

Assessment of Likely Landscape and Visual Impacts Arising from: Proposed Replacement Dwelling at Sawley, Application nr 3/2013/0854

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1. Background

I previously commented through my email of 25th November 2014 to Stephen Kilmartin on aspects of the proposals and the information submitted in support of the planning application (Application nr 3/2013/0854).

In my comments referred to above I identified a number of shortcomings in the applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and identified some serious flaws in the scheme proposals. Taking all these issues in the order in which they were in my previous comments I provide the following additional information:

a) *"No information relating to the 'Photoviewpoint' construction methodology or the way in which they should be used, e.g. viewing distance, image size, etc. has been provided."*
The applicant has still not provided any details of the methodology used. In the absence of this key information and the very low picture resolution which makes them unusable at even a modest enlargement, I strongly recommend that little reliance be placed on the applicant's photomontages.

"The substantial proposed boundary wall and bitmac surfaced access road are not shown on any of the Photoviewpoints.

Photomontages or visualisations – the applicant's Photoviewpoints – should illustrate the 'worst case scenario' so, with this in mind, I recommend additional ones are provided which show the proposed buildings and structures in the landscape after their completion not in 20+ years time when the mitigation planting has established."

The applicant has not provided any new photomontages or amended the ones already submitted. The latter is particularly surprising given that the applicant has revised the proposed scheme.

b) An assessment of the impacts of the proposals on sensitive residential receptors has still not been provided nor has any explanation been given for this. Consequently the applicant's assessment of the proposals likely visual effects is incomplete. This approach is contrary to good practice for LVIA such as that provided by the Landscape Institute and the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment in their second and third editions of the *Guidelines for landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*.

c) No assessment has been made of the likely impacts of the proposed substantial boundary wall. As stated above, it does not even appear on any of the submitted photomontages.

The serious omissions and weaknesses identified above, which the applicant has still not addressed, leave me with no option but to state that his LVIA remains incomplete and, ultimately, not fit for purpose, i.e. it neither provides full details of the proposals nor fully illustrates the likely landscape and visual effects of them. In my opinion, this is not acceptable particularly since the application site is situated within the nationally important

landscape of the Forest of Bowland AONB. With this in mind I think it is entirely reasonable to recommend that the application should not be determined.

It is worth bearing in mind that the Forest of Bowland AONB was designated for far more than just its *"heather moorland, blanket bog and rare birds"* as the applicant maintains in his Landscape Assessment.

2. Likely Landscape and Visual Impacts of the Proposed Replacement Dwelling at Sawley

The following comments take into account my previously highlighted concerns and incorporate additional assessment work on the proposal's likely landscape and visual impacts (*although it should be noted that the weaknesses and omissions outlined above hinder the assessment process*):

a) the type of development proposed – large country hall/house – is not a key feature of the area's local landscape character. Consequently, any development of this type would need careful design (building massing and layout in particular), siting and use of appropriate mitigation. The application site is prominently located and, since the applicant cleared the existing mature trees along the western boundary, **very** visible. Even the applicant's own photomontages e.g. Viewpoints 4, 6, 8 and 13 shows just how visible the proposed buildings would be on such a prominent site.

b) the proposed access track would be significantly longer than the one which currently serves the existing house; development in highly sensitive landscapes such as the FOB AONB should seek to conserve the natural scenic beauty. In addition, the proposed track would be situated along the site's western boundary maximising impacts on the valley floodplain and its landscape tranquillity. These effects would be maximal due of course to the boundary location but also due to the inadequate mitigation proposals to the west and east of the track - presumably to ensure that the applicant has views from his property over the valley (which of course maximises the visibility of the proposed house from viewpoints in the valley looking east - south east). By contrast, along the south eastern site boundary a substantial planting buffer is proposed effectively forming an extension of the existing woodland. This suggests to me that the applicant appreciates what is required to adequately mitigate the effects of his proposed development. It is unfortunate that the applicant has failed to recognise the need for such an approach on the site's western boundary.

c) the proposed 2m high 'deer fence' - in reality a substantial boundary WALL - would likely appear as an urbanising structure inappropriate for the area's rural landscape character. Of most concern is the long length of deer fence proposed for the western boundary which as outlined above is within an area that is a real weakness of the proposed scheme.

d) the scale and height of the proposed house and adjoining building is substantial and the site is prominently located on an elevated area near the edge of the flood plain. In addition the proposed mitigation planting on the western boundary – arranged to allow views across the valley and wider landscape from Sawley Hall – would provide only limited mitigation of the building's visual impacts. Consequently, it seems likely that Sawley Hall would be an imposing incongruous man made structure in a rural landscape characterised by built development of a markedly different vernacular style and scale found primarily in scattered cottages and clustered villages.

e) the range of plants chosen for the boundary and avenue planting includes species which are inappropriate for the area either due to their none native origin e.g. *Pyracantha rogersiana*, *Rhododendron* var, *Skimmia* and *Cotoneaster*. Boundary/avenue planting should be comprised of native species which are appropriate for the area's landscape character and

beneficial for local biodiversity. I am not against the use of ornamental plants per se, it's just that they require careful siting in a rural area where the key features of the landscape character are strongly represented. Consequently, I recommend that ornamental plants are situated within the hall grounds away from locations where they would be seen from the wider landscape.

f) according to the *Forest of Bowland AONB Landscape Character Assessment September 2009* (Lancashire County Council) the application site is situated within the transition zone between two Landscape Character Types: **Valley Floodplain** and **Undulating Lowland Farmland with Wooded Brooks**. The key features of the above Landscape Character Types are well represented in the wider landscape that the site is situated within and the landscape condition is considered to be moderate - good. The strong rural character, presence of key landscape character features in good condition, broad open views across the River Ribble floodplain, good visibility from the dense footpath network, scattered small scale built development, small landscape scale and strong sense of remoteness all suggest that the local landscape around the application site is **highly sensitive** to the kind of development proposed.

It is worth noting that the above Landscape Character Assessment draws attention to:

- *"the increased pressure from residential and tourist related developments, affecting the character and quality of the landscape".*
- *the need to use "local building materials, in particular gritstone and limestone".*
- *the need to "Conserve the distinctive settings to rural settlements".*

Conclusion

The proposed Sawley Hall would likely appear as a large incongruous man made feature in the rural landscape, the character of which is notable for, amongst other things, the absence of country houses of this scale, form and style. The hall would be seen over a wide area as evident even from the applicant's photomontages. The proposed buildings would be seen - aided by the applicant's mature tree clearance - from viewpoints to the north looking towards the historic village of Sawley (a designated Conservation Area), substantially affecting its setting and character. The applicant does propose some boundary planting to mitigate landscape and visual impacts but, where it is most needed - on the western site boundary - the amounts planted would have only a limited effect. In fact the main objective behind the western boundary planting has been maintenance of views out from the site. This is understandable but such an approach ensures that the proposed buildings will be visible in views looking to the site and Sawley.

The design of the hall is far from ideal for the rural location in an area designated for its **natural scenic beauty**. The large scale is contrary to that of other local buildings and the generic 'country house' appearance of the elevations and indeed the grounds does not relate well to the local building vernacular.

For all the reasons briefly outlined above I conclude that the proposed Sawley Hall would likely have **substantial** impacts on the area's landscape character, landscape amenity and landscape value. The buildings would likely be a significant and prominent man made feature in the rural landscape affecting views from residences, roads and public rights of way over a wide area to the north and west.

All these effects are deemed to be unacceptable in landscape terms. In addition it is considered that the proposals are contrary to the purposes of the AONB designation, i.e. to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of its landscape.

