APPEAL BY: Quantum Land (Brundall) Ltd against the refusal of Broadland District Council to grant outline planning permission with the details of appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination, with the exception of Phase 1 for which details of all matters in relation to the 23 dwellings within that Phase are provided. Development to comprise: up to 170 dwellings (Use Class C3), and a community/sports pavilion (Class D1 and D2 use), a country park, formal and/or informal outdoor sports provision, access, and other earthworks and engineering works. All development, works and operations to be in accordance with the Development Parameters Schedule and Plans.

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: APP/K2610/W/19/3239986

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY REFERENCE: 20171386

Date: 28 August 2020

Proof of Evidence of Robin Taylor BA (Hons) DipLA CMLI
Landscape Architect
Broadland and South Norfolk district councils
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1.1.1 My name is Robin Taylor. I am the Landscape Architect for Broadland and South Norfolk district councils.

1.1.2 I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute. I hold a degree and Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture.

1.1.3 I have been South Norfolk Council’s lead landscape professional within the development management function for 23 years, during which time I have provided assessment of, and input to, development proposals of a range of types and scales.

1.1.4 I was not involved with original consideration of the planning application, being the landscape architect for only South Norfolk Council at that time. I have therefore only considered this case in the context of this Appeal.

1.1.5 The evidence which I have prepared and provide for this Inquiry in this proof of evidence is true and has been prepared, and is given, in accordance with my professional institution, the Landscape Institute. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true professional opinions.

1.2 Scope of Evidence

1.2.1 The description of the appeal proposal is agreed in the Statement of Common Ground, which records that planning permission was refused by decision notice dated 19 July 2019.
1.2.2 My evidence will consider the first reason for refusal, which relates to landscape character and visual impacts and the overall character and appearance of the area.

1.2.3 I have not prepared my own LVIA but have reviewed the appellant’s LVIA and other submitted documents, including: Design and Access Statement (amended), Development Parameters Schedule (amended), Tree Survey Report and Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Ecological Appraisal, Landscape Proposals Plan (L101 Rev B), Planning Layout Phase (PL01 Rev E. both versions). I understand the site and the development proposals.

1.2.4 I have direct experience of the site and surroundings, having visited on four occasions during my preparation for the Appeal. The first visit was on 20 January 2020 and was with the original planning application case officer and others, for the purpose of familiarisation. I made two unaccompanied visits on 28 January and 28 August 2020 for the purposes of my own assessment. My other visit was on 11 February 2020 and was as part of a group to accompany the Council’s barrister for the Appeal and assist with her familiarisation.
2 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The documents making up the development plan for the purposes of this appeal are set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Statement of Common Ground, and the key determinative policies are identified in paragraph 4.2. The National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance are material considerations. I draw attention to key points from relevant policy documents below, but do not repeat the full text of policies.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

2.2.1 The paragraphs which are particularly relevant to the first reason for refusal are 8, 127 and 170(b). Paragraph 170(b) is reiterated in the PPG at paragraph 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721.

2.3 Joint Core Strategy (JCS)

2.3.1 Within its Spatial Portrait, the JCS describes:

“Outside Norwich the area retains a largely rural character and high environmental quality. Small towns and numerous villages are spread through attractive countryside, which also provides the setting for the city of Norwich. Large parts of Broadland fall within the urban area and parishes close to the city centre have a strong relationship with Norwich. Away from the urban area the district extends into a rural landscape distinguished by market towns and small villages.

River valleys and green areas extend into or adjoin built-up areas, creating a close relationship between urban and rural. Particular features include the Broads, of National Park status, and areas of international nature conservation importance. More generally, there is a variety of landscape types which gives a distinctive character to individual parts of the area. Wildlife habitats of national or local
importance are found in the urban area as well as the countryside. As well as these semi-natural aspects, there is a strong historic influence.”

2.3.2 JCS Policies 1 and 2 seek to protect environmental assets (including landscape character and he countryside and rural character) and to ensure that development respects local distinctiveness (including the landscape setting of settlements and landscape character

2.4 Broadland District Council Development Management DPD

2.4.1 Policy GC 2 requires that development outside settlement limits must avoid any significant adverse impact, and GC 4 requires proposals to pay adequate regard to the character and appearance of an area.

2.4.2 Policy EN2 (Landscape) states that, in order to protect the character of the area, development proposals should have regard to the Landscape Character Assessment SPD and pay attention to particular issues. For this site the relevant issues are:

- Gaps between settlements;
- Visually sensitive skylines, hillsides and valley sides and important views including the setting of the Broads Area;
- Green spaces including natural and semi-natural features as well as geological/geomorphological features which make a significant contribution towards defining the character of an area.

The supporting text for EN2 further explains that:

“A Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been adopted and this information should be used to ensure that development proposals reflect the distinctive character, qualities and sensitivities of the area…

“The Council will seek to ensure inherent visual qualities and ensure that the distinctive character of these areas is protected. Development will
only be permitted where it does not result in any significant detrimental impact upon the character, scenic quality or visual benefit of the area.”

2.5 Brundall Neighbourhood Plan (BrNP)

2.5.1 Policy 3 (Important Views) states that the Neighbourhood Plan “seeks to protect and enhance the views to the north east from the Memorial Hall” and that “any development or alterations to an area within these views must ensure that key features of the view can continue to be enjoyed including distant buildings, areas of landscape and the juxtaposition of village edges and open agricultural countryside”.

2.6 National Landscape Character Assessments

2.6.1 At a national level, there are 159 National Character Area (NCA) profiles. The application site is within NCA 80 The Broads (CD 8.25).

2.6.2 The Summary of NCA 80 describes that:

“Some 94 per cent of the NCA is open country and the remaining 6 per cent is urban” and that “The agricultural landscape is based on a long history of drainage to allow livestock grazing interspersed with arable cropping, mainly for cereals, which is supported by the moderately fertile river valley and flood plain soils.”

2.6.3 Of the key characteristics set out for The Broads NCA, the most pertinent are:

- The middle, upper and narrow incised side valley tributaries are small-scale, low and enclosed, often supporting woodland.
- Rivers dominate the landscape with the middle and lower river reaches flowing between flood banks, above the level of the surrounding land which is drained by dykes, ditches and pumps.
- Woodland cover is generally sparse, especially in the marshland area.
• Glacial deposits of outwash gravels and till are in many places overlain by peaty, loamy and clayey flood plain alluvial soils. Where drainage has been carried out, the fertile soils support arable production while in the wetter areas grazing marsh is common.

• Vertical features are very distinctive in this generally flat landscape and include some very fine medieval churches on the higher ground and several traditional drainage mills located on embankments flanking some of the drainage channels on the marshes and coastal plain.

2.7 District Level Landscape Character

2.7.1 The Broadland District Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (September 2013) (CD 8.26) identifies six Landscape Character Types, sub-divided into 16 Landscape Character Areas.

In its paragraph 5.1, the SPD states:

“Proposals will be considered for how well they conform to the distinctive character of an area, and whether they will add to or detract from this. In addition, Management Strategies and Objectives are set for each landscape area as well as Landscape Planning Guidelines for informing land use planning decisions.”

2.7.2 The Site lies within Landscape Character Type D – Tributary Farmland, which can be found in four parts of the district, and within Landscape Character Area D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland. The site abuts Landscape Character Type F – Marshes Fringe, and LCA F3 Reedham to Thorpe Marshes Fringe in particular.

2.7.3 The Key Characteristics typical of the Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Type D are cited as being:

• “The Witton Run is a tributary of the River Yare SSSI near Blofield;
• Shelving and gently undulating landform, which is cut by small tributary valleys;
• Predominantly rural character throughout;
• Landscape predominantly underlain by sands and gravels, overlain by loamy soils;
• Dispersed but evenly distributed settlement pattern:
• An intricate network of narrow, winding rural lanes often bounded by banks or ditches:
• Medium to large scale arable farmland;
• Pockets of remnant parkland;
• Tributaries elusive- evident but usually hidden within the landscape by topography and trees:
• Mixed settlement and architectural character;”

2.7.4 The summary of visual character for Landscape Character Area D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland includes the following, pertinent to The Site:

“Situated directly east of Norwich, this large area of gently undulating Tributary Farmland extends between the Yare and Bure River Valleys. Tributaries of the Yare form these gentle undulations. These cut into the soft loam that blankets the area creating deeply rolling slopes”

“Land use within the area is dominated by arable farmland. Field sizes vary from medium to large and there has been limited removal of hedgerows from field boundaries.”

“There is often an abrupt transition between the housing developments and the surrounding agricultural land. The area’s proximity to Norwich has stimulated growth within the area and encouraged other uses.”

“Although field sizes are generally medium to large, the topography of the area helps to create a small-scale enclosed character. Views are contained by rolling slopes, providing a variety of close horizons.”
Church towers and woodland create memorable features in these views.”

2.7.5 The following inherent landscape sensitivities, identified by the Landscape Character Assessment, are most pertinent to The Site:

- Distinctive topography with a strong mosaic of rolling arable fields, intact hedgerow and mature woodland within the grounds of old houses and lining tributaries.
- Strong rural character with a recognisable sense of place.
- Landscape setting of hamlets and villages.
- Characteristic views to features, such as church towers surrounded by woodland.
- The Witton Run is a tributary of the River Yare SSSI near Blofield. Within a 2km section of the tributary south of Little Plumstead there are four CWS.

2.7.6 The following Landscape Planning Guidelines applying to the D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Area are most pertinent to the Site:

- Seek to conserve the simple, predominantly rural character.
- Seek to conserve the landscape setting of historic halls and churches;
- Seek to conserve the landscape setting hamlets and villages;
- Seek to conserve the recognisable sense of place;
- Resist new development that would mask the area’s distinctive topography;
- Seek to ensure that new development does not reduce the vertical significance of important historical architectural features within the landscape, such as church towers.
- Seek to conserve and protect the tributary valleys for their biodiversity particular the Witton Run, a tributary of the River Yare SSSI near Blofield.
3 VISUAL EFFECTS

3.1 The submitted LVIA considers various viewpoints. Notwithstanding its paragraph 1.4, I have been unable to see any evidence that the viewpoints were agreed with the LPA’s officers directly. If I had had an opportunity to discuss the chosen viewpoints prior to the full LVIA consideration, I would have suggested additional or altered viewpoint locations in the vicinity of viewpoints 2, 4 and 5. I elaborate on this further below.

3.2 With regards to the assessment set out within Appendix 6 I disagree with the Appellant’s assessments for Representative Viewpoints 1, 2, 4 and 5.

3.3 Representative Viewpoint 1

3.3.1 Site Context photograph 1 of the LVIA considers a view from the PROW Brundall FP2. There is a clear sense of the tributary valley from this view. The Run Dike /Witton Run and its associated fen marshland, and semi-improved grassland, form the valley floor. The valley side rises to a ridge marked by existing dwellings at Westfield Road. These dwellings correspond with the boundary of two Landscape Character Areas (D4 Blofield Tributary Parkland and F3 Reedham to Thorpe Marshes). Whilst the dwellings are clearly not representative of the F3 Area in which they sit, they are not within the D4 Area (as confirmed by Figure 3 of the LVIA) and as such the rolling slope is characteristic as it forms this tributary side.

3.3.2 Appreciation of the valley side is increased from a point a short distance further south along PROW Brundall FP2, from where walkers can appreciate the valley side more clearly. In my opinion the visual effects will be greater further along the footpath, and the Appellant’s LVIA therefore underestimates the effects which would be experienced by footpath users who are moving through the landscape.

3.3.3 When viewed from slightly further south from Viewpoint 1, the introduction of development to the agricultural field will result in dwellings and associated
features which will mask the natural landform, which in itself will have to be adjusted to facilitate the scheme. Whilst I agree that, the sensitivity of visual receptor (1) is medium, my own judgement is that the magnitude of the effect will be greater than small. I consider the magnitude of change would be large (using the Appellant’s description in Table 1.7 of the LVIA Methodology). My judgement is that the change from agricultural field to residential development, and its corresponding changes to the valley side will be a pronounced change.

3.3.4 My own judgement is that there will be a resultant major adverse visual effect for both years 1 and 15 from this adjusted viewpoint 1.

3.4 Representative Viewpoint 2

3.4.1 Site Context photograph 2 of the LVIA considers a view from the side of Brundall Memorial Hall, which is immediately adjacent to PRoW Brundall FP2. This view is included in the Brundall Neighbourhood Plan as an Important View, which affords an attractive view across the surrounding landscape as recognised in the supporting text. Furthermore, in order to protect the character of the area, Policy EN2 requires development proposals to have regard to important views.

3.4.2 Policy 3 of the Brundall Neighbourhood Plan “seeks to protect and enhance the views to the north east from the Memorial Hall”. The supporting text states: “Specifically views to the north east across agricultural land from the busy Memorial hall community facility and path connecting Links Avenue and Golf Link Road towards Blofield and its prominent Grade 1 Listed Church of St Andrew and St Peter are considered important”.

3.4.3 The LVIA describes how “The new built form would channel the view towards the Church, emphasising the viewing corridor to a greater degree” At present there is not a ‘viewing corridor’ to the church (St Andrew and St Peter) and therefore by definition it cannot be emphasised. Since the LVIA was written, the proposed Parameter Plans have been amended to chamfer the edge of the proposed development extent.
3.4.3 Whilst the church would remain visible, it would be seen in the context of a more cluttered view. The sense of openness would be lost, instead the view would be dominated by the edge of the development which attempts to focus attention on the tower rather than allowing it to be seen in a panoramic landscape context. Currently the skyline is dominated by vegetation breaking above the landform. The introduction of development as shown on the amended photomontage would break the skyline and reduce the vertical significance of the tower from this viewpoint, reducing its impact as a memorable feature in the landscape. The view would not be protected or enhanced.

3.4.5 The policy text of Policy 3 requires development to ensure that the juxtaposition of village edges and open agricultural countryside, as a key feature of the view, can still be enjoyed. If the Appeal proposal goes ahead, the existing juxtaposition will be lost. There will be no agricultural land left on the edge of Brundall in this location. In my view Policy 3 would not be complied with.

3.4.6 I differ from the LVIA in that my judgement is that the visual effects from Viewpoint 2 will range from Major Adverse at year 1 to Moderate Adverse at year 15, as opposed to the Minor Adverse to Negligible Adverse concluded by the Appellant’s LVIA. This is because there will be a pronounced deterioration of the view in that the agricultural land – considered an important part of the view across to the Church of St Andrew and St Peter – will be lost.

3.5 Representative Viewpoint 4

3.5.1 The LVIA states that the Site Context Photograph 4 is “representative of both users of the recreational play space as well as the residential properties of the Site” however it is taken from a point that is neither within the existing play area nor an existing residential dwellings.

3.5.2 What Photograph 4 does illustrate, however, is that there is a clear sense of the tributary valley context with views across to the golf centre at Blofield.

3.5.3 To represent the users of the recreational space more fully, consideration needs to be from where their activities will take place. Viewpoint 4 is, I would
maintain, only representative of people going to the recreational space, or those travelling to dwellings.

3.5.4 My view is that consideration from a viewpoint (I will refer to this as Viewpoint 4A) within the recreational space would have been more helpful and would represent the users more successfully, offering a view more akin to that from the properties directly abutting the Site.

3.5.5 The church tower at Blofield is visible from the recreational space and as such I consider that the view from point 4A has a Medium value (whereas I agree that Viewpoint 4 as identified in the Appellant's LVIA has a low value).

3.5.6 The view represents people engaged in activity, but also those overseeing others using the play area. There is also a relationship with the PRoW Brundall FP1. As such I agree with the Appellant that the susceptibility of the receptor is high, and this is the case for both Viewpoint 4 in the LVIA and also 4A as described above.

3.5.7 The combination of the Medium value and High susceptibility for my alternative viewpoint 4A results in a Medium sensitivity to the proposed development. This accords with the Appellant's assessment for Viewpoint 4.

3.5.8 Notwithstanding the location of the viewpoint from which to base the assessment, the proposals have changed since the LVIA was undertaken. The emergency access is now proposed from Links Avenue, and the recreational play space would be retained as is. As a result, the indicative planting on drawing B3 (LVIA Appendix 3) is unlikely to be provided (with the existing remaining). The new planting would have provided a degree of screening, and as such the Year 15 magnitude and significance of effect is likely to be greater than anticipated by the LVIA from viewpoint 4, with new housing within the cross-valley view. In my view the effect at 15 years would be moderate adverse.

3.5.9 If, however, a viewpoint (4A) from within the play space had been considered, it is clear that the proposed development would be more conspicuous. The open agricultural field forming the side of the tributary valley would be built-upon to approximately two-thirds of its extent, and views to the church of St
Andrew and St Peter in Blofield would be altered and potentially blocked. My judgement is that from such a viewpoint the magnitude of effect would be as much as Large and the significance of effect as great as Major Adverse.

3.6 Representative Viewpoint 5

3.6.1 This viewpoint is representative of users of PRoW Brundall FP1, the Westfield Mission Church and various residential properties adjacent to the site. I do not agree with the findings of the Appellant’s LVIA for this viewpoint with regards to the 15-year Significance of Effect.

3.6.2 The development will effectively block the open agricultural view and sense of openness along the footpath. Furthermore, the proposed development will break above the existing boundary hedge to the Mission Church and will further diminish the sense of openness. Whilst I accept that planting will soften the new scene, it will not compensate for the loss of the open view. My own judgement would be that the significance of effect at year 15 would be Moderate Adverse at best (whereas the Appellant’s LVIA concludes it would be Minor Adverse).

3.6.3 This is another situation where a relatively small displacement of the viewpoint would also be more representative, particularly of users of PRoW Brundall FP1. As it stands, Viewpoint 5 is to the east of the Mission Church boundary, so the view over the appeal site is narrowed by the existing boundary hedge. If it had been located on the boundary where PRoW Brundall FP 1 enters the Site, my judgement is that the significance of effect at year 15 would be Major Adverse. This is because, at present, there are unhindered views across the open agricultural land which would cease.
4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

4.1 Of the various landscape features considered in the Appellant’s LVIA, the effect of the proposed development on the Site is my primary concern.

4.2 It is agreed that the sensitivity of the Site is Medium.

4.3 A Key Characteristic typical of the Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Type D is “Shelving and gently undulating landform, which is cut by small tributary valleys”, while the summary of character for Landscape Character Area D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland includes the following “Tributaries of the Yare form these gentle undulations. These cut into the soft loam that blankets the area creating deeply rolling slopes.”. The landscape of the site displays these characteristics.

4.4 The LVIA does not specifically consider the topography in the assessment of the effect on the Site, and at paragraph 9.34 of the main body of the document - in response to the landscape planning guidelines for Landscape Character Area D4 – no mention is made of the need to “Resist new development that would mask the area’s distinctive topography”.

4.5 However, from the Development Parameters Plan 1 – Finished Ground Levels, it is clear that there is considerable potential for the landform across the site to be varied in order to facilitate the proposals.

4.6 The Landscape Planning Guidelines applying to the D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Area also seek to “conserve both the simple, predominantly rural character” and also “the landscape setting of hamlets and villages”. The Site plays an important role in this for Brundall, presenting a traditional agricultural and rural setting. In terms of the Site, the loss of agricultural field and replacement with built development would constitute a Large magnitude of landscape effect as it is a total alteration to the site.
4.7 The Landscape Planning Guidelines applying to the D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Area includes: “Seek to ensure that new development does not reduce the vertical significance of important historical architectural features within the landscape, such as church towers”. The vertical significance of the tower of the Church of St Andrew and St Paul is a feature of the Site. The vertical significance of the tower will be reduced from the Important View (as discussed in 3.4.3) but also from views experienced along PRoW Brundall FP 1 along the southern boundary of The Site. The development would not meet the Guideline at site level.

4.8 My judgement is that the significance of effect for the Site is Major Adverse at both years 1 and 15 – an alteration that results in a partial deterioration of the existing landscape resource. Valued characteristic features would be wholly lost.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 In my judgement, contrary to the conclusions of the Appellant’s LVIA, there will be residual Major Adverse visual harm experienced by users of PRoW Brundall FP 2 (near to Viewpoint 1), the recreational play space at Meadow View/Westfield Road at its interface with PRoW Brundall FP1, and from Viewpoint 5 PRoW Brundall FP1/Mission Church.

5.2 I do not consider that the requirements of Policy EN2 (Landscape) are met due to the Major Adverse harm to the landscape character of the Site, which is characteristic of the D4 Blofield Tributary Farmland Landscape Character Area.