

LAND ADJACENT TO HIGHWORTH ROAD • FARINGDON

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SUMMARY OF PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Michèle Lavelle
on behalf of The Vale of the White Horse District Council



Project Title

Land adjacent to Highworth Road • Faringdon

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1. Summary & Conclusion

- 1.1. In summary, this proof of evidence supports the case for the Council and has considered the site in its context, the landscape documentation and the reasons for refusal.
- 1.2. My consideration of the site is based on the area encompassed in the 4DLD Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which provides the wider context in which to understand the natural and man-made landscape setting for the application site.
- 1.3. This application was refused outline planning permission on three core grounds, the first two of which concern the landscape and visual impact of the proposals on the site and are quoted in detail in Section 3 of this proof of evidence.
- 1.4. The first of these reasons cites policy NE7 in which it is stated that:

"The council remains committed to protecting the North Vale Corallian Ridge from development which would harm its special character and when considering applications will pay particular regard to the siting, mass, scale... of the proposed development..."
- 1.5. The nature of this site in terms of its topography and setting is such that I have reached the conclusion that any scale of development would be harmful to the special character of the North Vale Corallian Ridge and would be highly visible from particular viewpoints towards the north facing scarp slope. As stated at 5.18 of this proof of evidence, the reason for refusal in respect of this policy is supported by the findings of the LVIA which concludes that development on the scarp face would be harmful to the special character of the North Vale Corallian Ridge.
- 1.6. In commenting on the application, the Council's Landscape Officer stated that the site is highly visible to the north west of Faringdon, and that it has panoramic views toward the Thames Valley. It was noted that this high degree of visibility includes local receptors such as Highworth Road and Lechlade Road, as well as Folly Hill. Visibility and the impact of development is reviewed in greater detail in the 4DLD Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and upholds the opinions expressed by the Landscape Officer.
- 1.7. Mention was also made of the existing site use as a community resource, and the impact that the proposals would have on the current amenity and use of the site if permission were to be granted. The proposed impact on

the Public Right of Way, in particular, was queried by the Landscape Officer, who pointed out that the proposals would be unattractive and would lack informal surveillance if implemented as designed, with which I concur.

- 1.8. Additionally, it should be noted that this site is the only publicly accessible open space within comfortable walking distance for most residents on this side of Faringdon (ref para 6.10 of this proof and appellants LVIA fig. 26).
- 1.9. Following a number of site visits, desk top studies and the preparation of the LVIA I have developed a good understanding of the relationship between the urban form and the landscape character of this area such that it reinforces my view that development here would be wholly out of character and completely inappropriate to this site or its surroundings.
- 1.10. The site has a unique quality in that it sits on the boundary or the very edge of various physical conditions and designations as follows:
 - it lies just outside the development boundary for Faringdon so it has an urban edge to the East.
 - it demarcates the edge of open countryside to the North and West when viewed from the Highworth Road lay-by.
 - it lies on the edge of both National Character Area Profiles NCA 108 and NCA 109, the Upper Thames Clay Vale and the Midvale Ridge respectively.
 - topographically the site lies at the very edge of the scarp face and forms the transition between steep slopes and gentler gradients on which existing development occurs.
- 1.11. I am clearly not alone in my understanding and appreciation of the unique qualities of this site. It has consistently been excluded from consideration for development in the past (both historically, and in planning terms).
- 1.12. Policy DC1 is cited in the second reason for refusal and is considered in (5.19 - 5.24) this proof. It highlights the need to consider the contextual relationship that development will have "between all the elements of the built and unbuilt spaces" and that "proposals should be based on a thorough assessment of the surrounding built and natural environment and the defining characteristics of the local area..."
- 1.13. The proposed site layout and supporting Design and Access Statement with its graphic representations does not demonstrate that the proposals are in accordance with policy DC1.

- 1.14. The pattern of existing development and its relationship with the topography defines the characteristics of the local area. In my view the proposals pay scant regard to the topography of both the site itself and the wider setting.
- 1.15. Although the proposed site layout respects the alignment of the existing Public Right of Way and the established circuitous footpath, it does little to maintain the existing character and experience for the users.
- 1.16. As stated in 5.13.2 of this proof, the site currently provides the foreground and setting for bucolic views across the Vale, especially from the PRow and the Highworth Road lay-by. This setting is tranquil and relatively undisturbed by noise. The NPPF states (para 123) that planning policies and decisions should aim to: "identify and protect areas of tranquility which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason". Development of this site will be visually intrusive and spoil the tranquil setting.
- 1.17. Areas of Public Open Space are included on the proposal plan, both along the sight line from the Highworth Road lay-by towards Folly Hill and at the lower northern end containing an attenuation pond. However, as stated (in 7.14 of this proof) the illustrations do not adequately reflect the level changes that will need to be accommodated within the areas allocated as POS to enable building elsewhere on the site (see D&AS page 46, figures 41 & 42).
- 1.18. In conclusion, and in my professional judgement, I cannot find any merit in the proposed development.
- 1.19. The site is not appropriate, or sufficiently robust in landscape terms, for development. Any changes would have a profound, permanent and irreversible impact on the nature and character of the site and the wider landscape.
- 1.20. In social landscape and human terms, the site is a valuable resource to the community. It is 'Humpty Hill', with all the associated, shared experiences, memories and cultural connotations which inform a landscape over time.
- 1.21. Development would result in an extension of the town into open countryside and might set a precedent for further development of the scarp.
- 1.22. Such development would appear as an unnatural extension of the townscape, past a defined edge, down the escarpment slope into a rural

and undeveloped landscape which is currently contained within its own topography.

- 1.23. This precedent would also lead to development pressure on land to the west of the site, with the potential for further inappropriate expansion of the town towards the wooded and historic areas to the west.
- 1.24. The inability of the site to accept even minor changes to its morphology without impacting on the wider landscape is key to its special nature as a containing landscape feature to the town.
- 1.25. This field, the proposed site, is a piece of a jigsaw puzzle which belongs to the Corallian Ridge and the Thames Vale. It is not a piece of the suburban townscape of Faringdon.
- 1.26. In closing, therefore, I would respectfully request, for the reasons given in this evidence, and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that the Inspector dismisses this appeal and preserves the existing western escarpment landscape setting to the town of Faringdon, and the wider landscape.