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Subject: SMD/2021/0418 - Phase 2 Blythe Vale, Uttoxeter Road, Blythe Bridge
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Summary: no objection subject to conditions as noted. Impact on trees is considered acceptable; further details of tree protection measures should be submitted in the form of a suitable arboricultural method statement, to be secured by condition. Impact on landscape character and visual impacts on various receptors are inevitable given the type and scale of development proposed, but acceptable in the context of the application site's contribution as part of a wider major development allocation and with regard to medium to longer term mitigation of these impacts through comprehensive landscaping and biodiversity enhancement proposals. Amendments and additions to some of the detailed new landscaping proposals are suggested/requested. A landscape and ecological management plan for all open space areas should be required by condition.

This is an application seeking full planning permission for a residential development of 200 dwellings, together with associated roads, paths, public open space, landscaping and habitat proposals, etc. Although separated by a line of existing dwellings and a narrow field presently excluded from development proposals, the current proposal is effectively an extension of, and would have its main highway access through, the Phase 1 development already under construction to the north-west.

Of relevance to tree, landscape and ecology related issues, the application is supported by a tree survey/arboricultural impact assessment report, a landscape and visual impact appraisal, a comprehensive landscaping/planting scheme and an ecological appraisal.

Existing Trees and Hedgerows

The proposed site layout would largely fit within the pre-existing field structure, and enable retention of the majority of the remaining field hedgerows and associated hedgerow trees (following some limited earlier removals to accommodate the Phase 2 Spine Road approved under application SMD/2018/0443) to serve as a basis for a green infrastructure network around and across the site, creating a framework for the open space areas to be supplemented by new planting, and which in turn would act as interconnecting wildlife habitat corridors. The outward-facing layout means that in most areas of the site plots would be set back away from existing field hedgerows across intervening public highways or shared access drives, and there are very few instances where private garden boundaries directly abut these hedges. This has several benefits, including increasing the separation between houses/private gardens and the hedgerows/trees thus reducing direct impact on roots and reducing likelihood of trees/hedges exerting a more dominant or overbearing effect on the outlook from plots; in addition, natural surveillance of the open space network is maximised.

There is one area where a stretch of existing field hedgerow is shown to be retained sandwiched between dwellings/garden boundary fences, at Plots 120/122/156/170. I have reservations about how successful this would be in the long term, due to very restricted access for hedge

maintenance if required and it is also foreseeable that occupants on one side or the other may be tempted to adopt but remove sections of hedge in order to increase their garden size. However, the alternative is almost certainly to remove this stretch of hedge in order to achieve an efficient housing layout, and the aim to retain as much existing hedgerow as possible and maximise green infrastructure connectivity is laudable.

The proposed development would directly require the removal of only one small group (G1 in the tree survey) of small/young trees and scrub, comprising Ash, Elder and Hawthorn, in order to accommodate the layout around Plots 95 – 97 & 103 – 106. These are internal to the site and not of significant wider amenity value, being classified as retention category C which would not normally be regarded as a reasonable constraint to development in principle nor to specific layout. There are also no doubt a few specific locations where a new small gap in existing hedgerow would be created, or an existing small gap slightly widened, in order to accommodate for instance the open space footpath network passing through to enable connectivity. These limited and small scale losses would be readily mitigated by new planting, and do not lead to objection.

From the arboricultural report tree protection plan, it is seen that there are no dwellings, garages, and primary or secondary roads which encroach within Root Protection Areas of trees/hedgerows to be retained. There are a few places where shared drives and open space footpaths partly encroach into RPAs, but in these cases they can be acceptably constructed using no-dig specification and permeable surfacing materials, in conjunction with cellular confinement loadbearing layers where applicable eg to support vehicle movements. These can be secured by conditions, including submission of detailed arboricultural method statement. The shared drive to Plots 74 – 77 is identified for such measures; similar would also be required for the shared drive to Plots 171 – 175 although this is not indicated on the plans and so would need to be specifically noted as an addition in a relevant condition unless amended prior to determination.

Conditions to secure standard temporary tree protection measures during construction should also be applied.

Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal

Whilst retaining existing field hedgerows and trees, and also existing ponds in the associated larger open space areas, and therefore to one way of thinking not directly impacting on the existing landscape structure or features, the proposal would of course fundamentally change the landscape character of the site itself from open agricultural land to residential development. The proposal, in accordance with the on-going Phase 1, will extend the built up area of Blythe Bridge into previously designated open countryside. The site was included in an area identified as “important landscape setting to settlement” in the 2008 Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment, but other than that neither the site nor its immediately surrounding area are in any designated protected landscape. In any event, the current application site forms part of the wider Blythe Vale mixed use development site now allocated in the recently adopted Local Plan and included within the Blythe Bridge development boundary. Such impacts on landscape character and extent of built up area are an inevitable consequence of major development on a greenfield site at the edge of an existing settlement, and in the case of this particular site a principle which has already been accepted by virtue of allocation and grant of planning permission for major development, including latterly the on-going residential development of

which this Phase 2 site forms part. Impact on the character of the immediately surrounding landscape would be limited due to the filtering/screening function of intervening hedgerows, trees and small woodlands, and it should be noted that local landscape character is already notably influenced by urban edge development and settlement, major road corridors and traffic effects, railway line, pylons and high voltage electricity transmission lines, communications mast etc. Any such landscape character impact beyond the site would be mitigated and gradually decreased as new on-site landscaping becomes established.

It is noted that image reproduction quality of receptor viewpoint location photographs in the application LVIA report is very poor.

The site is visually fairly well contained, due to localised topography and vegetation. The highest magnitude of visual effects would be experienced, inevitably, at on-site (public footpath Forsbrook 6 which traverses the northern part of the site) or immediately adjacent (residential properties on Woodlands Lane and at Marsh House/Lodge/Cottage Farm) visual receptor locations which, relating as they do to users of public right of way and occupants of residential dwellings respectively, are also receptor types amongst the highest sensitivity to visual impacts. Initial visual effects on occupants of these residential properties has been judged moderate/major adverse during construction/on completion, with a residual moderate adverse effect at, say, 15 years post-completion once new planting has become established. Initial visual effects on users of public footpath Forsbrook 6 would be major adverse, reducing to a residual moderate adverse effect at 15 years. With regard to these on-site or immediately adjacent visual receptor locations, substantial visual impacts are inevitably to be expected in relation to any major development of the site, but given the Local Plan allocation and previous and current planning permissions for major development, these visual impact effects would not be a reasonable basis for objection to or refusal of the current application. However, it would be important that new landscaping proposals seek to provide significant mitigation and reduction of visual impact. To this end, the application includes as part of its landscaping scheme some proposals for new structural landscaping provision.

Visual impact on receptors at other locations in the vicinity of the site and more distant surroundings range from moderate adverse to negligible initially, reducing to minor adverse to negligible after 15 years.

New Landscaping

A comprehensive landscaping scheme is submitted with the application, providing a full specification of positions, species, planting sizes and numbers/densities of proposed new trees, hedges, shrubs, grasses, herbaceous and marginal/aquatic plants.

In terms of landscape structure and hierarchy, there is a generally appropriate strategy to use a combination of road verges, open space and plot frontages to create tree-lined streets, with larger species proposed for the primary spine road and smaller species for secondary routes and more confined positions. Whilst this approach is appropriate and supported in principle, I am concerned that several positions where the larger *Tilia cordata* 'Streetwise' (narrow-crowned, upright variety of Small Leaved lime) is shown are in fact too close to dwellings for a species of such potential mature size (c.15 – 20m tall at maturity) such as for example on the frontages of Plots 4, 17 and 87 where tree stem positions are only 3.5 – 4m from dwellings; on several other

plots these trees are indicated at barely over 5m from dwellings which is still rather close for the potential mature size. This would inevitably lead to understandable pressure for premature removal or heavy pruning, or more likely (as the trees would be on private plots) direct action by occupants to achieve this. It is unfortunate that the hierarchical tree-lined street strategy has perhaps been post-applied, albeit with good intent, to a pre-set housing layout, rather than a layout being designed to provide the physical space to sensibly accommodate the planting strategy as a design objective. Realistically for this layout (and assuming layout amendment to create sufficient space for larger trees along the primary spine road is not possible/forthcoming) a good few of the *Tilia*, in the more confined positions, would be better replaced by smaller species. Even so, 3.5 – 4m is rather close for reasonable long term retention of all but the smallest ornamental/garden tree species or specimen shrub.

Major structural planting by way of substantial areas of woodland mix and native buffer mix is included in suitably large open space areas around the site boundaries. It is also encouraging to see a good-sized area proposed for orchard/fruit tree planting, as this supports one of the Council's current biodiversity/climate change initiatives.

The proposed native hedgerow mix includes several shrub species which, whilst native, are not characteristic of our local field hedgerows. I would therefore suggest omitting from the native hedgerow mix the *Cornus*, *Euonymus*, *Ligustrum*, *Rhamnus*, *Salix* and *Viburnum* and substituting instead with *Crataegus monogyna*, *Prunus spinosa*, *Corylus avellana*, and *Acer campestre*. It is also noted that most locations where native hedge mix is proposed are in fact around plot/garden boundaries, and whilst this is supported it is more likely that these may be kept fairly closely trimmed by occupants, and it would therefore be good to try to find additional locations on open space areas where native hedgerows can be planted and allowed to grow to more substantial proportion including achieving mature flowering/fruitlet phase to give greater habitat diversity and biodiversity enhancement, and also in such locations to incorporate some hedgerow standard trees such as native Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*), Damson (*Prunus insititia*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and where space permits Common Oak (*Quercus robur*). Possibly to partly enclose the proposed orchard and south-eastern woodland planting areas, linked to existing site boundary hedgerows for connectivity. The already indicated stretch of new native hedgerow planting alongside the public footpath to the north of Plots 181 – 186 is one which could be enhanced by the addition of a few suitable standard hedgerow trees.

It would also be beneficial to increase the number of individual standard Common Oak trees across the site (currently only 5 in total according to the planting schedule) – in suitable locations on open space where they would have room to achieve mature size without unduly overbearing on dwellings or gardens, and also incorporate Oak and Rowan as components of the woodland mix (currently not included).

A condition to secure implementation and subsequent maintenance of the proposed landscaping scheme should be imposed. A further condition is also requested to secure the submission of a landscape and ecological management plan for all open space areas across the site to include details of specifications for creating all habitats, establishment aftercare and on-going maintenance, longer term habitat development management, and confirmation of arrangements and responsibilities for the maintenance/management/care of the open space areas.

I have made some specific comments and amendment suggestions above, but overall I have no objection to this application and once amendments are secured I would request that the following conditions be imposed in the event that planning permission is granted:

1. Before the commencement of development (including any site clearance, site stripping, site establishment or formation/improvement of temporary/permanent access) a comprehensive arboricultural method statement shall be submitted to and approved by the LPA. Such a statement shall include full and specific details of all tree protection measures (such as temporary tree protection barriers and associated notices, any temporary ground protection surfacing, special construction measures and specifications as appropriate where any approved works may be located within the Root Protection Areas of retained trees) together with details of working methods, including relative timescales and monitoring/supervision responsibilities, for the avoidance, minimisation or mitigation of harm to existing trees to be retained on and adjacent to the application site, and to ensure that such appropriate measures are implemented as necessary to protect trees from the initial outset of any site establishment or construction operations and for the full duration of such activity. Notwithstanding any indication in the Underhill Tree Consultancy "Tree Survey & Arboricultural Impact Assessment Report" reference UTC-0609-03-AIA dated 6th June 2021 submitted in support of the application hereby approved, the arboricultural method statement required under this condition shall include suitable special construction measures and working method specifications for the shared drive to plots 171 – 175. Details of any accommodation or remedial tree works required shall also be submitted and approved prior to commencement as part of the arboricultural method statement required under this condition. Thereafter, the development hereby approved shall be carried out only in full accordance with details approved under this condition.
2. No trees, shrubs or hedgerows shall be removed other than those whose removal is directly required to accommodate the approved development, unless otherwise approved by the LPA. There shall be no removal of any trees, shrubs or hedgerows during the bird nesting season (nominally March to August inclusive), unless otherwise agreed by the LPA and in this case only following careful inspection by a competent person immediately prior to removal in order to establish that such trees, shrubs or hedgerow are not in active use by nesting wild birds.
3. The first action on commencement of any phase of development, prior to any further action (including any site clearance, site stripping, site establishment or formation/improvement of temporary/permanent access) shall be the erection of temporary tree protection barriers and advisory notices for the protection of the existing trees to be retained, in accordance with guidance in British Standard 5837:2012 *Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction – Recommendations*, and as broadly indicated in the Underhill Tree Consultancy "Tree Survey & Arboricultural Impact Assessment Report" reference UTC-0609-03-AIA dated 6th June 2021 submitted in support of the application hereby approved, and as subsequently more specifically shown in

the Arboricultural Method Statement required under Condition 1 **(or as may be renumbered to suit the decision notice)** of this consent, and these shall be retained in position for the duration of the period that development takes place, unless otherwise agreed by the LPA. Within the fenced areas there shall be no excavation, changes in ground levels, installation of underground services, provision of hard surfacing, passage of vehicles, storage of materials, equipment or site huts, tipping of chemicals, waste or cement, or lighting of fires unless otherwise agreed by the LPA.

4. The planting scheme shown on Liz Lake Associates Detailed Planting Plan Sheets 1 to 4 inclusive on Drgs. Nos. 1965-A3-001 Rev P02, 1965-A3-002 Rev P03, 1965-A3-003 Rev P03 and 1965-A3-004 Rev P02 **(or as may be subsequently amended by further revised plans prior to determination)** shall be fully implemented within each phase of the development hereby approved including associated open space areas before the end of the first available dormant season (November to February inclusive) following completion of the development in each phase. The trees, shrubs, herbaceous and marginal/aquatic plants and grass planted in accordance with this landscaping scheme shall be properly maintained for a period of 5 years following planting. Any plants which within this period are damaged, become diseased, die, are removed or otherwise fail to establish shall be replaced during the next suitable season.
5. Prior to the commencement of development (including any site clearance, site stripping, site establishment or formation/improvement of temporary/permanent access) a landscape and ecological management plan shall be submitted to and approved by the LPA, giving details of proposed creation, maintenance, management and development, including timescales and delivery mechanisms, for all landscaping and wildlife habitats and associated structures/features within the various public open spaces, ecological areas and structural landscaping provision across the site. This shall include full and accurate locations of existing and any proposed new habitats; technical specifications, timescales and phasing for the creation of any new habitats; 5 year establishment and aftercare management prescriptions for any newly created habitats; and minimum 20 year maintenance and management operations for all habitats throughout the site to be monitored and reviewed every 5 years, together with confirmation of arrangements and responsibilities for implementation of the management plan. Following approval of such a management plan, it shall be fully implemented in accordance with the details and timescales so approved.

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