



Appeal on Behalf of Lifestorey

Site of The Rise And Three Neighbouring

Properties, Stanford Hill, Lymington

## **Townscape Summary Proof of Evidence**

LPA Ref: 20/10481

PINS Ref: APP/D2320/W/20/3265785

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## **Background**

1. My name is Andrew Williams. I am a qualified Urban Designer, Chartered Landscape Architect and a founding Director of Define; a Town Planning, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture practice.
2. I was appointed by Lifestory in December 2020 to provide expert townscape evidence to this appeal. I had previously reviewed the site, its context and the proposed design prior to confirming I could act in support of the scheme. I visited the site and surrounding area in January 2021 and will also be visiting the site as close as possible to the inquiry to ensure I am familiar with how the site appears in the context of trees being in leaf.
3. My evidence addresses the second reason for refusal, which claims that the appeal scheme's layout, scale, mass and position does not positively contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place, contrary to policy ENV3 of the New Forest Local Plan. 2016-2036 Part 1: Planning Strategy (July 2020), the Lymington Local Distinctiveness SPD, paragraph 127 and 130 of the NPPF and the National Design Guide.

## **Policy and Guidance**

4. National policy requires development to create well designed places that adds to the quality of an area and is sympathetic to local character whilst not discouraging appropriate innovation and change.
5. It recognises that development needs to optimise the use of a site and raises the consideration of the desirability of retaining or changing a prevailing character when optimising.
6. This approach is expanded on in the National Design Guide, where three of the ten characteristics of a well designed place relate to the subject of character (context, identity and built form).
7. The Local Plan also identifies that development should achieve high quality design that contributed positively to local distinctiveness.
8. In respect of Local Distinctiveness, the 2011 SPD identifies twenty two generic guidance principles which are considered further (or not where not applicable) per character area.
9. The 2011 SPD identifies ten character areas, the appeal site lies immediately south of Area1 (Town Centre) which identifies the successful transition of Bucker Court immediately adjacent to the site.
10. The appeal site is located within the north west tip of (Area 6 - South Lymington) within the planned connected streets area. The SPD highlights that the plot width, building line, build up and set back are all important to the west of the area, that front gardens should not be lost to car parking, all parts have a similar mass, the north west corner has individual dwellings where spatial setting is most important and that commonality of materials is important.

## **Appeal Site and Scheme**

11. The site is currently occupied by four properties - The Rise, High Bank, Silverbirches and Hill View. They vary in height from 1.5 to 2.5 storeys, are reasonably consistent in their set

back and plot width, but eclectic in their style and appearance. Overall, they have some positive contributions to townscape character (frontage vegetation), neutral contributions (architecture and appearance) and negative contribution (the front boundary treatment Varys in its quality and appearance). They have one single tree to the rear garden identified (in the 2011 Local Distinctiveness SPD) as being important and the rear garden is also identified as 'Larger Garden Spaces' - see Figure 2.

12. The appeal scheme promotes a single building of three storey, to include a lower ground floor to its southern elements with the upper floor becoming an attic space. It has a very similar set back from Stanford Hill as the existing properties (and also very similar building line). It is only visible to any notable degree to the public from Stanford Hill, and therefore its main frontage elevation is of most relevance to my evidence.
13. From this perspective, four separate building elements are noted, two being more assertive (white and cream render with a more formal structure and appearance) and two being recessive (buff brickwork with flat roof and a lower height). This is an approach taken for the adjacent Bucklers Court scheme, albeit in a slightly more formal, and I believe in a slightly less successful way than proposed here.

### **Townscape and Visual Impact**

14. In respect of townscape effects, I find that there are no adverse effects resulting from the appeal scheme to the three townscape elements that relate most closely to the appeal site (these being the linked Town Centre form to the north, Highfield Mansions and the transition from South Lymington to the Town Centre).
15. It is clear to me that the appeal site is not perceived as being part of the South Lymington character area, which is far more intimate and suburban in nature. Instead, it is part of a short stretch of properties (from Belmore Road to north of Bucklers Court) which acts as a transition from South Lymington into the Town Centre. This is evident from this stretch of properties (excluding Bucklers Court) being the only properties that have direct access to Stanford Hill.
16. In this respect, the approach of the appeal scheme to in effect move the transition slightly from Bucklers Court to the appeal site is in keeping with how this stretch of townscape is perceived. Bucklers Court is heralded as a positive feature in this transition by the 2011 Local Distinctiveness SPD<sup>6</sup> and I consider the appeal scheme to be at least as successful in taking up the same approach, although in my view with a higher quality architectural form and appearance that has notably improved through consultation. The proposed change simply 'fits' successfully into this townscape context and therefore results in an overall neutral townscape effect.
17. In respect of visual effects, the appeal scheme has a limited visual envelope, with views of the scheme not extending beyond 80 metres to the north, 120 metres to the north west and 140 metres to the south. No substantial effects take place, and no views lead to adverse effects, due to the proposed scheme introducing slightly more built form within the view, but also a more consistent green frontage treatment and in overall terms neither enhancing or detracting from the quality of the existing visual experience.

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<sup>6</sup> see 2011 SPD paragraph 4.1.18 4th sentence, page 36

## **Policy Compliance**

18. I firstly consider the NPPF and the National Design Guide. As recognised above, central to the national townscape policies and guidance is the need to optimise the use of land but also to add to the quality of the area and being sympathetic to local character. As set out in my assessment of townscape effects, I consider the appeal scheme to in effect replicate and move slightly the (recognised) positive transition between South Lymington and the Town Centre. This does not result in adverse effects and is inspired by positive and successful local examples (Bucklers Court).
19. Secondly, Local Policy ENV3 is highly aligned with national guidance. It requires the efficient use of land, whilst achieving high quality design that contributed positively to local distinctiveness. For the reasons expressed above, I consider the appeal scheme to meets this requirement. The scheme takes the opportunities to positively contribute by continuing the positive transition to the town centre and also providing a consistent hedge and tree lines front garden boundary. In GLVIA3 terms this approach leads to a neutral townscape conclusion due to it 'fitting in' to the townscape context, but this approach is aligned with the requirements of ENV3.
20. Finally, the 2011 Local Distinctiveness SPD provides guidance in respect of ten geographic areas of the town. The appeal site isolated on the northern tip of Area 6 (South Lymington) and immediately abutting the Town Centre (Area 1). As set out above, I have major reservations as to how the appeal site and its immediate neighbours can be defined as being within Area 6, as their character and positioning relative to Stanford Hill is so notably contrasting with the remainder of Area 6.
21. Notwithstanding this point, when looking closely at the appeal site and scheme, there is a notable consistency of approach in respect of building set back, building line, frontage treatment and landscape. The areas of difference that are perceived from the public realms the scale of the proposed buildings, where views from Stanford Hill will see additional upper storeys (although this remains a relative minor change in the view).
22. However, the design approach taken with the appeal scheme is to use the positive transition approach of Bucklers Court and to apply that to the building set back and building line of the appeal scheme. This results in an arrangement that takes the recognised positives of Bucklers Court, but applies it to the site specific.
23. Thus, the proposed building relates positively to its neighbours in terms of scale, the set back to the main road remains very notable (3-4 times the set back of Bucklers Court). The architectural approach to include prominent and recessive elements, with varied materials and roof lines, also replicates the approach taken at Bucklers Court, but in my view in a more sensitive and more architecturally successful way.

## **Overall Conclusion**

24. I consider the appeal scheme to be an excellent example of how land can be optimised for planning purposes whilst reflecting good local examples of character, fitting in to its townscape context and delivering high quality design.