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LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL TECHNICAL NOTE

Client

Welbeck Strategic Land Ltd

Project

Ruskin Fields,

Oxford

Date

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This technical note has been prepared to provide landscape support for the allocation of the Site at Ruskin Fields within the emerging Local Plan. The note sets out how the design has evolved through a landscape led process and demonstrates that the development can be successfully accommodated whilst respecting the Site's landscape character and visual context.

2.0 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

2.1 The Site comprises a series of pastoral fields located between the A40 Bypass to the north and the wooded setting associated with Ruskin College and Old Headington to the south. The land is enclosed by mature woodland belt, hedgerows and established trees which form a strong landscape framework and provide substantial visual containment.

2.2 The Site displays several characteristics that are important in landscape terms.

- A well-defined pattern of historic field boundaries
- Established landscape framework comprising outgrown hedgerows and adjacent woodland
- A discernible topographical gradient rising towards the south
- Existing long-distance views from parts of the Site towards the wider countryside.
- Public access routes including the route along Stoke Place and the footway adjacent to the A40.

2.3 The enclosed nature of the landscape is evident from the surrounding vegetation structure and topography. The Site does not form part of an extensive open landscape and is generally experienced as a contained parcel of land within a strong vegetated framework, particularly when viewed from Foxwell Drive, to the west. The Site is also influenced by the adjoining A40 corridor and existing urban edge, reducing its susceptibility to the perception of isolated countryside development.

3.0 LANDSCAPE LED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The illustrative masterplan has evolved from landscape principles rather than being solely driven by development capacity. The design strategy is centred on the retention of the Site's defining landscape assets and reinforcement of existing landscape structure. The principal landscape measures include

- Retention of the mature tree belts and historic field pattern.
- Protection and enhancement of woodland edges
- Incorporation of veteran trees within green infrastructure
- Creation of a substantial green corridor
- Retention of open land within the eastern parcel of the Site
- Integration of SuDS features
- Provision of habitat buffers adjacent to priority habitat areas
- Inclusion of community growing spaces and publicly accessible green infrastructure

4.0 RESPONSE TO VISUAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 A key consideration throughout the consultation and design process has been the protection of important views associated with the setting of the Old Headington Conservation Area, Stoke Place and Ruskin College. The following sets out how the design can respond to the identified visual sensitivities.

View from Stoke Place

4.2 The design responds by:

- Maintaining a substantial area of open green space in the foreground
- Restricting development heights at the eastern and southern edge of the Site
- Limiting buildings adjacent to the view to approximately two storeys
- Retaining long-distance views towards the wider countryside
- Using a 'high wall' character edge that reflects the established character of the conservation area whilst maintaining openness.

View from the A40 Footway

4.3 Development has similarly been arranged to reduce effects on views available from the footway adjacent to the A40. The design retains a good proportion of the eastern field undeveloped, allowing views across the open land to remain a defining characteristic of the view. Lower scale housing is proposed within visually sensitive areas. This approach ensures that the landscape structure remains the dominant visual elements and prevents development from appearing as a continuous urban frontage along the eastern edge of the Site.

Long distance views to the north

4.4 When viewed from the wider landscape to the north, the proposed development would comprise a relatively small component of views towards Oxford and the Conservation Area. The development would be seen in the context of existing surrounding development of varying scales and would not break the skyline. Built development can be located in order to assimilate with the existing trees and vegetation. Furthermore, a substantial area of open space within the Site would be retained, maintaining the Site's contribution to the wider landscape setting, and would not detract from Oxford's historic skyline.

5.0 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS

5.1 The proposals can deliver a substantial green infrastructure framework extending beyond basic policy requirements including:

- Natural and semi-natural green space
- Public open space
- Children's play provision
- Community allotments and growing areas
- Habitat Buffers

- Sustainable drainage infrastructure and with biodiversity value
- Retention of existing mature vegetation and veteran trees
- A central green corridor that retains the legibility of the historic field pattern whilst providing recreation and biodiversity functions.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 Having reviewed the design evolution presented within the illustrative masterplan, the proposals demonstrate a robust landscape-led design approach that is deliverable. The scheme is founded upon an understanding of the Site's landscape character and visual sensitivities and responds appropriately through the disposition of development, open space and green infrastructure.

6.2 The masterplan retains and reinforces the defining landscape structure, protects veteran trees, woodland edges and priority habitats whilst positively responding to topography and existing field patterns. The design responds positively to key views and maintains openness within the most sensitive eastern part of the Site. Through the integration of green infrastructure, SuDS and biodiversity enhancement, the design achieves a suitable transition between urban development and the surrounding landscape.

6.3 From a landscape and visual perspective, there are no overriding constraints that would prevent development of the Site. The principal landscape sensitivities, including long distance views from the north towards the Site, views from Stoke Place, the setting of the Old Headington Conservation Area, veteran trees and existing landscape structure, can be appropriately accommodated through the proposed development framework. Development would not result in unacceptable effects on the key characteristics of the local landscape and there is a clear landscape basis to conclude that the Site can accommodate development without unacceptable effects on visual amenity, subject to the implementation of the landscape principles embodied within the report.

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