

LAND AT OAKS ROAD, GREAT GLEN, LEICESTERSHIRE

Appeal by Miller Homes . Ref APP/F2415/W/16/3167654

Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

For and on behalf of Great Glen Parish Council

Donald James Munro Dip LA CMLI Chartered Landscape Architect

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Donald James Munro and I am a Chartered Landscape Architect. I was elected a Member of the Landscape Institute in 1984 and hold a Diploma in Landscape Architecture. I am a Director of Munro + Whitten Ltd, we are consultants in landscape architecture, urban design, master planning and the natural environment. Our offices are in Leicester and we are a registered practice with the Landscape Institute. The practice undertakes projects in the residential, commercial and educational sectors and prepares strategies and reports on landscape planning matters for local authorities.
- 1.2. I have been instructed by Great Glen Parish Council who are a Rule 6 party as determined by the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000 and the Town and Country Planning Appeals (Determination by Inspectors) (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000.
- 1.3. My evidence focuses on the landscape and visual aspects of the proposals and the impact of the development upon these aspects of the local environment. I have visited the site and walked or driven the surrounding landscape of Great Glen I have considered the refusal notice, pertinent application documents and published documents concerning the landscape and setting of Great Glen. I met with the Parish Council representatives to discuss what might be involved evidentially. I assisted the in the preparation of a Statement of Case, anticipating the matters that I may consider in this Proof.

2.0 DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This document contains the narrative of my proof. It should be read in conjunction with my A3 appendix, which contains Figures 1 - 15 containing supporting plans and photographs that are referred to in this proof. Cross-references are found in the body of the text.

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2.2 I shall set out in my proof what I believe are material considerations to support the Council's resolution to refuse this land for residential development. These are;

2.2.1 topography,

2.2.2 vegetation and landscape features

2.2.3 settlement pattern,

2.2.4 landscape character,

2.2.5 visibility of the site

2.3 I will go onto describe the development proposed and its effects and its inability to mitigate against these effects.

2.4 I will then provide a summary of my conclusions.

3.0 GROUNDS FOR REFUSAL

3.1 At the 7th March 2017 HDC Planning Committee it was advised that the decision upon application 16/01501/OUT is to be taken by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) under appeal APP/F2415/W/17/3167654 and that the Council could not refuse or grant planning permission now that an appeal had been made. However, the Planning Committee resolved that *"if the Council had taken a decision it would have resolved to REFUSE planning permission for the reasons set out below: **The proposal's adverse countryside impact and adverse archaeological impact are contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 17 (core principles) and 128 and outweigh the benefits of the proposal contrary to NPPF paragraph 14"**.*

3.2 I have highlighted the reason for refusal that I will support on behalf of my clients in this proof of evidence namely that the development will have adverse impact upon the countryside.

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4.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

4.1 The site lies on high ground above the eastern edge of Great Glen and to the north of Oaks Road. To the east of the site is Glen Oaks, a mature belt of woodland. Beyond this woodland is an open field which leads up to the northern continuation of Oaks Road. Beyond the site to the north are open fields and to the west the eastern boundary of the village of Great Glen settlement area located along Coverside Road.

Topography and Built Settlement

4.2 The broad ridge upon which the site is located is a distinct topographical feature above the village and in the local landscape as shown in Figure 1a and 1b of my appendices. As will be shown later its prominence makes it visible from a great distance in the local countryside. My analytical maps show the site sits on the 120m to 130m AOD contours. It is the Glen Oaks wood and the ridge upon which it sits which is prominent in the River Sence valley and a key feature of the rolling ridges and valleys to the north of the main river valley. This broad ridge feature, along with the similar broad ridge to the west, that defines the River Sence valley and into which is settled Great Glen village. As my analysis shows I do not accept that the 130m+ contours define the valley landscape and that it is the 120m+ contours that form the valley and envelop the village of Great Glen.

4.3 Development on the 120-130m contours in the Great Glen landscape excludes mass areas of housing. As can be seen on my Figure 1b the development between the 120-130m contours is restricted to ad hoc single buildings or small complexes of buildings. They include;

- 4.3.1 Leicester Grammar School to the west
- 4.3.2 Premier Inn and pub complex on the old A6 to the west
- 4.3.3 Stretton Hall, old hospital now a small residential complex, to the north west
- 4.3.4 Stackley House, to the north
- 4.3.5 Stoneygate School and Great Glen house to the south

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4.4 I believe it would therefore be incongruous, in terms of settlement morphology to place large scale housing development on this broad ridge, an important open landscape on the high ground above the village and upper Sence valley. Great Glen housing has, and should continue to, follow the valley floor and valley sides in a northerly direction. The Oaks Road proposals will drag the settlement's built form up and onto prominent high ground effecting the open countryside around.

Vegetation and Landscape Features

Vegetation;

- 4.5 I show on my Figure 2 the broad disposition of woods, hedgerows and trees within the local landscape. They define boundaries, provide to a lesser or greater extent visual resource and screening and define the character of the countryside around Great Glen.
- 4.6 The hedgerow to Oaks Road is low and well maintained as is the central hedgerow on site. It offers no screening and as I will show later allows views up and over it into the site and leaves the skyline open and unencumbered. This is repeated elsewhere in the landscape to the north and south of the site where the hedgerows are low and maintained and as such allow unrestricted views. It is only occasional trees in the hedgerow that interrupt views across the landscape.
- 4.7 Glen Oaks wood is the dominant landscape feature in the local landscape sitting as it does on the 130m contour. It defines the top of Great Glen's landscape made more dominant by the extent of open land that surrounds it. It is a deciduous wood of good condition and is by its very nature a popular destination for local villages as evidenced by the worn paths leading through it from Oaks Road in the south to the northern edge where a track and field margin links to the public footpath off Coverside Road.
- 4.8 Beyond the site the local landscape is well served by mature tree cover and hedgerows of varying height and condition. It does take the character of a sylvan landscape when seen from afar. This vegetation blocks many views across the

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landscape except where views from a similar elevation look over and across the vegetation cover especially where this occurs in valleys. The Glen Oaks ridge rises up and above this sylvan landscape crowning the village of Great Glen with limited natural screening other than Glen Oaks wood itself.

Ridge and Furrow

- 4.9 The appeal site contains Ridge and Furrow, an important landscape feature. The origins of ridge and furrow cultivation can be traced to the 10th century or before. Between 1995 and 1999, Northamptonshire County Council and English Heritage quantified the survival of medieval open fields in the East Midlands. The results of this research were published in *Turning The Plough*¹ which confirmed that the loss of ridge and furrow landscapes is extreme in the region and that it is now a rare archaeological resource and becoming more so as each year passes.
- 4.10 The 2.5ha of ridge and furrow is on the southern field along Oaks Road, it is distinctive when seen both from the ground and in the air as can be seen in my Figure 3. An analysis of the local landscape around Great Glen, undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan shows there is over 60ha in the Parish. The ridge and furrow on the site represents 3.5% of this Parish's heritage asset. The Great Glen Neighbourhood Plan Re-Submission November 2016, states that "A survey in the 1930s showed that almost all of the fields in the parish still had the ridge and furrow earthworks of medieval open field farming preserved under unploughed grassland. Some 60-70% of these had disappeared by 2003, however, and there are now only sixteen surviving, reasonably well-preserved examples (among approximately 140 fields) of this characteristic, historically and culturally significant, landscape feature". The presence of the feature is therefore important and distinctive and a valuable part of the local landscape and gives the village a distinct 'sense of place'.

Ponds

¹ Hall, D 2001. *Turning the Plough. Midland open fields: landscape character and proposals for management*. English Heritage and Northamptonshire County Council

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- 4.11 The appeal site contains a field pond; also an important landscape feature. Found in the north west of the site it supports rough grass and herbaceous ruderal margins with surrounding tree cover. Ponds are important for biodiversity. Collectively, they can support more species than many other freshwater habitats. Ponds also assist terrestrial wildlife providing drinking water during dry weather, a supply of insect and plant-based food, and shelter among the emergent and surrounding plants and trees. This is especially important in environments, which are otherwise lacking in places for wildlife such as this area of the site currently set to arable monoculture crop. It can provide a much-needed refuge for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and flying insects. It sits within the arable crop as a small island that is pleasing to the eye and breaks the monotony of the field landscape. The site's pond could also be a local landscape heritage asset as its origin may have been a 'marl pit' excavated to provide soil improvement to the local fields.
- 4.12 In summary I consider that this site is well served with landscape features that both offer a sense of place to the landscape now and reflects its historical agricultural past. Features that are scarce in the local landscape and worthy of retention and must be seen as a constraint to development.

5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 5.1 In the Reasons for Refusal the authority refers to that *"The proposal's adverse countryside impact"*. I shall in this section of my proof set out the key documents that define the site within the countryside and its status in planning.

National Character Area 93: High Leicestershire

- 5.2 The summary for this NCA, within which sits Great Glen and the appeal site, highlights some key characteristics of note. These are *"a rolling landscape of ridges and valleys"*, *"a sense of many trees being present in the landscape"*, *"prominent ridge and furrow"*, *"arable mainly on the ridge tops"* and *"small woodlands, [the last] often sited on ridges"*. These all reflect the character of the site. It particularly highlights *"panoramic views across open countryside can be found from high land"*, as will be

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shown later there are both wide views out from the site and equally into and towards the site from the local landscape.

- 5.3 The NCA profiles contain Statements of Environmental Opportunity, which assist future decision making in the character area. I will refer to these opportunities later in my proof when I assess the development proposed and highlight how and if the proposals assist in achieving the opportunities set out or indeed fail and by doing so undermine the opportunities sought by Natural England for the area.

Harborough D.C Rural Centres Landscape Sensitivity Study Leading to the TLP Land Parcel Capacity Study

- 5.4 In the Rural Centres Landscape Sensitivity Appraisal, dated XXX, the landscape is broken down into Land Parcels, which for brevity I have abbreviated to LP. The site falls within LP 11, as shown on my Figure 4. In the appraisal the site scores 32 on the Overall Capacity Profile, falling within the **Medium** Capacity range. This surprises me as the adjacent land parcels LP10 & LP12, which share similar characteristics, are assessed within the **Medium-Low** Capacity Range. I therefore assessed the land parcel myself and after further scrutiny of the appraisal criteria adjudge the following to be equally if not more valid;
- 5.4.1 LP11 is only bounded by 'Glen Oaks' (a small linear belt of trees) along part of its eastern edge, I consider that it should be judged to be C= '*Fragmented vegetation- scattered small woodlands, fragmented shelterbelts and/or hedgerows.*'
- 5.4.2 In addition it is obvious that any built development of the site will break the skyline and be placed on prominent, rising ground particularly when viewed from existing public rights of way from the north and south and from the existing eastern edge of the village it is reasonable (in-line with the Harborough D.C 'Traffic Light Plan') and so the Parcel should be judged to be D= '*Limited scope to provide adequate mitigation in keeping with the existing landscape in the medium term.*'
- 5.4.3 Finally LP 11 is very open to public views from public rights of way both close by and at a middle distance and therefore the parcel could be considered to be judged as '*E= Site is very open to public views*' and indeed there are also

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open and clear views from nearby residences into the site and therefore the Parcel could be judged to be '*E= Site is very open to private views*'.

- 5.5 My re-assessment above would reasonably adjust, by four points, the appraisal giving Land Parcel 11 a score of 28 putting it within the **Medium-Low** Capacity for development. Which given its adjacent land parcels seems in my eyes to be a more valid category. As such it lowers its suitability for development.
- 5.6 Turning now to the Land Parcel Capacity Study, I also consider it important to review the findings here too. LP11 shares many similarities to the adjacent LP12 and the accompanying comments on suitability for development state '*This Parcel is considered to have Medium-Low Capacity to accommodate development. This is due to the relatively steep side and currently undeveloped valley of Burton Brook. The Parcel is open character and **built development would be very prominent in this location, particularly in views from existing rights of way, from London Road and Oaks Road.***' It is my opinion that LP11 is a natural extension of LP12 because the land rises up from Burton Brook (LP12) towards the Glen Oaks ridge (LP11) at 134m AOD. The continuous rise is only broken by Oaks Road and its hedgerows which are low and do not contain trees. The site is of open character when viewed from the south south east and north and built development would be very prominent in this location when viewed from existing PROW particularly as new housing break the Skyline. I therefore consider that LP11 shares many similarities with Parcel 12 and can justifiably be said under closer review of the Parcel Appraisal that its suitability for development should be judged to be **Medium-Low** rather than Medium. For this reason I consider the site has less capacity to accommodate development successfully.
- 5.7 I consider that due to the anomalies and failings in the appraisal, any development decisions based upon their findings would be flawed and could be considered invalid.

Harborough District Landscape Character Assessment

- 5.8 The landscape character assessment for the District was published in 2007 and whilst the Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study 2009 has

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superseded the Focus Areas, traffic light analysis, I contend it remains relevant to the appeal given the anomalies I highlight in Para's 5.4-5.7 above.

5.9 There has been little, if any, change to the landscape to the east of Great Glen. I therefore contend that statements made in the Great Glen Focus Area description remain applicable. These include;

5.9.1 *"the landscape character of this area is vulnerable to development pressure particularly on exposed and steeply sloping land"*

5.9.2 *"overall the potential for development sites for Great Glen which are appropriate in landscape terms are limited in the main by rising landform"*

5.10 The appeal site falls within Focus Area I, as indicated on the Great Glen, traffic light plan (HDLCA Figure 2.5, my Figure 5). I concur with the findings of the appraisal and see no reasons why over the last 10 years there are any changes in the local landscape to change its status from RED, **"land considered *unsuitable for development in landscape terms. Landscape character should be protected through the prevention of development*".** I agree with the recommendations, which I have set out in bold.

5.11 A key point in the appraisal schedule is the statement that *"Mitigation across the site would not be able to prevent views into the site and the wider adverse impacts of development on the landscape"*. I will come back to this later in my proof when I review the mitigation proposed as part of the development.

6.0 VISUAL AMENITY

6.1 As I have described previously this area is very prominent in the surrounding countryside. As part of preparing this proof of evidence I undertook a desk top study of the local area based on the OS mapping to determine where the site might be visible from. This I based on analysing the local contours to seek out locations that might have views to the site. I then walked the local public rights of way or drove the roads in the surrounding landscape to check my findings. I undertook the assessment

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drawing on my professional experience, expertise and the guidance set out in Guidelines for Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, Edition 3, published by the LI and IEMA.

- 6.2 My findings are set out in Figures 7 – 14, with photographs and details of my observations and the location of the view points plotted in Figure 6.
- 6.3 My observations in the field led me to dismiss View Points 13 – 20 which the desk top study raised as having the potential for views towards the appeal site. Significant intermediate tree cover between the viewpoint and the appeal site obscured the views.

Distant Views

- 6.4 There are 4 viewpoints that are over 1km distant from the site and located on land accessible to the public, public rights of way or roads. This shows the site in the context of the local landscape when seen from afar. My observations fully upholds the findings of the published landscape character assessments, which cite *“a rolling landscape of ridges and valleys”, “a sense of many trees being present in the landscape”, “small woodlands, [the last] often sited on ridges” and “panoramic views across open countryside can be found from high land.* The open fields of the site are visible in the broader landscape, as is the Glen Oaks wood, and if developed there will be an obvious line of housing on the high ground in the views, (not dissimilar to the western edge of Kibworth, where recent housing on high ground dominates views from the west, a matter I will discuss in greater detail later in my proof). The site on Oaks Road is seen from around the compass. VP9 from the former Stretton Magna village at Great Stretton to the north west with views across the Sence upper valley directly to the site with the rooftops of Great Glen visible. The site dominates the end of the broad ridge above the village. VP10 from Leicester Grammar School in the west. As with VP9, views over the Sence valley toward the village with more prominently in the view is the site and the backdrop of Glen Oaks wood. To the south west are views from Station Road at VP11 across the Sence valley south of Great Glen up and out to the site again prominent above the village. Finally VP12 from the south east on high ground above Kibworth Harcourt, a view of a sylvan landscape with

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no settlements in the view, a few farm buildings, Burton Overy is lost in the rolling ridge and valley landform and Great Glen hidden behind the ridge upon which sits the site which is visible to the viewer.

- 6.5 There is no doubt in my mind that the introduction of residential development here will place an intrusive built form into the sylvan landscape on high ground that will have a significant effect on panoramic views across open countryside and as such will be fully at odds with the National Character Assessment SEO1 which seeks to “*protecting and maintaining the long distance views*”.

Local Views

- 6.6 The local views in the landscape are a key part of the enjoyment of the landscape for local people whether walking for recreation, jogging and running, cycling or horse riding. They form the sense of place as much as the physical elements of the landscape which in themselves form and create the view.
- 6.7 Walking the local public rights of way has taken me to eight locations around the site that benefit from views towards, over and beyond the site that gives this broad ridge its setting and character.
- 6.8 To the south along Burton Brook is a footpath that follows the watercourse from Burton Overy in the north to London Road in the south, VP1. It is in a remote well-defined rural valley but the path is well used as I noted from the worn route through crops and wear and tear of the stiles along the path. The vegetation to the watercourse has sporadic gaps in summer and therefore reveals regular views to the north up and over open fields to Oaks Road and the appeal site. In winter with leaf fall these views will become more regular and obvious to the walker. Most notable in the views is the open skyline above the appeal site, which separates Glen Oaks wood from the edge of the village housing seen, noticeable to the west. It is in my assertion that development of the appeal site will continue this built form over the ridge top losing the open skyline and detrimental to the view and feeling of remote open countryside within the valley and drawing in and absorbing the wood and as such denying its remote rural location..

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- 6.9 To the south west (VP2-5) is another well used right of way; the bridleway from London Road up to Oaks Road passes through open fields with the viewer looking directly at the appeal site over low well maintained hedgerows with some trees and with Glen Oaks wood as a backdrop. The site is very visible in the view so any development would dominate the landscape of the ridge, screen the view of the wood and drag the village envelope out and into what is now, in my opinion, the start of the open countryside landscape of ridges and valleys.
- 6.10 To the north of the site are a number of views (VP6-8) that are firstly on the site itself in the north west corner, then following the footpath north east toward Oaks Road as it runs north towards King's Norton. The view from the footpath on site across the broad ridge reveals open skies above the field with the pond and Glen Oaks wood prominent in the view. Beyond the site the viewer can see the mature trees around Stoneygate School on the old A6 and then onwards to distant views of south Leicestershire. This view defines the end of the village as it rises up the valley slopes to stop, quite correctly in my opinion on the edge of the ridge top.
- 6.11 Walking out to VP7 reveals views south over the site. The village edge sits on the cusp of the ridge top to reveal a panoramic view to distant south Leicestershire. This well used path benefits from views to Glen Oaks wood, Stoneygate School's sylvan setting and the big open skies above the site. Development here would rise up and across the view denying the panoramic view out and across the landscape and impose the village onto what is now the serene transition from urban settlement to open countryside.
- 6.12 Finally in the north is the more distant view at VP8. Whilst the footpath here is lesser used than the stretches closer to the village it is not underused. When on site I met Great Glen residents walking their dogs in a circuit that took them up the Sence valley then across to Oaks Road before returning to the village along this path. I found myself in remote countryside with little if any settlement in the view albeit some occasional passing traffic from the adjacent road. The view south over open fields, across low hedgerows and framed by hedgerow trees is to the appeal site and an open skyline. Great Glen is not perceived. Any development of the site will

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dramatically change this as the village extension will impose itself onto the view with loss of open ridge and skyline. At 0.7km distant, not a great distance, this tranquillity would be lost and an urban derived landscape will dominate this rural remoteness.

6.13 To summarise the effects of the development on the local views, having walked the rights of way both north and south of the development, I am wholly convinced that the openness of the broad ridge, the fields of the appeal site and Glen Oaks wood define the transition between Great Glen and its rural setting. The significance of the loss of this landscape to development will be substantial, removing the tranquillity and calm to the end of the village before moving to open and remote countryside. The sense of place for local people will be lost and arrival at the village along Oaks Road will be abrupt and crude.

7.0 IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

7.1 I turn now to the development itself and the masterplan prepared by Phil Jones Associates (PJA) for the appellant, their drawing no. 02016-08 Revision D and the Landscape and Visual Appraisal prepared by Hankinson Duckett Associates.

7.2 The proposals are for a comprehensive development across both fields with areas of open space to the north east corner and a drainage hollow to the south west corner of the site. A open grass swale runs through the development from north to south. The residential units shown are a mix of detached, semi detached and terraced house types. The DAS indicates the maximum height will be two storeys. There is no definitive height given for the houses so I presume that the ridges will be around 8.5m above ground level. There are associated roads and private drives to the layout with access off Oaks Road.

7.3 I anticipate the following impacts upon the landscape;

7.3.1 Loss of the hedgerow to Oaks Road, to achieve visibility splays at the junction.
(although not shown on the masterplan I consider the loss is inevitable)

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- 7.3.2 Loss of all ridge and furrow on the southern field apart from a de minimis area to the edge of Glen Oaks wood
 - 7.3.3 Breaks in the central hedgerow for road access into the north of the site
 - 7.3.4 Incorporating existing field pond into the swale
 - 7.3.5 Play area adjacent the edge of Glen Oaks wood
 - 7.3.6 Footpath links in the north to the existing footpath
 - 7.3.7 Earth bund in south east corner to create the basin for the drainage hollow (height unknown)
- 7.4 The loss of the hedgerow to Oaks Road for highway visibility splays is substantially significant in the local landscape. Whilst I assume the landscape scheme will promote a new hedgerow it will not compensate for the loss of this existing hedgerow which has benefited from centuries to develop its flora and fauna. The new planting will take at least 10 years to develop a reasonably dense hedge but its flora will be relatively sterile especially at ground level and restricted to the juvenile mix of native shrubs specified.
- 7.5 The loss of the ridge and furrow will be substantially significant too. I do not believe the retention of the remnant ridge and furrow by the wood has any worth and doubt that the development construction will manage to avoid destruction of this heritage resource. Its loss to the village landscape is significant and shows a lack of respect for the heritage asset
- 7.6 The loss of two small sections of the central hedgerow to allow road is of moderate significance. However, of concern is the proximity of the houses to the side of the hedgerow which are so close in three locations, will impact on the hedgerow vegetation during construction with mechanical plant movements, scaffolding and materials storage. Whilst I accept this is an illustrative layout there does seem to be little effort to provide a meaningful offset of say 5m each side of the hedge to protect its integrity. Whilst it is not my place to re-design the scheme there is opportunity to include this protective corridor in private gardens or into a greenway link east west across the site.

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- 7.7 The incorporation of the field pond into the swale and the replication of the pond further to the south is a positive benefit. It will be important to ensure that water entering the swale has passed through an oil and petrol interceptor to avoid contamination of the water within the pond and new swale and their associated fauna.
- 7.8 I would raise a point of concern with the inclusion of open space and especially a play area adjacent Glen Oaks wood. This will encourage informal use of the wood which, whilst a benefit to the local residents, will undoubtedly impact on its environmental and biodiversity role with potential loss of flora and fauna of the woodland habitat. The limited use observed to date seems to have little effect upon the wood. ON this matter I am aware of the Woodland Trust document *Impacts of Nearby Development on Ancient Woodland* published in 2012 – identifies that development near to ancient woodland increases the likelihood of unmanaged public access, leading to: trampling of vegetation and soil compaction; removal of dead wood or plants; acts of vandalism, and the dumping of rubbish or garden waste. Further indirect effects include predation of woodland fauna by pets. Whilst Glen Oaks is not designated as ancient woodland it is nevertheless a very old wood given it is shown on the 1885 OS map for the area so has an age profile of over 132 years undoubtedly longer and has been set within open countryside during its lifetime. The proposed adjacency of the proposed development must gravely impact on this very old wood, which is therefore, in my opinion another significant effect of the development upon this local landscape.
- 7.9 The inclusion of footpath links will benefit movement of residents from the new development into the village especially trips to school and its recreational links to the local footpath network. However, the links continue east and encourages or directs access to Glen Oaks wood which is not part of this application so the local planning authority have no means of control over access and management of the wood to preserve its landscape, biodiversity and environmental integrity. I conclude that this access and the adjacency of the open space will have a major detrimental effect on the wood.

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- 7.10 I consider finally the earth bund to the SuDS attenuation hollow in the south west corner of the site. The applicant has not provided any levels or contours so I must base my estimates on a typical hollow that might be 1.0 - 1.5m deep and given the need to cut back into the slope I anticipate the bund may be 2m above ground level in the corner. This places an incongruous landform into the landscape, artificial in nature and one that cannot be planted to mitigate it, as I am aware that local flood authorities preclude planting to ensure structural integrity of water retaining bunds.
- 7.11 I turn now to landscape mitigation of the development. If I start in the north, there is no new planting shown on the PJA masterplan therefore views from the footpath (my VPs 6, 7 and 8) are of a broad housing frontage with no landscape relief. All views across the site and out to the south Leicestershire landscape are lost. The only saving grace is the north east open space which allows retained views to Glen Oaks wood. Viewpoint 9 will have a direct view to the housing built edge with no relief presenting a stark settlement edge on the top of the ridge.
- 7.12 The east has no views to the site but in terms of landscape mitigation and by reference my concern about disturbance to the wood there is no buffer planting to protect the woodland edge only a grassed offset. There is little here to protect the wood.
- 7.13 To the west the views are here from the properties along Coverside Road. The resident's benefit at the moment from no overlooking of their rear gardens and house backs. The new housing will be on higher ground with elevated views down and into the garden and across to rear windows of the properties. Loss of privacy and amenity is significant for this boundary. No buffer planting is offered to screen the intrusion.
- 7.14 This lack of planting to the west will effect views from the west namely VP10 from Leicester Grammar School. In a similar manner to VP9 the public, staff and pupils attending the school will have a direct view to the built edge of the housing rising above the existing village envelope with no relief presenting a stark settlement across the top of the ridge above Great Glen.

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- 7.15 My View Point 11 and 12 see the site from a distance but I consider the impact of the development will be noticeable in the landscape as little mitigation is offered along the southern edge apart from a line of 12 trees spaced at 20m centres (my estimate). This will not screen the houses when first planted nor in the future as it is doubtful that the canopies will ever meet. The trees will take time to grow and to achieve any meaningful scale in the landscape they will need 15-20 years.
- 7.16 On this particular point I wish to direct the Inspector's attention to my descriptive View Point 21 on Figure 15, which looks towards the western edge of Kibworth. In or around 2010 housing development was constructed along the new Warwick Road at an elevation of about 125-130m AOD (a similar elevation to the appeal site). As part of the mitigation the developer planted a new hedgerow with trees in front of the houses and on the opposite side of the road, a 20-25m wide woodland belt. As can be seen from my photograph the housing remains very visible in the landscape from the west some 7 years later. I think it very reasonable to conclude that the distant views to the appeal site will similarly be that of stark built settlement edge for some time after construction.
- 7.17 I return to the appeal site and consider the local views from the bridleway and footpaths, my VPs 1 – 5. The development proposed will rise up and impose itself upon the open skyline. It will screen views of Glen Oaks wood and visually draw the village envelope up and across the ridge top and into the open countryside. Any subtle transition will be lost as will the tranquillity of the valley landscape with housing rising up and above the ridge top. The tree planting and new roadside hedge will not offer any adequate mitigation to the loss of the open skyline and will not in my opinion provide adequate screening of the houses. The result will be a similar stark edge to that found to the west of Kibworth as shown on VP22 (Figure 15); a closer descriptive viewpoint about 600m from the edge of the Kibworth built edge.
- 7.18 I now turn to the findings of the HDA LVA, which supported the application. I find the report to be inadequate in many aspects of its appraisal of the landscape, some of which I set out below;

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- 7.18.1 It states that *'The Study Area, in respect of this assessment, covers the extent of the approximate zone of visual influence as defined on Plan HDA 7 and thus includes a broad swath of land surrounding the site.'* I consider that a wider study area of up to 3km would have thrown up further potential viewpoints for assessment. My observations from the landscape certainly discovered more viewpoints farther afield.
- 7.18.2 Under their reference to the published landscape character assessments the appraisal makes no reference to the Statement of Opportunities SE0 1 which sets out, as I say above, key opportunities to protect and enhance the landscape. With regard to the statement on the district's LCA the LVA states *"As the site does not include the higher ground of Parcel 11 and development would not break the skyline, the site's capacity for development is likely to be higher than that reported for Parcel 11."* I disagree with this statement as the development **will** include the higher ground and new housing **would** break the skyline when viewed from the S/SE and North.
- 7.18.3 When appraising the local landscape character, the LVA states that *'the local landscape character of the site is therefore split between its two fields; the northern field has strong characteristics in keeping with the 'arable fields' upon the higher ground of the ridge above Great Glen, and the southern field has the characteristics of 'historic fields'. Given their relative topography and the separation created by Glen Oaks, the southern field of the site has intervisibility and thus more affinity with Great Glen, whereas the field to the east of Glen Oaks has more affinity with the field to the east of Oaks Road and the landscape to the east, including the nearby village of Burton Overy.'* I would disagree with the judgement that the two fields that make up the site are sufficiently different to warrant separate landscape character descriptions. I argue that the southern field has an equal level of intervisibility with open countryside as that of the northern fields and has an affinity to the wider landscape and are viewed in the same context as fields south of Oaks Road, leading down to Burton Brook. I am unsure why reference is made to the land east of Glen Oaks as it has little if any relevance to the appeal site.

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- 7.18.4 The LVA states that *'Housing within the village can often be viewed from the surrounding agricultural landscape and therefore housing does not appear incongruous in these views.'* I do not accept this is the case. As I describe earlier the village is found settled in the valley bottom and on parts of its slopes and whilst I accept that some of the housing can be seen it is by no means the whole of the village. I argue that the development proposed would be untypical as it rises up onto the 120m – 130m ridge and as such sit atop the valley and create a stark built skyline viewed in the context of the currently indistinct settlement edge.
- 7.18.5 I note on visual sensitivity the LVA states *'Footpath C13 appears to be well-used and forms a convenient circular route around the eastern part of the village. Footpath users are assessed as having 'Medium' sensitivity to the type of development proposed, because this footpath does not actually cross the site and thus only partial views of the site are possible.'* I disagree; the path does enter the site on its north west corner and also has full open uninterrupted views of the site and the landscape to the south (my VP7 Figure 11 refers). I cannot agree with the sensitivity applied and would increase it to High.
- 7.18.6 Concerning the visual envelope the report states *'the site is limited to a localised area, by existing dwellings to the west of the site and vegetation in their gardens, and by the site's boundary vegetation, particularly the woodland of Glen Oaks.'* I do not agree as I have shown from my own observations that the limited vegetation north and south of the site and the elevated position of the site on the ridge top allows localised and distant views in from the south and north.
- 7.18.7 The report states that *'The redevelopment of the site would form a natural extension to the village...The landscape proposals would more than compensate for the losses of low value landscape features, with appropriately located hedgerow enhancement and tree planting which would be in keeping with the landscape character of the village of Great Glen.'* I consider that the proposals do not form a natural extension to the village as it rises out of the valley onto the ridge top and that the landscape proposals do not adequately

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compensate for the loss of the landscape features. Ridge and Furrow is a regionally scarce landscape feature and alongside mature hedgerows are specifically referred for retention and enhanced under the Statement of Opportunities SE01 for the National Character Area. Their loss is a major adverse impact.

7.18.8 The LVA seeks to misdirect by stating “; *the proposed buildings would be restricted to below the 130m AOD contour, so they would be only slightly higher than the existing housing in the village*”. The houses on the edge of the Coverside Road are cut into the slope and are on the 120m contour to the north and south with their gardens sitting upon the 125m contour. I do not consider a 5-10m level difference to be slight at worst major at best moderately higher. The houses in the development will rise above the ridges of the Coverside Road houses exposing their elevations and rooftops to the view, a stark edge with no relief planting between them and the current village edge.

7.18.9 The LVA concludes ‘*In summary, the proposals, through the introduction of new housing, would have a limited impact on this part of the village of Great Glen. They would not adversely affect the setting of the village, and would contribute positively to the local landscape character of the wider Sence Valley.*’ I consider that the proposals do affect the setting of the village by rising out and above the village and intrude on the open countryside. The proposal would not contribute positively to the local landscape character of the wider Sence Valley as it places conspicuous expansive development on the open ridge top that defines the rural valley where, as I have shown previously, there is no convention for ridge top development.

7.19 To conclude I now question whether the proposals meet or achieve NCA SEO1 opportunities or by failing to do so undermines the requirements set out by Natural England.

7.19.1 *Protecting and maintaining the long-distance views of historic villages;* through building up and over the open ridge and placing built forms on the open skyline the development fails to meet the statement of environmental opportunity

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- 7.19.2 *Protecting remaining ridge and furrow*; by the wholesale removal of ridge and furrow the development fails to meet the statement of environmental opportunity
- 7.19.3 *Conserving the character and views from and into historic villages*; through the extension of the village over the ridge and out into open countryside the development fails to meet the statement of environmental opportunity
- 7.19.4 *Maintaining the abundant hedgerow networks*; the loss of the Oaks Road hedgerow and breaking through and adjacency of build next to the central hedgerow the development fails to meet the statement of environmental opportunity
- 7.20 Given the above I do not consider the proposals meet or achieve NCA SEO1 opportunities or by failing to do so undermines the requirements set out by Natural England.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is my opinion that there are overriding landscape and visual reasons which I set out above and are central to local and national planning guidance on landscape and countryside matters.
- 8.2 I find that it is at odds with Core Strategy Policy CS11 (b) states that “*new development should be directed away from undeveloped areas of land which are important to the form and character of a settlement or locality*”.
- 8.3 I also consider it to be contrary to Core Strategy CS17 (c) states that “*rural development to be located and designed in a way that is sensitive to its landscape setting, retaining, and where possible enhancing, the distinctive qualities of the landscape character area in which it is situated*” and “*protecting the landscape setting of individual settlements*”.

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- 8.4 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF seeks “*positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment*”. The proposal would fail to result in such improvement with its intrusive nature and weak mitigation and as such, it fails to pursue sustainable development goals.
- 8.5 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF states the role of the planning system to “*contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment*”, by amongst other things “*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*”. The value of this landscape is its setting on top of an prominent ridge that is currently open and defines the start of the countryside east of Great Glen. It receives views into and across the valley from a distance and is a part of the local visual appreciation of the open skyline and transition to open countryside east of the village, all of which add to the value and appreciation of the landscape.
- 8.6 I am aware of the recent appeal APP/F2415/W/15/3141322 by the Co-op for land at Houghton on the Hill, a village to the north of Great Glen within the same landscape national character area. The dismissed site there had the same edge of village location. The inspector’s report states; “*the site is a field on the edge of the village and close to the existing built development*”, and “*has a close relationship to the village*”, “*it adjoins open fields*”, “*and relates closely to them*” and “*appears very much as part of this wider landscape*”. I therefore consider that the findings of the Inspector at Houghton on the Hill are pertinent and relevant to the appeal site.
- 8.6.1 The inspector found that “*a good deal of the proposed development would be seen against the backdrop of the open ridge*” and “*as a result it would appear in a prominent and elevated position, exposed on the skyline where it would be seen as a noticeable expansion of the extent of the village*”. I contend that the same outcome will happen at this appeal site.
- 8.6.2 The Inspector concluded “*As a considerable amount of built development on the elevated ridge at the top of the valley side the proposal would be a dominant and intrusive feature*” My viewpoints have shown that its visual prominence will similarly be dominant and intrusive.

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8.6.3 The Inspector's opinion stated that "*the proposal would represent a visible and significant encroachment of development into currently open land that is defined as countryside. I cannot see that it would be visually contained or sit within the natural envelope of the village. Rather it would result in the loss of what is an important and prominent area of countryside on the edge of Houghton on the Hill that would undermine the existing form of the settlement. The proposal would seriously erode the open character and rural appearance of the site, which forms part of the gateway setting to the village*" I consider the same argument and conclusion can be drawn here given the similarities of location, development, views.

8.6.4 The Inspector deals with the weakness of mitigation by stating "*given the surrounding topography and the site's elevated position on the ridge, I am not convinced that the existing planting or proposed landscaping would disguise the consequent loss of openness or screen the proposal to the extent that it would lessen its visual impact to an acceptable degree*" I do not think it unreasonable to draw the same conclusions to this development also.

8.7 I believe the development proposed would excessively detract from the landscape setting and the appearance of the surrounding countryside along with that the rural character of the site. Because of which it would fail to be sensitive to the distinctive qualities of the wider landscape character area in which it is located. It will appear intrusive in the landscape, in conflict with what is a contiguous rural landscape and would unacceptably diminish the attractive open character to the east of the village and its countryside setting.

8.8 For these reasons I consider that the proposal would damage the overall character and appearance of the area and as such the appeal should be dismissed.

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