

Land at Sturgeons Farm, Landscape & Visual Appraisal

Prepared for: GN Rackham & Sons Ltd

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Land at Sturgeons Farm, Shelfanger Road, Diss, Norfolk Landscape & Visual Appraisal

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1 Existing Site Context

The proposed development site is on the fringes of the market town of Diss, Norfolk. The site, which comprises five distinct enclosed fields, is west of Shelfanger Road and Louie's Lane. To the east of the site is residential housing and a playing fields/sports grounds. To the south are allotments and Quaker Wood, a community woodland managed by volunteers. To the west and north are arable fields, also to the north is KC Steward Recycling Centre. Small copses exist on both the north and south boundary (outside the site).

The site itself comprises five enclosed fields, a mixture of arable and pastoral. The field boundaries are mostly defined by substantial hedgerows, although there are some gaps in these. There is a barn/warehouse building at the centre of the site within one of the enclosed fields. A public footpath runs through the site, west to east, joining Brewers Green (Roydon) with Louie's Lane. Parallel to the footpath is a drainage ditch, which runs along the field boundary separating the north and south of the site. A watercourse runs along the northern site boundary, but the site is shown in Flood Zone 1 with less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of flooding (Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning).

There are no statutory designations identified in the immediate vicinity of the site. Shelfanger Meadows, a SSSI, is 1.35 kilometres north of the site, and the nearest listed buildings on Shelfanger Road and Brewers Green Lane are at approximately 400 metres distance.



Proposed Development Site Study Area

Figure 1: Site location plan

2 The Proposed Development

The site (GNLP0362) was submitted by the landowner in a call for sites. The type of proposed development is 'residential led mixed-use development' of up to 415 dwellings on an area of 13.81 hectares. At this stage there is no further detail of the proposed development design.

3 Landscape Character and Landscape Sensitivity

The site lies within the wider Waveney Valley and is described in a number of baseline studies in landscape character which are reviewed below.

3.1 NCA 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands

The site is within NCA 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands National Character Area.

Characteristics of this NCA which are present in the landscape are:

- Plateau of chalky glacial till that is generally flat or only gently undulating, watercourses form greater slopes especially along the tributaries to the Waveney
- Scattered areas of ancient woodland, game copses, shelterbelts, valley floor plantation and carr woodland as well as hedgerow trees provide a treed landscape character, despite much boundary loss.
- A mix of remnant medieval ancient countryside, although irregular field patterns and large modern amalgamated open fields dominate.
- Sinuous field boundaries are formed by deep ditches, some with hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Extensive areas of arable land dominated by cereals with breakcropping of sugar beet and oilseed rape, and some pastures along valley floors.
- Small slow-flowing rivers and streams and the River Waveney drain the clay plateau. The River Waveney has a relatively large-scale open valley landscape compared with the other river valleys which have narrow valley bottoms.
- A dispersed settlement pattern of small nucleated market towns with architectural variety and colour, loosely clustered villages and scattered hamlets. Settlement is often focused around large medieval greens. Many of the market towns have modern extensions.

3.2 South Norfolk Landscape Assessment

The site sits within both the Waveney Rural River Valley character area, and the Waveney Tributary Farmland character area, in the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment.

3.2.1 Waveney Rural River Valley

Key characteristics of this LCA which are relevant to this site are:

- Gently sloping valley sides

- Large-scale open valley landscape
- Arable and pastoral farming
- Discrete Woodland blocks
- Strong market town character

Relevant **significant landscape assets** are:

- National/international - none
- District/county level – distinctive settlement pattern and strong vernacular market town character
- Local level – grazed pastoral farmland, and drainage ditches

Sensitivities and vulnerabilities identified in the report include:

- Upgrading of the rural lane network could be detrimental to characteristic small fords and bridge crossings
- The need to conserve mixed arable and pastoral character of the valley sides, and degradation of the hedgerows creating a monotonous landscape
- Local rural vernacular and market town quality – compact and contained settlement could be eroded by residential extensions/linear development along major roads
- Need to conserve and enhance diversity of habitats, sensitive to development, fragmentation and changes to water level/quality.

The south of the site is along the northmost edge of this character area. Although the site contains some qualities which can be considered typical of the character area, the site itself is not a typical example of the LCA as many characteristics are absent. Many key characteristics of the LCA are associated with proximity to the River Waveney, however the site is some distance from the river and is separated from it by the settlement of Diss. More relevant to this site are the key characteristics that are associated with settlements.

3.2.2 Waveney Tributary Farmland

Key characteristics of this LCA which are relevant to this site are:

- Transitional landscape between the upland plateau and the main river valley
- Narrow streams / drainage channels
- Arable farmland with a varied field pattern
- Mature hedgerow trees
- Hawthorn/blackthorn hedges divide fields
- Scattered blocks of woodland

Relevant **significant landscape assets** are:

- National/international - none
- District/county - none
- Local level – drainage ditches, good hedgerow network, mature hedgerow trees

Sensitivities and vulnerabilities identified in the report include:

- Hedgerows and woodlands, which create pattern and variety in the landscape and contribute to a more intimate and enclosed character
- Hedgerow trees which are especially sensitive to upgrading

- Diversity of habitats sensitive to development, fragmentation, and changes in water level/quality

The site sits on the southernmost edge of this character area. The site is more typical of this character area than it is of the Waveney Rural River Valley character area. The landscape assets it contains are only locally significant, however these are pertinent as they are identified as sensitive/vulnerable in the report.

3.3 Conclusions on landscape sensitivity

The site is situated within two landscape character areas and sits within the Waveney Valley where the council has defined a policy for the protection of landscape character.

Although most of the site is currently laid to arable use, its character is closely related to the settlement edge to the south and has been influenced by the presence of the recycling centre to the north.

Development proposals would need to be carefully designed to ensure that the scale, design and use of materials with landscape proposals which are sympathetic and sensitive to the locality and which enhance the local distinctiveness.

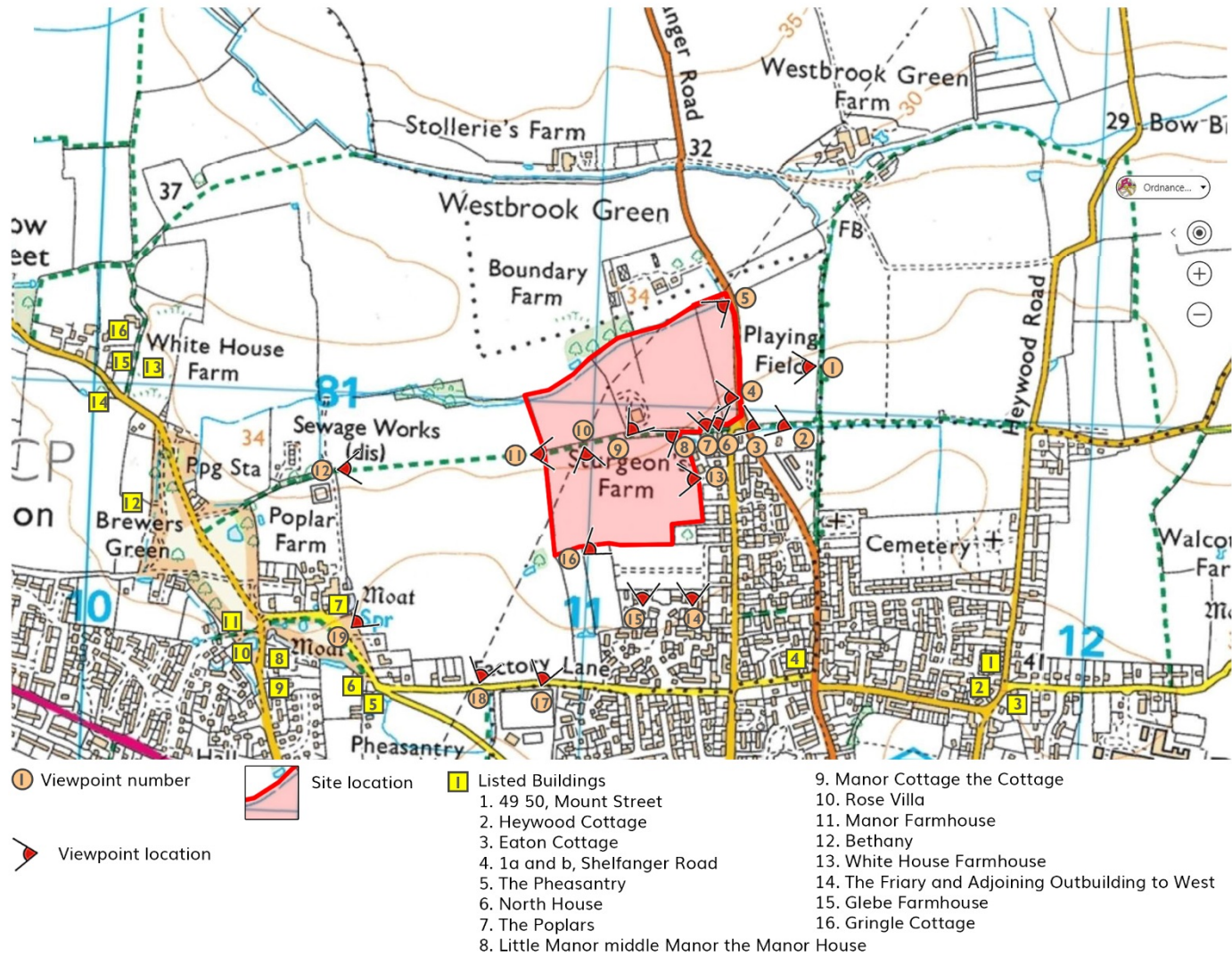


Figure 2: Viewpoints Location Plan

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4 Visual Impact Findings

Fieldwork was carried out in February 2018. Viewpoints were identified by a desktop study and site visit. These are shown on Figure 2 above.

The table below summarises the key viewpoints and the findings of the fieldwork. Photographs from these viewpoints are provided in the appendix of this document, Section 6.

There are, at present, no development proposals. The analysis below therefore makes the assumption of 2-storey residential buildings across the entirety of the site and appraises the development site based on this assumption. It is also assumed that all existing screening vegetation is retained.

4.1 Summary Table of Viewpoints

View no.	Location	Description of the existing view	Predicted proposed change to view
1	Footpath between Shelfanger Road and Westbrook Green Farm, adjacent to sports ground looking east	Glimpsed views through boundary hedgerow to sports ground pavilion visible in middle distance with rooftops of the recycling centre visible beyond. Skyline defined by coniferous hedge to rear.	Glimpsed views through boundary hedgerows to rooflines of some of the proposed development. Change to view: Minimal.
2	Footpath to the south of the sports ground looking west	Viewing over playing field to proposed site with tree belts to left hand side and pavilion building dominating the view	Partial views to some proposed buildings, screened by site boundary hedgerows & trees in the sports grounds. Views will be less significant in the summer. Skyline unchanged. Change to view: Minimal
3	Junction of Shelfanger Road and Louie's Lane looking west	Viewing across hedgerows and intermediate field boundaries with single residential property visible on Shelfanger Road	Open, close-range views to the northern portion of the site. Proposed buildings form a continuation of houses on Louie's Lane, dominate the view, and break the skyline. Change to view: Substantial

View no.	Location	Description of the existing view	Predicted proposed change to view
4	Looking west from Shelfanger Road	Viewing west across open ground. Poor boundary definition along Shelfanger Road. Conifer hedge forms skyline boundary. Roof of recycling plant visible in distance	Close-range glimpsed views through intermittent boundary hedgerow to north of site. Where visible the proposed buildings dominate view and break the skyline. Change to view: Substantial
5	Vehicular entrance/exit to sports ground	Viewing south west across open fields through intermittent hedge boundary. Field boundaries dominate this view	Close range view of site, proposed buildings in foreground dominate the view to the north of the site. Change to view: Substantial
6	Outside properties along footpath	Close range view northwards currently obscured by dense vegetation growth.	Views to buildings are close-range and would dominate, views would be partially screened by existing vegetation. Rooftops would obscure the skyline. Change to view: Substantial
7	Outside properties along footpath	Viewing northwards from footpath across open fields. Farm buildings visible below distant boundary hedgerows	Proposed buildings in foreground and distance, views to buildings at west of site partially screened by field boundary hedgerows. Skyline obscured by rooftops to the north. Change to view: Substantial
8	Continuation from view 7	Open views extend west across open fields to boundary hedges and wooded copse	Rooftops of some proposed buildings to north partially visible through screening field boundary vegetation. Existing open expansive views to south interrupted by development. Skyline broken by rooftops. Distant views lost. Change to view: Substantial
9	Centre of site looking north-east	Views from footpath in to site currently obscured by large farm building	Close range views in to site following removal of existing buildings Change to view: Moderate

View no.	Location	Description of the existing view	Predicted proposed change to view
10	On site footpath looking south	Surrounding residential buildings visible. Those to south mostly screened by woodland and coniferous hedge to allotment boundary	Open close-range and expansive views. The development will be dominant and obscure skyline Change to view: Substantial
11	Footpath to the west of site looking east across boundary	Views across open field to existing housing along Louie's Lane	Close-range partially screened by existing hedges. Rooftops will obscure skyline beyond Change to view: Substantial
12	Footpath to the north -east of Poplar Farm looking east	Open views across fields. Existing rooftops visible and intermittently break skyline	View to proposed buildings in middle-ground Rooftops visible closer. Partial screening by boundary vegetation, north of site better-screened than south. Rooftops will continue to break skyline Change to view: Minimal
13	Junction Louie's Lane and Farm Close	Views to open fields and boundary hedgerows between existing housing. Note: the view from the rear of houses along Louie's Lane will be across open fields	Middle distance, extension of existing residential buildings, distant views blocked, skyline obscured by buildings. The view of open fields from the rear of properties will be changed and all distant views will be obscured Change to view: Substantial
14	Looking north from Appletree Lane	Views to skyline and trees between existing housing and from rear of existing housing. Some rooflines visible in middle distance	Occasional additional rooftops visible beyond treetops. Change to view: Minimal
15	Looking north across the playground and allotments	Short range and closed view due to intervening coniferous hedge line	Rooftops close to south of the site may be visible above coniferous hedgerow at allotment boundary. Development may break skyline. Change to view: Minimal

View no.	Location	Description of the existing view	Predicted proposed change to view
16	Looking north-east from the community woodland	Views through existing boundary vegetation to building at the centre of site and rooftops of buildings in Farm Close.	Close-range view dominated by buildings. Middle-range views eliminated. Skyline obscured. Change to view: Moderate
17	Looking north from Factory Lane	Open views across fields with site beyond boundary hedge and trees. Intermittent view to fields through gaps in hedgerow.	Middle distance rooftops beyond boundary hedgerow may be partially visible, won't break skyline and will be screened in summer Change to view: Minimal
18	Included because of adjacent properties	Views from properties along Factory Lane across open fields. Intermediate boundary comprising hedgerow and trees	Middle distance rooftops beyond boundary hedgerow may be partially visible, won't break skyline and will be screened in winter Change to view: Minimal
19	Form adjacent listed building	Views from adjacent to listed building along Factory Lane. Long distant and viewed through boundary hedge and tree line.	Occasional additional rooftops visible beyond treetops. Change to view: Minimal

5 Summary and mitigation

The majority of viewpoints where a substantial change has been identified are close range from the public right of way which crosses the site or from adjacent roads. Views taken from roads are generally at speed and are not considered to be significant. The public right of way currently crosses open land to the north of Diss and the outlook from this footpath would be substantially altered.

Viewpoint 13 from the rear of houses along Louie's Road will be more substantially impacted because they are close range and direct. There are a total of 10 properties, directly impacted by this change.

The nearest listed buildings are some 400m from the site and separated by open fields. It is not considered that the development of the site would have an adverse effect on the setting to the listed buildings.

Mitigation can be most effectively achieved by:

- Reinforcing boundary planting along Shelfanger Road
- Creating internal planted buffers within the new development which break up built form and massing. This is especially pertinent from viewpoints 7, 11 and 13

- Careful consideration of massing and density together with placement of any buildings over 2 storeys in height.

Initial proposals for the development suggest that both the public footpath and the eastern boundary will be retained with enhanced landscaping. These measures would reduce the landscape and visual effects from both the public footpath and from Shelfanger Road.

6 Concluding Statement

The site is located on the northern edge of Diss town centre and would form a continuum with existing built development extending along Shelfanger Road towards the boundary with the existing recycling centre.

The site is within a wider landscape of arable and pastoral agriculture with fields of variable size which are enclosed by boundary hedgerows of variable quality. The landscape character of this area has been degraded to some extent by incursions such as the recycling centre.

The existing public right of way that crosses the site would be impacted and there would be a loss of amenity for those using this route which forms part of a wider network of local footpaths.

The development would not impact directly on the adjacent wooded copse but as it extends close to the wood there could be an impact on biodiversity and habitat. This would need to be further considered.

The visual sphere of influence of the site is relatively tight with no views from the rural landscape to the north. The majority of the impacted views are from the adjacent Shelfanger Road and from residential properties that overlook the site.

There would be a change in landscape character in the immediate locality as farmland would be developed for housing. Both the landscape character impact and the visual impact to viewpoints as identified in figure 2 could be mitigated by a carefully considered landscape scheme combined with a sensitive layout for the development including buffer planting around and within the site.

7 Appendix – Viewpoint Photographs



Viewpoint 1



Viewpoint 2



Viewpoint 3



Viewpoint 4



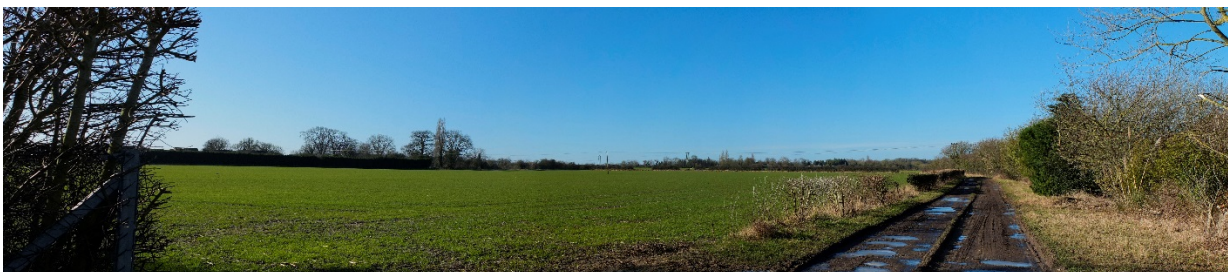
Viewpoint 5



Viewpoint 6



Viewpoint 7



Viewpoint 8



Viewpoint 9



Viewpoint 10



Viewpoint 11



Viewpoint 12



Viewpoint 13



Viewpoint 14



Viewpoint 15



Viewpoint 16



Viewpoint 17



Viewpoint 18



Viewpoint 19