a of the NPPF, and the Local Authority have not suggested otherwise.

Description

- 2.5 The Site comprises a series of irregular shaped pastoral fields which lie immediately to the south of the B1202, Bird in Eye Hill. The southern boundary borders a belt of ancient woodland, known as Bird in Eye Shaw. Ancient woodland also extends alongside the southern section of the western Site boundary.
- 2.6 The Site slopes in a westerly direction to Framfield Stream and in a southerly direction to the stream which runs through Bird in Eye Shaw. The eastern and central part of the Site have a gentler gradient with the land sloping more steeply to the watercourses.
- 2.7 Bird in Eye Farm and its associated outbuildings are inset in the centre of the Site. These buildings are accessed via a track leading from the B1202 and include a number of barns, which are currently occupied by small business units, areas of hard standing, a farmhouse and the Grade II listed Bird-in-eye Oasthouse.
- 2.8 The Site benefits from a good degree of physical and visual containment, on account of: the ancient woodland along the southern boundary; the woodland alongside Framfield Stream; the dense vegetation alongside Bird in Eye Hill; the properties which front onto Bird in Eye Hill and back onto the northwestern part of the Site; and the vegetation alongside Hammonds Green; and the farm track which

leads off it. Views from the central section of Bird in Eye Hill are more open.

- 2.9 The visual assessment found that there are some opportunities for views from public vantage points in the near vicinity of the Site to the west and north. For the rest of the Site, and in the wider landscape, views are restricted by the undulating topography and the extensive woodland cover in the wider landscape.

3.0 THE APPEAL SCHEME

3.1 The current proposals have significantly reduced the overall quantum of development on the Site from 290, which was the previously refused application, to 190 dwellings. The redline boundary has also been amended to exclude the ancient woodland to the south of the Site and the field beyond.

3.2 The Appeal Scheme has been sensitively designed with the primary inputs being heritage, landscape, ecology, drainage and highways. The Appeal Scheme has also addressed the concerns raised by the previous Planning Inspector. The principles of the proposed development are:

- Housing in the western part of the Site to be set back from the steeper slopes on the valley side in order to allow open views to The Oasthouse;
- New hard and soft landscaping to be undertaken in a sensitive manner on the periphery of the Oasthouse with existing areas of car parking and hard standing removed which currently detract from the immediate setting of the listed building;
- New landscaping on the valley sides will have an informal character and will include areas of meadow grassland. A Locally Equipped Area of Play will also be provided. All existing high and moderate quality trees and hedgerows are to be retained and enhanced. A SANG will also be provided in the eastern part of the Site and on the lower slopes to the south and west. The SANG will also include a 2.5km walking route.
- Vehicular access is to be taken off the B2102, Bird in Eye Hill, via a roundabout, with pedestrian / cycle access taken at the north western corner of the Site; and
- All woodland within and on the edges of the Site is to be protected and management secured through management plans, with housing and roads set 50m back from the ancient woodland (see parameters Plan).

3.3 As a result of the above approach, the proposed development responds to the Site, the neighbouring landscape, and the Oasthouse in an appropriate manner, and it will read as a natural extension to Uckfield. The density and scale of the proposed housing will also be compatible with that in the neighbouring area of Uckfield.

4.0 RESPONSE TO LANDSCAPE MATTERS RAISED BY TOWN LEGAL LLP, WHO ARE ACTING ON BEHALF OF KASSIE SMITH KC, AND THIRD PARTIES

Town Legal LLP

- 4.1 As noted in Section one of this Statement, Written Representations, which object to the Appeal Scheme, have been submitted to the Inspectorate by Town Legal LLP.
- 4.2 The initial consultation response from Town Legal LLP was submitted on the 10th February 2025 with a subsequent response on the 25th May 2025. In the intervening time, the Appellant continued to work closely with East Sussex County Council to agree a suitable access arrangement for the Site. As a result of that interaction, an appropriate access was agreed, and as a result, the Highways Authority removed their objection to the planning application.
- 4.3 In the following section I briefly address the main landscape related topics which are cited in the Representations. As landscape is ultimately a matter of judgement, I have not addressed every point where we have different opinions, but that does not mean that I agree with the judgements that they are making.
- 4.4 Section 7 of the May 2025 Representation refers to matters of Impact on Rural Character & Visual Impact on Landscape. These matters are addressed below under the following subheadings.

Roundabout Access into the Site

- 4.5 Following discussion between the Applicant and the Local Highways Authority the agreed access remains as a 3 arm roundabout although it has been reduced in scale to 28 metres in diameter. A secondary smaller roundabout is also provided within the Site. There will also be associated infrastructure, such as street lighting and signage. The revised scheme has now been agreed with the Local Highway Authority.
- 4.6 In considering the impact of the roundabout it is important to consider the existing nature of the area of land that will be occupied by it. The proposed roundabout is in a similar location to the existing access into the Site and adjacent to linear housing on the edge of Uckfield, although I acknowledge that the existing access is of a different scale to the proposed roundabout.

- 4.7 The land which the roundabout is to occupy is not covered by any statutory or non statutory designation for landscape character or quality and it does not fall within or adjoin a Conservation Area. The roundabout will not result in the loss of any TPO trees.
- 4.8 In considering the wider context of accesses into the settlement of Uckfield, it is relevant to note that elsewhere there are roundabouts on the principal roads which border, or lead into, the settlement. The image below is of the junction of Eastbourne Road and Teelings Drive on the southeastern approach to Uckfield.



Junction of Eastbourne Road and Teelings Drive. Image courtesy of Google Earth

- 4.9 In terms of the urbanising influence of the junction, it will require some minor remodelling of the ground and creation of embankments, but such features can accommodate new planting to reduce the impact. It is also not unusual to see embankments alongside roads in undulating landscapes such as those on the approach to Uckfield.

- 4.10 There will also be sections of brick retaining walls alongside the western side of the vehicular access to the retained commercial uses in Bird in Eye Farm. These walls will only be 0.47 metres high.
- 4.11 The maximum height of the retaining wall on the south side of the internal access roundabout, which borders the north side of the existing commercial development at Bird in Eye Farm, will be 1.08 metres high.
- 4.12 It is not uncommon to see brick retaining walls, or brick walls, defining the boundaries of the properties that face onto Bird In Eye Hill. The proposed retaining walls will therefore not be introducing a new feature into the townscape and the proposed retaining walls will in any event be within the body of the Site.
- 4.13 The introduction of embankments or section of brick retaining walls alongside sections of the roundabout and the access roads will therefore not be discordant with the character of the area. Similarly, the scale of the features are such that they will not appear intrusive.
- 4.14 There will be pavements on the perimeter of parts of the roundabout and street lighting, but the impact of these features will be localised. It is also relevant to note that when one approaches Uckfield from the east on Bird in Eye Hill the alignment of the road, combined with the dense roadside vegetation, means that the proposed roundabout will only come into view when one is relatively close to the Site.
- 4.15 Given the above factors, the roundabouts will result in a new element of infrastructure which will announce the entrance into the settlement of Uckfield when approaching from the east, in a similar manner to the roundabout on Eastbourne Road.

Lack of recognition of Listed Oasthouse Building

- 4.16 Paragraph 6.3 of the February 2025 Representations states that *'The LVIA at 3.2 even fails to acknowledge the listed Oast House within the farm buildings (which hardly fills one with confidence in CSA's Assessment)'*.
- 4.17 As a matter of fact, paragraph 3.2 does not specifically refer to the Oast House but that does not mean that it has not been considered in the LVIA or has not informed the structure of the Appeal Scheme. Throughout the LVIA there are multiple references to the listed Oasthouse e.g. Landscape Effects Table in Appendix K: *'The Grade II Listed Oasthouse within Bird in Eye Farm is surrounded by converted barns and stables, many of which are of low architectural merit.... The effect of the development on heritage assets is covered in detail in the Heritage Statement which accompanies this application'*.

- 4.18 The Landscape Strategy and SANG Design (CSA 2646/123 B, Appendix I of the LVIA) specifically identifies the location of the Oasthouse and provides a photograph of it. The vista which has been created to it is also labelled.
- 4.19 It is therefore a misplaced criticism that the Oasthouse has not been considered in the LVIA simply because it is not mentioned in one specific paragraph.

Distinctively Rural and relatively Tranquil Landscape

- 4.20 Paragraph 7.4 of the May 2025 Representation refers to the previous Representation which considered the Site to be distinctly rural and relatively tranquil and states that *'That concern remains'*.
- 4.21 There is no formal definition of what comprises a tranquil landscape but the two most common factors that are used are landscapes that are free from urban intrusion and those that are not affected by noise.
- 4.22 In the case of the Appeal Site, there is intervisibility with some of the neighbouring housing and development elsewhere in Uckfield. There are also significant areas of hardstanding around Bird in Eye Farm with some of the buildings within the complex being of a utilitarian appearance. There is also traffic movement on Bird in Eye Hill and to a lesser extent along the access track which leads to the commercial buildings within the farm complex. On that basis, I do not consider that the Appeal Site can reasonably be described as tranquil.
- 4.23 The 2022 Landscape Character Assessment of Wealden District also addresses the issue of tranquillity. That assessment identifies the Site as falling within Area 6D High Weald. One of the key characteristics of that area is described as *'A rural landscape, with areas of remoteness, tranquillity and experience of dark skies in the valleys and larger woods of the LCA, particularly away from the main settlements and busy A roads'*.
- 4.24 The assessment goes on to say that the perceptual qualities *'are areas of relative remoteness, tranquillity and an experience of dark skies in the valleys and larger woods, particularly away from Uckfield and Maresfield and the busy trunk roads [my underlining]*.
- 4.25 That assessment accords with my own observations. Given the above factors, the Site's relationship to Uckfield, and the intervisibility with it, I do not consider that it can be described as distinctly rural or tranquil.

Third Party Representations.

- 4.26 The following section briefly considers, under the following subheadings, the main landscape matters raised by third parties.

Urban Sprawl

- 4.27 The Site benefits from a good degree of enclosure, on account of the ancient woodland to south; Bird in Eye Hill to the north; the frontage housing on Bird in Eye Hill to the northwest; and the existing hedgerows and vegetation to the east. The green corridors on the western and southern boundaries of the Site, together with the SANG to the east, will be in the public domain and a management plan will be put in place to ensure that these areas accommodate additional planting and are managed in an appropriate manner.
- 4.28 Given the robust, and clearly defined nature of the external boundaries of the Site and the potential for additional planting, then I do not consider that the Appeal Scheme, on any reasonable basis, can be described as urban sprawl.

Does not respect rural character of the Site

- 4.29 Any development on a greenfield site will inevitably result in the character of the Site changing. However, the Appeal Scheme has responded to the existing landscape features of the Site in a sensitive manner. The majority of the existing hedgerows and trees will be retained and enhanced, as will the plantation woodland in the southeastern part of the Site.

Impact on Ancient Woodland

- 4.30 The indirect impact of the development on the neighbouring ancient woodland is addressed in the Ecology Statement and the Local Authority agree that an appropriate management plan can be put in place to ensure that the proposed development does not result in any harm to the woodland.
- 4.31 The proposed layout has been configured in such a manner as to provide a 50 metre offset from the ancient woodland which is significantly greater than the 15 metre requirement. By adopting this approach, the ancient woodland will be protected in an appropriate manner and there will also be opportunities to experience it from within the proposed development.

Not sympathetic to Local Character

- 4.32 I have already described the manner in which the Appeal Scheme responds to the key landscape features of the Site and how it addresses the setting of the Oasthouse in an appropriate manner.
- 4.33 The Appeal Scheme is in outline form only but the parameters plan shows that it not only responds to the landscape in an appropriate manner but that the scale and height of the development is compatible with that in the neighbouring area e.g. the maximum height of the buildings would be 2 ½ storey.

Not respect distinctive landscape

- 4.34 The landscape of the Site is pleasant but there are a number of detracting features, and it is closely related to Uckfield.
- 4.35 The Site itself is not covered by any statutory or non statutory landscape designations and it not considered to be a Valued Landscape in respect of para 187a of the NPPF. It does not contain any veteran trees or distinctive features, such as ridge and furrow, and there is no objection to the proposed development from the Local Authority on landscape grounds.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The proposed development has clearly been crafted to respond to the key landscape features of the Site, its wider rural setting, and the neighbouring listed Oasthouse in a sensitive manner. As a result, the Appeal Scheme will read as a natural extension to Uckfield and will be compatible with the scale, density and nature of development within it. The landscape features within the Site and the neighbouring ancient woodland have similarly been addressed in a sensitive manner.
- 5.2 The provision of a roundabout access into the Site will introduce a new element of infrastructure into the section of Bird in Eye Hill which borders the Site but the change will only be experienced from a relatively short section of Bird in Eye Hill. Such roundabouts are found elsewhere on the entrances to the settlement and as such it will not be discordant with other approaches to Uckfield.
- 5.3 The nature and extent of existing boundary vegetation means that the Site already benefits from a good degree of visual containment. This can be further enhanced, which means that the visual impact of the proposed development will, for the most part, be localised.
- 5.4 The majority of trees and hedgerows within the Site will be retained and there will be significant opportunities for additional planting. The SANG will also provide a benefit for both people and wildlife.