



BETTER SOLUTIONS, INTELLIGENTLY ENGINEERED

ENVIRONMENT - ARBORICULTURE

Avant Homes Central
Land off Moorthorpe Way
Owthorpe, Sheffield
Arboricultural Proof of Evidence
Summary

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1. Qualifications and Experience

1.1.1 My name is Mark Topping and I am an Associate Director of Landscape Architecture, Urban Design and Arboriculture at Surface Property, and I am sub contracted to BWB Consulting on behalf of Avant Homes. I hold a Masters of Arts degree in Landscape Architecture with honours. I have specialised in BS5837:2012 - Trees in relation to design demolition and construction -Recommendations for over 19 years. I have worked for a number of organisations working in private practice and the third sector and I became a Chartered member of the Landscape Institute in 2006.

2. Introduction and Context of Evidence

2.1 Purpose of this Proof of Evidence

2.1.1 Avant Homes are appealing against the decision of Sheffield City Council (SCC) to refuse planning application 19/03143/FUL (the Planning Application) on Land at Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe, Sheffield (the Site) for residential development of the Site (the Development). Avant Homes seek full planning permission for a residential development of 72 dwellings along with associated access, parking, engineering, landscaping and ancillary works on land off Moorthorpe Way, known as Site E, along with the construction of a Locally Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) and an Attenuation Basin.

2.1.2 My evidence addressed a single reason for refusal, and issues raised by Sheffield City Council (SCC), Owlthorpe Action Group (OAG) and the Woodland Trust; alongside the recent designation of Ancient Woodland made by Natural England (December 2020). In order to address these issues I have structured my proof of evidence to respond to these points in the following order:

- *Landscape Character and Green Infrastructure;*
- *Loss of Category B trees and other trees on Site;*
- *Loss of footpath link to the north;*
- *Ancient Woodland; and*
- *Ancient and Veteran Trees.*

2.2 Background

2.2.1 Site E is part of a wider site allocation including sites C and D to the east and south east and its development is defined in a development brief: Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe - Planning and Design Brief - July 2014 (updated 2017) (Design Brief).

2.2.2 This document prescribes how the site should be developed.

2.2.3 The Site was historically in agricultural use until approximately 2000. Since that time the Site and surrounding parcels C and D have laid dormant and have begun to colonise into grass/scrub and young woodland.

- 2.2.4 An area of recently designated Ancient Woodland lies adjacent to the Site to the north;
- 2.2.5 A number of veteran/ancient trees are located along the same northern boundary and lie adjacent to the Site. These were added to the Woodland Trusts Inventory earlier in the year following submissions from (OAG).
- 2.2.6 My evidence utilises assessment work undertaken by BWB consulting (revised December 2020) including:
- *Trees Survey in line with BS5837:2012;*
 - *Associated Tree Constrains Plan;*
 - *Arboricultural Impact Assessment; and*
 - *Tree protection plan.*
- 2.2.7 Trees on Site are assessed in line with BS5837:2012 to be predominantly low category trees, groups and hedges with a single category B group G9a. Trees within the Site with the exception of the northern section of G9a are proposed to be removed as a result of the Development.
- 2.2.8 Further vegetation lies along the Site boundaries consisting of category B and C trees.
- 2.2.9 The woodland to the north, whilst being designated as Ancient Woodland is also assessed to be category A within the tree survey.
- 2.2.10 Evidence is presented to determine that the Site and adjacent land has been in agricultural use for many years with aerial photography and historical mapping providing evidence of this. A boundary fence line is assessed as the boundary between the Site and adjacent woodland and has been used to determine the location of a 15m buffer in line with standing advice.

2.3 Amendments to Plans

- 2.3.1 Following stakeholder comments and changes to designations surrounding the Site since the Planning Application a layout review was undertaken (Scheme B) and accepted by the inspector. The evidence presented is based on an assessment of the impacts of this scheme upon landscape and arboreal resources on Site.

2.4 Consultation Responses

- 2.4.1 Consultation from various stakeholders has been reviewed and the structure of the evidence is set out to respond in particular to SCC Statement of Case, OAG Rule 6 Statement of Case, Woodland Trust correspondence and the recent Natural England designation.

2.5 Legislation, policy and Guidance

- 2.5.1 This section sets out the national and local planning policy context as set out in relation to NPPF 175 c), SCC UDP Policy GE15, Design Brief policy, Standing Advice and national

guidance predominantly BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations.

3. Landscape Character and Green Infrastructure

- 3.1.1 Based on the written evidence I present my professional opinion on the landscape character of the Site. I identify the components I consider to define this character; together with the impacts on landscape character and green infrastructure as a result of the Development. This includes the loss of category C and in part category B trees; balanced with the residual effects of mitigation upon such impacts.
- 3.1.2 Whilst the regenerating vegetation within the Site creates an area of woodland cover, it is out of character with the mature woodland to the north and of a low and poor quality in the round as defined by BS5837:2012.
- 3.1.3 The proposed planting scheme preserves the character of the existing woodland and mitigates the loss of moderate category B and low quality dense regenerating woodland groups with species rich woodland.
- 3.1.4 I assessed that the appeal scheme preserves the intrinsic green and open character of the Site and represents an appropriate and sensitively designed interface, with the Development enhancing the landscape and arboricultural quality in line with policies G1, G2 and G3 of the Design Brief and UDP Policy GE15 Trees and woodlands.

4. Loss of Category B trees and other trees on Site

- 4.1.1 Based on the written evidence I present my professional opinion on the quality of the arboreal resources on Site and agree with the findings of the Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment. I summarise the retention and removal of existing trees, hedgerows and vegetation on Site.
- 4.1.2 There is one group of existing trees within the Site to be removed, in part; G9a. There is on site compensation for this loss that will result in a net gain of better quality woodland. The remaining existing vegetation within the Site is proposed for removal to facilitate the Development. This vegetation is of a low arboreal quality consisting of groups, trees and a hedgerow of category C1 or C2 defined by BS5837:2012. Existing boundary vegetation to be retained includes groups of category B and C specimens and groups. These trees are to be retained as part of the Development with small areas of removal along the southern and western boundary to facilitate retaining structures.
- 4.1.3 The Helliwell tree evaluation was used to calculate the value of those trees within the Site to be removed and a figure of £22, 935.91 was calculated for addition to a section 106 agreement for offsite planting.
- 4.1.4 In summary I assess that the removal of category C trees is acceptable as they form the lowest retention category within BS5837:2012. I assess that the partial removal of group G9a is also acceptable as the loss of all category B trees on Site can be mitigated within the Development; together with some category C trees based on the provision of a detailed landscape scheme illustrating native woodland planting on Site.

This proposed planting is capable of achieving a higher arboreal quality than the existing baseline scenario and within a short period of time post construction (10 years) it is assessed that the mitigation will provide a higher quality arboreal resource than that which is to be removed.

5. Loss of footpath link to the north

- 5.1.1 The Development illustrates that 186m of the existing permissive footpath link can be retained and a further 89m can be realigned to retain the existing informal footpath link along the northern boundary.

6. Ancient Woodland

- 6.1.1 Following designation of woodland to the north of the Development in 2020 I undertook an assessment of the impact of the Development on the existing woodland. This included defining a suitable buffer along the northern boundary of the Site. A previous buffer was agreed with SCC through the Planning Application, and a further buffer defined in the Design Brief. As part of my assessment I provide a revised buffer which in my professional opinion represents a worst case (in terms of effects on development) buffer to ensure protection of the Ancient Woodland from the Development.
- 6.1.2 The land within the Site was in agricultural use until 2000. Therefore there is a clear definition between the character of the Site and the woodland to the north. This previous land use negates the presence of woodland soils and therefore a core focus of my assessment has been in regard to the effects upon the above and below ground spatial constraints of the woodland edge and any incursions into the 15m buffer zone.
- 6.1.3 Following a review of the incursions and mitigation in the form of functioning buffer zones and mitigation enhancement it was assessed that incursions into the buffer zone are at an acceptable level and that overall a buffer is in excess of the Natural England guidance has been provided.
- 6.1.4 I demonstrate that there is no incursion into the RPA's of existing trees on or off Site.
- 6.1.5 A further assessment of the Development and the Ancient Woodland was undertaken in line with standing advice to ensure a robust assessment was considered.
- 6.1.6 In summary I assessed that the buffer and mitigation in place was sufficient to prevent any loss or deterioration of Ancient Woodland as a result of the Development and in line with NPPF 175 c).
- 6.1.7 Furthermore the mitigation planting provided through the Development will provide an improvement above the current baseline scenario once established.

7. Ancient and Veteran Trees

- 7.1.1 As part of the above assessment of Standing advice for Ancient Woodland this included an assessment of any effects upon ancient and veteran trees. This

demonstrated that whilst there were no incursions into the RPA's of existing trees along the woodland edge, there was also no incursions into the RPA's of veteran or ancient trees based on the larger Root Protection Areas defined in standing advice (15 x stem diameter).

7.1.2 I assessed that as a result of the protection to the RPA's of existing trees in line with BS5837:2012; together with assessment of effects of other aspects such as hydrology and incursions as part of the standing advice assessment guidance there would be no loss or deterioration of ancient or veteran trees as a result of the Development in line with NPPF 175 c).

7.1.3 This assessment was affirmed by OAG in an email dated 11th December 2020.

8. Conclusion

8.1.1 In my professional opinion the key components of landscape character on Site and within the wider landscape would be preserved through the retention and protection of existing offsite woodland G15 and G16 (Ancient Woodland), topography and boundary vegetation. I assess that the mitigation planting would be both in keeping and would enhance the character of vegetation against the existing woodland.

8.1.2 I assessed that the loss of category B and C trees on Site is acceptable due to their retention category, age and the ability to provide both extensive onsite and offsite mitigation.

8.1.3 I assessed that existing trees offsite can be retained and protected along the western boundary.

8.1.4 I assessed that there is no incursion onto the RPA's of existing trees or ancient/veteran trees along the northern boundary and that all trees on Site to be retained can be protected in line with BS5837:2012.

8.1.5 I assessed that the informal footpath to the north can be retained.

8.1.6 I assessed that the adjacent Ancient Woodland and Veteran/Ancient trees can be retained in line with standing advice and BS5837:2012 with no incursion into the RPA's of trees on Site and through provision of a suitable 15m buffer on Site.

8.1.7 In summary I assessed that for the above reasons I considered the Development complies fully with Paragraph 175c of the NPPF, UDP Policy GE15, and paragraphs M1, G1, G2 and G3 of the Design Brief.



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