

Landscape Briefing Note

Dennybrook Garden Village, Wyboston, January 2021

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This briefing note has been prepared by CSA Environmental on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Strategic Land, in relation to Dennybrook Garden Village, Wyboston (hereafter the 'Site'). The Site is being considered as a potential location for a new garden village. The purpose of this briefing note is to provide a summary of the key landscape and visual opportunities and constraints associated with the Site, which will inform advice as to suitable locations within the Site for residential development.
- 1.2 An initial Site visit was undertaken in December 2020 to view the Site and inform this briefing note.

2.0 Site Description and Context

- 2.1 The Site comprises an irregular tract of gently undulating farmland, with a number of farm building curtilages and a larger tract of land to the west, around Coxfield, excluded from the Site. It extends to approximately 980ha with the majority of the land in arable use.
- 2.2 Overall the wider landscape in which the Site is located falls gradually from the west to the River Great Ouse which passes through St Neots to the east. Tributaries of the River Great Ouse, Colmworth Brook, Honeydon Brook and Begwary Brook pass through the Site cutting through the arable landscape from west to east and forming shallow valleys within a gently undulating landscape. There are several other smaller watercourses and wet ditches within the wider landscape and the Site. Apart from the larger settlements mentioned below, small villages are characteristic of the wider landscape.
- 2.3 To the east of the Site, approximately 0.75km at the closest point is the western edge of Eaton Socon, a suburb of the town of St Neots. Immediately east and north of the eastern edge of the Site is the small settlement of Wyboston, while Chawston, another small settlement lies immediately to the southeast. Beyond these settlements is the A1 road, and to the east, the gently undulating, mainly arable landscape with scattered villages continues.
- 2.4 To the immediate south of the Site is the hamlet of Colesden, with the hamlets of Duck's Cross and Channel's End in close proximity to the southwest. The town of Sandy lies approximately 9km to the southeast of the Site on eastern side of the River Great Ouse. The gently undulating landform continues to the south of the Site, although here small blocks of woodland are more common, often indented into the field boundaries. To the southeast of the Site, east of Sandy, the wooded Greensand

ridge rises, extending in a northeast to southwest orientation. This ridge is visible in distant views from the Site, and the prominent Sandy TV Station mast can be seen above it. To the southwest and west the land rises more steadily, but remains gently undulating. Bedford, the largest settlement in the area, lies approximately 12km to the southwest of the Site.

- 2.5 To the west, the small settlement of Colmworth lies within approximately 300m of the western edge of the Site on rising land. The spire of the Church of St Denys, on the eastern edge of the village is locally visible, including from the higher, more exposed parts of the Site to the west.
- 2.6 To the north, indented into the Site's boundary is the settlement of Honeydon, while the pattern of undulating arable landscape, watercourses and scattered settlements continues. To the northwest is a larger area of woodland associated with Bushmead Priory, and given the gentle undulation, the smaller blocks of woodland scattered through the landscape to the north result in wooded horizons.
- 2.7 The Site falls gently from around 60m Above Ordnance Datum ('AOD') on the western boundary to 20m AOD between The Lane, Wyboston and Chawston Lane to the south. A number of minor, unnamed roads mainly travelling in an east-west direction, link the villages on the edges of the Site, and there are also some north-south links. Semi-mature trees lining the roads without hedgerows are characteristic in some parts of the Site, including to the west of the junction of The Lane and Staploe Road along the unnamed road, and where the Site boundary meets Coleden Road. In the northern parts of the Site, to the east of Honeydon and along the unnamed north-south road north of Honeydon, semi-mature hedgerow trees and hedgerows are more characteristic, while to the west on higher ground, the landscape is more open along the roads. Some field boundaries are also marked with hedgerow trees, and there are some hedgerows, often intermittent along internal boundaries and some roadsides. Many of the fields are of a considerable size, suggesting widespread field amalgamation in the area. Trees and outgrown hedgerows also line the watercourses, in some parts of the Site, in particular to the west of Tithe Farm along Colmworth Brook, where there is also a reservoir. In addition, there are small areas of woodland and shelterbelts, which are occasionally coniferous and bound some of the farmsteads, within the Site and on the boundaries. The level of woodland and other tree and hedgerow cover generally allows longer distance views, in particular from higher ground on the roads or public footpath network, although these views are often terminated in the middle distance by wooded horizons. A group of three fishing lakes lie in the south eastern part of the Site, to the north of Chawston, off Roxton Road.
- 2.8 Numerous public footpaths and bridleways extend through the Site linking it to a wider network of public rights of way in the wider landscape. The Ouse Valley Way, a longer distance recreational footpath, extends through the eastern part of the Site linking Wyboston and Chawston. A line of high voltage overhead cables extends in

a northeast to southwest direction, across the Site just south of The Lane, Wyboston to Roxton Road, and then over the south eastern corner of the southernmost part of the Site.

3.0 Relevant Landscape Policies and Character Studies

3.1 Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 guides development to 2030, and the policies of relevance to the Site are as follows:

- Policy 35S – Green Infrastructure;
- Policy 37 – Landscape character;
- Policy 39 – Retention of trees;
- Policy 40 – Hedgerows; and
- Policy 73 – Wyboston Lakes.

3.2 There are also two policies saved from the 2013 Allocations and Designations Local Plan of relevance to the Site, both covering small tracts of land in the eastern part of the Site between Wyboston and Chawston:

- Policy AD21 - Holiday Fishing Village allocation, associated with the small lakes north of Roxton Road; and
- Policy AD44 - relates to a number of pieces of land in the Wyboston and Chawston area and is saved as former land settlement housing association areas.

3.3 The Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment, 2014 (prepared by LUC on behalf of the Borough) locates the Site within Type 1, Clay Farmland Landscape Character Type ('LCT') and within the local landscape character area ('LLCA'), 1D, Thurleigh Clay Farmland LLCA. The key characteristics of this LCA are described as a low lying, arable landscape with subtle topographic variation due to the minor tributaries of the River Great Ouse. There are a few scattered, and some areas of ancient woodland. Large fields are bound by ditches and some hedgerows, but these can be absent resulting in a visual merging of the fields. Mature Ash and Oak trees can be present marking lost hedgerows, and there is evidence of recent planting in the lines of semi-mature trees that line roads. As a result of the varying levels of vegetation, long views are possible across fields, usually to wooded horizons. Woodland and farmland ponds and ditches add to the presence of water in the landscape. There are a number of remnant areas of unimproved grassland along road verges, and at Thurleigh Airfield in the western part of the LCA. The character area is less settled than the adjoining LCAs, with some settlements and scattered farmsteads along tributary valleys in the east, connected by quiet rural lanes.

3.4 The key positive landscape features/strategic sensitivities identified in the study of relevance to the Site are the surviving network of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees; earthworks of moated sites and sunken settlements; recreational access via the network of public rights of way and rural lanes; and the ponds and brooks in

the area. The key visual sensitivity identified in the study is the sense of openness and wide views.

- 3.5 The landscape strategy as set out in the character assessment for this LCA is to enhance the declining hedgerows, and hedgerow and field trees, while conserving and enhancing the open rural landscape.
- 3.6 The landscape management guidelines which support the strategy of relevance to the Site is the conservation, enhancement and restoration of woodlands, hedgerows and field trees; and the conservation and limiting of urbanisation of rural roads. Development guidelines cover similar ground, aiming to resist further loss/fragmentation of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and to work within their existing framework.

4.0 Statutory and Non-Statutory Designations

- 5.0 The Site is not covered by statutory or non-statutory designations for landscape character or quality. There are five Grade II Listed residential buildings within the Site, and a Scheduled Monument on the northern edge of the easternmost part of the Site. Details of these heritage assets are covered in a separate Heritage Note. The closest areas of ancient woodland are located to the northwest of the Site at Bushmead Priory, and to the south of Colesden.

6.0 Visibility

- 6.1 The western parts of the Site, on the higher elevations between 40-45m AOD and 60m AOD are the key areas of visual sensitivity. Here the landscape is more exposed, and although there are some blocks of woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees are less frequent, and longer views are possible from the higher land to the southeast from the Greensand ridge and from the west at Colmworth. A number of public footpaths extend through this part of the Site, providing opportunities for reciprocal views and connecting to the wider public rights of way network at Colmworth.
- 6.2 The public footpaths which extend through the centre and eastern part of the Site are of high visual sensitivity. There are several which follow or are connected to the Colmworth Brook valley, allowing the user to experience the rural landscape from the edge of St Neots to Colmworth.
- 6.3 Areas of lower visual sensitivity include the central and eastern parts of the Site, due to it being on lower lying land, and the north westernmost part of the Site north of Honeydon, which is contained from the rest of the Site by woodland

7.0 Landscape Quality, Value and Sensitivity

- 7.1 The Site forms part of a wider landscape of gently undulating, arable farmland, cut through by tributary watercourses in shallow valleys, with numerous other water bodies and smaller ditches dotted through the Site. Woodland blocks, shelterbelts,

hedgerows (some intermittent or lost) and hedgerow trees are features of the landscape, but on higher ground the Site is more open and exposed. It is fairly typical of the Thurleigh Clay Farmland LCA (LCA 1D, as described in Bedford Borough Council's Landscape Character Assessment). The higher western parts of the Site are visible from higher ground to the west and southeast, and there are numerous public footpaths and bridleways which cross the Site, allowing recreational access. Overall, the Site is assessed as being of medium landscape quality and value, however, there are individual landscape features such as the Colmworth valley and some of the woodland and trees, which is assessed as being of higher landscape quality and value. The Site is assessed overall as having a medium sensitivity to larger scale residential development, rising to medium to high sensitivity to the west on the higher land above 45m AOD contours approximately.

8.0 Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints

- 8.1 The initial appraisal has identified a number of key landscape and visual constraints and opportunities, which have been informed by the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment. These are illustrated on the plan in **Appendix A**, alongside the key ecology and heritage opportunities and constraints to the proposed residential development.
- 8.2 A scheme of this size will inevitably result in landscape and visual harm, but by taking into account the areas of higher sensitivity and concentrating development in areas where the sensitivity is lower, a considered scheme could be accommodated.
- 8.3 The key areas of landscape constraint are to the west and east, and along the Colmworth Brook valley. To the west of the Site, the higher ground, mainly above 45m AOD, is constrained by greater landscape character and visual sensitivity, and should therefore be avoided in terms of residential development. As the land falls to the east, the sensitivity decreases to medium, but remains higher along the watercourses, in particular the Colmworth Brook corridor. Here development should be set back from the corridor, allowing for new recreational uses, as well as ecological mitigation. The eastern edge of the Site, which lies in close proximity to St Neots, and adjoins Wyboston and Chawston, is more sensitive as development in this part of the Site would result in the coalescence between it, and Wyboston and Chawston. To avoid this, and provide a setting for the new settlement, development should be pulled back to Staploe Road/The Lane/Roxton Lane.
- 8.4 The landscape and visual opportunities below should be used to guide future development proposals, and would act to mitigate some of the harm by offering opportunities for strong landscape scale interventions. The key principles are as follows:
 - Sensitive integration of areas of development, within a strong landscape framework which respects the east-west topography and hydrology of the Site;

- Creation of key landscape and ecology corridors, with the Colmworth Brook Valley being the primary corridor, and subsidiary corridors along the other watercourses; and
- Preventing coalescence between the new settlement and Wyboston and Chawston by setting the development back behind an area of public open space.

8.5 Bold Green Infrastructure Framework to be created by:

- Historic field boundaries to act as a spatial guide in key urban design decisions, as well as the opportunity for reinstatement of some field boundaries, connecting the scheme to its heritage and providing a sense of place;
- North-south green infrastructure connections across the new settlement, preferably along historic field boundary alignment;
- Incorporation into the scheme, and enhancement of as many of the existing areas of woodland, hedgerow trees and hedgerows as is practicable, to respond to the landscape management guidelines of the character assessment;
- Incorporation and enhancement of as many of the other waterbodies, including small field, woodland ponds and ditches into the scheme, thus reflecting the watery character of the area;
- Significant new areas of woodland planting on the higher ground to the west of the Site (as part of large-scale ecological habitat restoration of wood-pasture);
- Extensive new recreational routes through the Site, including through the western parts of the Site linking up previously severed public footpaths and bridleways, and creating a landscape scale network for public access; and
- Large-scale recreational and ecology corridor along the Colmworth Brook valley linking the public open space to the east to wood-pasture to the east of the Site.

8.6 A strategic development of the nature proposed will inevitably have an adverse impact on the Site's landscape character and its surroundings. However, by identifying the key landscape opportunities and constraints, as well as those relating to ecology and heritage, a sensitively designed scheme, which minimises the effects and boldly enhances the landscape could be implemented.

Appendix A

Initial Landscape, Ecology and Heritage Opportunities and Constraints

