

Land at Little Mill, Monmouthshire



Outline Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Anthony Jellard Associates (AJA) have been commissioned by Powell's, Chartered Surveyors to prepare an initial appraisal of the landscape and visual issues which would arise in the promotion of land at Little Mill for possible housing development.
- 1.2 This appraisal has been informed by initial pre-app response provided by Monmouthshire, dated 7.09.17.
- 1.5 A site visit was made by AJA during the preparation of this statement. AJA are familiar with the area having carried out numerous projects in this part of South Wales.

2. BASELINE CONDITIONS

- 2.1 The site adjoins the recent Cae Melin residential development on the eastern edge of Little Mill. That development was the last main addition to the settlement
- 2.2 The site is a single grazed field crossed by a visually intrusive high voltage transmission line supported by metal lattice towers. No towers are within the site. This transmission line will effectively restrict built development to the north-western section of the field, but at the same time this provides the opportunity for substantial landscape and green infrastructure provision in the remaining part of the site.

Landscape Character

- 2.3 As part of this assessment, we have considered the LANDMAP landscape character data base. The LANDMAP system has been developed specifically for the assessment of character in the landscape of Wales. The system was developed by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW, now Natural Resources Wales) and has now been implemented in partnership with Local Planning Authorities throughout Wales.
- 2.4 We have reviewed the Landscape Character of the site and its landscape context focussing on the most recent published LANDMAP Visual and Sensory Aspect data. Although there are five Aspects within the LANDMAP data, the LANDMAP methodology for landscape characterisation notes that landscape character areas are to be defined using the Visual & Sensory Aspect Area as a starting point, then refined by examining the data from other Aspects.
- 2.5 From examining the data base information we would draw out the following points of relevance to the candidate site.
- 2.6 The site lies within the Visual and Sensory Aspect **Goytre Lowland MNMTHVS042**. The summary description states that this is

'A gently undulating lowland landscape, sheltered by the scarp slopes of Mynydd Garn-fawr and Garnclochdy to the west, gradually merging with the floodplain of the River Usk to the east... It is an enclosed landscape with large irregular blocks of mixed deciduous and

coniferous woodland, parkland and medium to large-scale fields of permanent pasture and arable crops, becoming smaller and more irregular to the south... These fields are enclosed by a strong structural network of traditional field boundaries, individual field trees and hedgerow trees and often interspersed with streams, tributaries and ponds... It is a domesticated landscape with numerous large farmsteads, traditional cottages, country estates and small-scale linear settlements... It is crossed by a network of narrow roads as well as the main A4042(T) and the Newport to Hereford railway

- 2.7 In the overall evaluation of *high* the area is described as being ‘in good condition with consistent character throughout and generally unspoilt by visually intrusive development. The area is character is defined primarily by the Llanover estate buildings and the ever-present scarp slope to the west’. From our site survey we observed that, while the scarp slope is a feature of the Little Mill landscape, it is further away than in much of the Aspect Area. Also, the estate characteristics, in the evaluation description, are largely absent, and the undistinguished character of the linear settlement of Little Mill has significantly affected the local landscape context.
- 2.8 The principal management objective on the LANDMAP data sheet is ‘to maintain the field pattern and tree cover’ and the proposed landscape and green infrastructure strategy being proposed for this development would accord with this recommendation. The site would be contained within existing field boundaries which would be strengthened as part of the development. Substantial new tree cover would be planted on the eastern section of the site and this would, when established, become a strong defensible green boundary preventing further expansion of the settlement eastwards
- 2.9 The LANDMAP data also states the ‘key quality to be conserved’ is ‘enclosure’. Again, the proposed development approach would fully respect this objective. Located on the valley floor and avoiding the higher ground, and set within existing hedgebanks with substantial new planting, the development could be delivered in a way which not only retains the sense of enclosure but enhances it.

Settlement Form

- 2.10 Little Mill started with a mill and few Victorian cottages but has grown considerably since the 1950’s with a series of estate developments, most recently the Cae Melin development adjacent to the site. It is essentially a ribbon settlement of undistinguished urban form and character.
- 2.11 The proposed development is physically and visually directly linked with the existing settlement as well as being visually contained in the wider landscape by existing hedgerow vegetation cover. These factors, combined with a high quality of design for the proposed residential development, would provide the opportunity for a better quality edge to the eastern side of Little Mill. Overall it is considered therefore, that there will be no significant adverse impacts in terms of landscape character.

Green Infrastructure Assets

2.12 These are described more fully on the plans supporting this representation. The assets include:

- boundary hedgerows and the wider network of hedgerows in the surrounding area
- woodlands and individual trees
- riparian woodland along the line of the Berthin Brook just south of the site
- green corridors such as the disused railway line to the south (this section of line would be part of the proposed National Cycle Route 466 from Pontypool to Usk)
- footpath network
- amenity green spaces

3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Drawing AJA/ illustrates a potential 'landscape and green infrastructure-led' approach to the development of the site. The main features of the proposed approach are summarised below:

- the development would be restricted to the north-west section of the site, clear of the wayleave and with health and safety standoffs from the high voltage transmission line. Development would be well set back from the A472. The greater part of the site would not have built development
- the number of residential units, in the region of 20- 25, would be in scale with the settlement pattern, only representing a modest extension eastward
- the degree of enclosure of the site would be maintained and strengthened with new planting.
- A substantial part of this planting would be on the eastern boundaries of the site to form, when established, a strong defensible edge to Little Mill, a much stronger edge than currently exists.
- This planting would also present a better settlement edge appearance for users of the A472 travelling westwards, including reducing the effect of the visually intrusive transmission line.
- The larger part of the present field beneath and to the east of the transmission line, would offer high potential for green infrastructure provision, much more than would normally be offered or required on a development of this scale. This would be a valuable resource not only for the development but for the wider settlement.
- The scale, form and style of the proposed buildings would be sensitive to the rural setting and in harmony with the best of the local vernacular, helping create a better built edge to this part of Little Mill including an improved approach to the approach to the settlement along the A472.

4. A SUMMARY OF THE LIKELY KEY LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

4.1 A preliminary assessment has been made of the likely landscape and visual effects of developing the site following the approach described in section 3. This assessment should be read in conjunction with the viewpoint photographs in the Appendix and can be summarised as follows:

- Effects on the Brecon Beacons National Park will be negligible given the separation distance and the angle of view. Viewpoint VP6, for example, from beside Folly Tower above Pontypool, shows that development of the site would represent a barely visible extension on the far side of the settlement
- Viewpoints VP4 and VP5 are much closer and are from the south and north hillsides respectively above the settlement. They do show that the development would represent further expansion eastwards, but it must be noted that less than half the site field would have built development and the greater part would be designed as a combination of open space and planting. This planting would, in time, form a strong defensible edge to the settlement. Visual effects from these hillsides would be significant but localised given that the site is comparatively well enclosed and located on the valley floor.
- Views 2 and 3 are taken from the A472 and, again, show the existing enclosure of the roadside hedge which would be strengthened by additional planting. The proposed housing would be set well back into the north-west section of the field. Effects on road users, when the mitigation planting is established, would be minor.
- View VP1 is from part of the local footpath network and also close to some of the residential properties in the Cae Melin development. There will be locally significant effects on several of these properties, but these would be mitigated for by good quality housing layout and design, coupled with a strong landscape framework.

5. RELEVANT LANDSCAPE RELATED PLANNING POLICIES

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADOPTED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2021 Adopted 27 February 2014

5.1 The LDP is the current development plan for Monmouthshire County Council. Policies relevant to landscape and visual issues include the following.

Policy LC5 – Protection and Enhancement of Landscape Character

Development proposals that would impact upon landscape character, as defined by LANDMAP Landscape Character Assessment, must demonstrate through a landscape assessment how landscape character has influenced their design, scale, nature and site selection.

Development will be permitted provided it would not have an unacceptable adverse effect on the special character or quality of Monmouthshire's landscape in terms of its visual, historic, geological, ecological or cultural aspects by:

- a) Causing significant visual intrusion;*
 - b) Causing significant adverse change in the character of the built or natural landscape;*
 - c) Being insensitively and unsympathetically sited within the landscape;*
 - d) Introducing or intensifying a use which is incompatible with its location;*
 - e) Failing to harmonise with, or enhance the landform and landscape; and /or*
 - f) Losing or failing to incorporate important traditional features, patterns, structures and layout of settlements and landscapes of both the built and natural environment.*
- Particular emphasis will be given to those landscapes identified through the LANDMAP Landscape Character Assessment as being of high and outstanding quality because of a certain landscape quality or combination of qualities.*

Commentary on how development relates to policy

Existing landscape character has been analyzed both by desktop analysis, including the LANDMAP database, and in the field. The location, modest scale of the development and proposed landscape and green infrastructure approach will contribute to the local environment and assimilate the development into its surroundings without any unacceptable adverse landscape effects.

Policy GI1 – Green Infrastructure

Development proposals will be expected to maintain, protect and enhance Monmouthshire's diverse green infrastructure network by:

- a) Ensuring that individual green assets are retained wherever possible and integrated into new development. Where loss of green infrastructure is unavoidable in order to secure sustainable development appropriate mitigation and/or compensation of the lost assets will be required;*
- b) Incorporating new and /or enhanced green infrastructure of an appropriate type, standard and size. Where on-site provision of green infrastructure is not possible, contributions will be sought to make appropriate provision for green infrastructure off-site.*

AJA comments on relationship of proposed development to this policy:

The proposed development approach has been fully informed by Green Infrastructure principles.

Policy S17 – Place Making and Design

Development shall contribute to creating high quality, attractive and sustainable places. All development proposals must include and promote high quality, sustainable inclusive design which respects local distinctiveness, respects the character of the site and its surrounding in order to protect and enhance the natural, historic and built environments and to create attractive, safe and accessible places.

Commentary on how development relates to policy

The design development approach, as envisaged, has taken account of the particular landscape characteristics of the site and its wider setting. The proposed residential development would be in scale with this part of Little Mill. A detailed site design with a strong and well-integrated landscape and green infrastructure could be developed which would encourage a 'sense of place' and allow for an effective and positive assimilation of the development into the settlement and wider surroundings.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 If a landscape and green infrastructure led approach, as described above, is followed, this site could, in our opinion, could be developed for housing without unacceptable landscape and visual effects. There is unusual scope for a large element (more than half the site) of landscape and green infrastructure provision which would enrich the local landscape and improve the environment for the wider community in Little Mill. A strong defensible planted edge could be created in the eastern portion of the site. While there will be some locally significant visual effects, the location and enclosure of the site means that these would be localised. There would be negligible effects on the BBNP.
- 6.2 Our overall conclusion is that this site could be developed in a way which would comply with the raft of applicable national, regional and local planning policies related to the landscape. The proposed development on this land at Little Mill would respond sensitively to the unique characteristics of the site, providing attractive housing which positively contributes to the fabric of the settlement.