
HATTON PARK OPTION SITE 2: LANDSCAPE & VISUAL AMENITY APPRAISAL

Warwick District Council's 'Village Housing Options and Settlement Boundaries Consultation' report (November 2013) identifies the preferred site option for residential development at Hatton Park as Land north of Birmingham Road. The site selection "*attempts to minimise landscape impact in an area constrained by landscape and environmental sensitivities around the canal network*". It discounts 4 other options, including Option 2, land north of the Grand Union Canal, which is under the control of Bloor Homes Ltd. This is apparently due to it being a "*very visible site with high landscape impact and separation from the main settlement*". Evidence to support this conclusion is included within Appendix 6 of the report, which sets out summaries of the accompanying Landscape Sensitivity and Ecological & Geological Study (LS&EGS) and the Green Belt and Green Field Review (GB&GFR) (both November 2013), which identify landscape and visual issues affecting the sites.

A review of this evidence and the conclusions made in the Village Housing Options and Settlement Boundaries Consultation' report in respect of the potential landscape and visual impact that might arise from the development of Option site 2 ("the site"), have been considered following fieldwork undertaken on the 14th of January 2014 to assess the landscape and visual amenity characteristics of the site and surrounding area.

Landscape Character & Visual Amenity

The evidence acknowledges that there is good tree cover around the majority of the perimeter of the site, especially along the canal, and that the tree belt along the southern boundary forms an important setting for the canal and the flight of locks – which are regarded as a major tourist attraction in Warwickshire. It also suggests that the site is an important green link between the canal and the wider countryside to the north of the A4177. It concludes that the setting of the canal and the importance of the zone as a green corridor make it unsuitable for development and give it a value of "High" (included in the LS&EGS as a High Landscape Sensitivity to housing development). Finally it concludes that it appears slightly separated from the main built up area of Hatton Park, leading to potential ribbon development along Hatton Hill. However, these conclusions are an inaccurate assessment of the site and its landscape and visual amenity characteristics, and therefore, the site's capacity to accommodate future development is misrepresented.

The site is extremely well contained by the mature vegetation around its perimeter, and particularly along the canal corridor and the A4177 (**refer to photographs 1 & 2**). Indeed, it is apparent that the retention and enhancement of the perimeter tree belt along the canal will effectively maintain the setting of the canal by limiting the intervisibility between the flight of locks and any proposed development on the site. As the LS&EGS itself sets out, views towards the site are generally contained by mature vegetation and trees around all sides, limiting views into the site from the canal to only occasional glimpsed views through the vegetation. Notably, it assesses the visual sensitivity of the site as only "Moderate".



Photo 1 – View along canal corridor contained by adjacent vegetation



Photo 2 – View along A4177

Furthermore, the combination of low lying land and the rising canal corridor means that the easternmost extents of the site are particularly well screened from the canal by surrounding vegetation, both along the southern boundary and on the adjacent Water Treatment Works site. Views are generally limited to the area around Hatton Locks car park, where a gated access and gap in the vegetation allow a clear view across the site towards Hatton Park. The bell tower of the old Central Hospital Building is a notable landmark from this location, as highlighted in the LS&EGS. However, development of the site would make provision for an open space buffer at the western end of the site to allow this visual corridor to be maintained, while additional tree planting could ensure that the proposed housing edge is sympathetically integrated into the setting of the canal, particularly around the car park. This arrangement would also seek to address views into the site from the adjacent cottages on Canal Road and provide additional screening to the Water Treatment Works (identified as being a potential significant benefit within the LS&EGS). The open space could also accommodate an improved footpath and cycle link and vehicular access to Hatton Locks from the A4177, strengthening the connections between the visitor centre and Hatton Park and potentially alleviating some of the problems with the existing narrow access along Canal Road.

In terms of the site's role as a green link between the canal and the wider countryside to the north of the A4177, north-south connections across the site can be maintained through the inclusion of landscaped buffers (including drainage and ecology features) alongside the existing perimeter vegetation, and through the provision of the open space corridor at the western end of the site. The adjacent Water Treatment site also provides access for wildlife movements around the edge of the site, while further connections into the wider countryside can also be found moving further west towards John's Bridge. Visual connections between the countryside to the north and the canal corridor are in fact (contrary to what the evidence suggests) very much restricted by the existing intervening vegetation. Where views across the site from the canal were identified, there was a stronger visual connection with the development at Hatton Park, particularly the Bell Tower, rather than the adjacent countryside.

Finally, it is not considered that the development of the site would constitute ribbon development, although that pattern of development is already a characteristic of the existing A4177 corridor in the vicinity of the site. Rather, the introduction of a roundabout and access will create a new focal point on the A4177, and the development could be arranged to strengthen connections between Hatton Locks and Hatton Park rather than create any sense of separation. This will include potentially slower traffic speeds and improved pedestrian and cycle links across the A4177.

Green Belt

The GB&GFR also considers visual and landscape issues relative to the perceived functions of the Green Belt. It assesses the value of the site as part of a wider zone that includes the adjacent Water Treatment Works to the east. It concludes that the site has a value of Medium to High with a typically mixed character for the area that plays a valuable role in restricting ribbon development.

Part of the assessment considers that development on the site would have a negative impact on the visual amenity of the Green Belt (Q.3) by creating a linear urban/built form and removing the open visual characteristics of the current area. However, as set out in the preceding section, the site is very well contained by surrounding vegetation with only glimpsed views from the road through to the rising ground around Hatton Hill. A linear form of development is already characteristic of the existing road corridor but the inclusion of the access roundabout, an open space buffer along the western end of the site and the careful arrangement of proposed buildings could also potentially open up views across to Hatton Locks and strengthen the visual links and connection to Hatton Park.

While development on the site would increase the spread of the built form westwards (Q.6) this

would consolidate the existing settlement pattern by tying together existing development at Hatton Hill, Hatton Park and Hatton Locks. Further development would be restricted by the canal to the south and by existing housing along Canal Road to the west.

Conclusion

It is apparent from the site assessment that that some of the conclusions made about the site in the evidence are inaccurate, and the potential for landscape and visual mitigation in the design and development of the site has not been taken into account (as it had for the Council's preferred site) in coming to the conclusion it does in respect of the site's capacity to accommodate future development

The site is considered to be appropriate for development in landscape and visual terms due to its visual containment (particularly with the retention of the belt of vegetation alongside the canal), its ability to retain important green functions and key visual links as part of any development layout, and its opportunity to consolidate the surrounding built form.