



## **Summary Proof of Evidence of Mark Steele BA DipLD CMLI (for the Applicants) on Landscape and Visual**

Call-in by the Secretary of State of an application made by Omega St Helens / TJ Morris Limited

Land to the West of Omega South & South of the M62, Bold, St Helens

Local Planning Authority Reference: P/2020/0061/HYBR

Planning Inspectorate Reference: APP/H4315/V/20/3265899

**CD38.1A**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Experience**

**1.1.1** My name is Mark Steele BA DipLD CMLI, I am a fully qualified landscape architect, a chartered member of the Landscape Institute and I have given landscape and visual evidence at over eighty planning inquiries.

## **2.0 ES Chapter 10 and St Helens Council Planning Committee Report**

### **2.1 Existing Landscape Resource**

**2.1.1** ES Chapter 10 provides a comprehensive description of the existing landscape resource.

**2.1.2** The Landscape Character Assessment for St Helens analysis for Landscape Area WFE 4 Hold Hall identifies negative features including:

- *'separation and fragmentation...by route of M62'*; and
- that *'whilst the towers at Fiddlers Ferry form a series of dramatic features in views from the landscape, they do impose an industrial character on the rural landscape'*.

**2.1.3** Landscape Character Assessment for St Helens Figure 8 illustrates the limited scale of development to the west of LCT WFE4 in 2006 within the area now occupied by the Omega Business Park.

**2.1.4** PoE Appendix A Figures B and C illustrate the scale of change to the landscape resource that has occurred between 2004 and 2019.

The *'St Helens Borough Local Plan 2020-2035 Green Belt Review Appendix B-C part 5'* acknowledges this change, where the Green Belt Sub-Parcel assessment confirms that it

*'...is bordered by large scale built development at Omega South and the M62, therefore only has a moderate countryside character.'*

PoE Appendix A Figures D to F illustrate the *'large scale build development at Omega South'* in views from the Warrington Road to Gorse Lane Public Right of Way (PRoW) and the proposed development site.

2.1.5 The landscape character context of the proposed development site has changed substantially due to the development of the Omega Business Park and this has had an indirect effect on the baseline landscape characteristics of the host LCT.

2.1.6 Furthermore, the development of the proposed green belt release would have a direct effect on the baseline landscape characteristics of the host LCT. The proposed green belt release area is relatively narrow. The extent of the landscape buffer indicated on the ES Landscape Strategy is substantially greater than the existing landscape buffer to Omega South or the potential landscape buffer for the currently proposed green belt release.

2.1.7 In my opinion, the effects of the proposed development should be considered in the context of this substantial existing and proposed change to the landscape resource.

## **2.2 *Environmental Statement Chapter 10: 'Landscape and Visual'***

2.2.1 ES Chapter 10 sets out the methodology for the assessment of landscape and visual effects and the Planning Committee Report concludes that *'The methodology for this assessment has been carried to the industry standard guidelines and is of an acceptable standard.'*

2.2.2 ES Chapter 10 concludes that there will be permanent and enduring significant landscape and visual effects.

However, these effects should be considered in the context of changes to the landscape resource.

2.2.3 The Planning Committee Report concludes that *'The assessment of impacts is comprehensive in scope and generally, the conclusions on the severity of impacts can be accepted as accurate'*.

2.2.4 I have reviewed ES Chapter 10 and agree with this conclusion.

### **3.0 St Helens Council Landscape and Visual Concerns**

#### **3.1 Countryside Development and Landscape Officer Landscape and Visual Concerns**

3.1.1 The St Helens Council Countryside Development and Landscape Officer expresses concerns relating to:

- the efficacy of the proposed landscape and visual mitigation;
- effects on woodlands as landscape features and their contribution to the character and appearance of the landscape;
- effects on the landscape as well as users of paths and recreational areas within the Bold Forest Park; and
- whether the medieval deer park can be described as a *'key landscape feature'*.

#### **3.2 The Efficacy of the Proposed Landscape Mitigation**

3.2.1 Regarding landscape effects, I disagree with the Committee Report concern that there is *'...an over reliance on the ability of the landscape measures proposed as part of this development to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development'*, as ES Chapter 10 acknowledges that characteristic landscape features would be lost, that permanent uncharacteristic built form would be introduced and that residual landscape effects would remain significant.

However, similar built form has become characteristic of the adjacent Omega South and would become characteristic of the part of the site proposed as green belt release.

- 3.2.2 Regarding visual effects, the majority of visual receptors that are subject to significant visual effects at Year 0 are still subject to significant visual effects beyond Year 15.

However, the landscape mitigation measures will contribute to the screening of visually intrusive service areas and will enhance accessibility as well as amenity for users of the Bold Forest park.

### **3.3 *Effects on Woodlands as Landscape Features***

- 3.3.1 ES Chapter 10 acknowledges that effects on woodlands would be significant, as features within the landscape, as well as elements that contribute to landscape character.

- 3.3.2 In addition to their contribution to landscape character, *'Tree Preservation Orders and Trees in Conservation Areas Guidance'* stresses the importance of *'visibility'*.

However, the woodlands that are proposed to be removed are not publicly accessible and are not widely visible due to the screening effect of other foreground woodlands and trees.

- 3.3.3 In my opinion, this reduces the amenity value of the TPO woodlands affected by the development, as well as their contribution as features of the landscape.

### **3.4 *Effects on the Landscape and Users of Footpaths and Recreational Areas within Bold Forest Park***

- 3.4.1 ES Chapter 10 acknowledges that effects on landscape character would be significant.

### 3.4.2 ES Chapter 10 finds that visual effects:

- would be significant on users of the Mersey Valley Golf and Country Park and the Clock Face Country Park during construction and at completion, but that this would reduce to not significant beyond year 15;
- would be significant for users of Griffin Wood and would remain so beyond year 15;
- would be significant for users of Joy Lane. However, views of the proposed development from this location are likely to be screened by development of the proposed green belt release to the north of the M62;
- would be significant for users of the Warrington Road to Gorsey Lane Public Right of Way and would remain so beyond year 15.

3.4.3 None of the proposed Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan cycleways pass through or near the proposed site. However, the cycleway proposed as part of the development would improve links to recreational and employment opportunities.

3.4.4 The Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan indicates a proposed bridleway passing through the proposed development site. However, this route is not viable, as it is not supported by the landowner.

3.4.5 I conclude that the proposed development will have significant effects on the landscape character of the Bold Forest Park as well as users of the Public Right of Way between Warrington Road to Gorsey Lane.

However, the part of the landscape that is directly affected by the proposed development site is not accessible to users of the park and is not widely visible, which limits its contribution to the experience of the park.

### **3.5 The Medieval Deer Park as a Landscape Feature**

3.5.1 There is no evidence I have seen that the affected woodlands are a '*...remnant of the historic medieval deer park*'.

3.5.2 This is confirmed by the Subject Statement: Cultural Heritage, which finds that '*...there is no remaining above-ground evidence of the features that would normally signify the presence of a deer park...*'

## **4.0 Conclusions**

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4.1.1 Having addressed the St Helens Council Committee Report landscape and visual concerns, I conclude that the findings of ES Chapter 10 can be relied upon when determining consent for the proposed development.

4.1.2 The proposed development of the application site will give rise to significant landscape and visual effects beyond maturity of the landscape mitigation measures.

However, the contribution of the woodland affected by the proposed development to perceptions of landscape character, as well as visual amenity, is limited by a lack of accessibility and restricted visibility.

Furthermore, the change to the landscape and visual resource should be considered in context, as the proposed development is sited within a landscape that has been (and continues to be) the subject of substantial change. The landscape character has been influenced by the Omega South development to the east of the application site. This material change to the context of the application site needs to be adequately reflected in any judgements on the acceptability of the proposed development.

**Mark Steele – March 2021**