

Land at Higher Town, Sampford Peverell

Character Assessment - Summary

1. Introduction

This note has been prepared in response to the Matters and Issues to be raised at the Hearing for the Mid Devon Local Plan Review 2013-2033 Proposed Submission (incorporating proposed modifications) Examination. It responds to the consideration of Policy SP2 and specifically to question 14, *“Does the proposed allocation have sufficient regard to the character and appearance of the area?”*.

The note provides a summary assessment of the site and its context, together with an explanation of how the site can be developed having sufficient regard to the character and appearance of the area.

The Design and Access Statement which has been prepared as part of the outline planning application for the site provides further detail on the assessment of the area and site. It also demonstrates in outline form how residential development can be accommodated on the site, which has due regard the character and appearance of the area.

2. Character of Sampford Peverell

The character of the surrounding area is predominantly influenced by a mix of both the historic character of the village (defined by the Conservation Area boundary) and mid to late twentieth century residential development along Turnpike and to the east of the site. In relation to the overall historic character of the village, Sampford Peverell can be divided into two sub areas, Higher Town and Lower Town, with the boundary between the two defined by the Grand Western Canal.

Lower Town

Lower Town is linear with densely developed frontages lining the relatively wide carriageway of the main road through the village. There is a strong sense of enclosure which is emphasised by the presence of several substantial buildings close to the back edge of the pavement.

Higher Town

This is the oldest part of the village with the church providing a focal point, along with other important characteristic elements of the village such as the school and Post Office (now a dwelling). These attract pedestrian and vehicular activity at various points during the day. Away from the wider roads of Turnpike and Higher Town, due to the topography arising from location on the valley sides, the roads in this area are quite narrow with few footways and are often enclosed by tall stone retaining walls. This gives an enclosed and intimate character when moving through the area. The views out to open countryside towards Sampford Barton with its range of traditional farm buildings underlines the agricultural origins of the village.

The density varies across the village with a relatively loose grain in the northern area (Higher Town) and tighter along Lower Town and in the more recent development areas such as Boobery, Fairfield and Blackdown View / Paulett.

Drawing on aspects of these two areas and other later residential development, there are a number of features which reflect character of the village:

- Variety in the set back of buildings from the back of the footway with predominantly shorter gardens or at the back of footways. This is particularly a feature of housing along Higher Town. Properties in Turnpike are set back into their plots with larger front gardens.
- A variety of housing types including detached dwellings, pairs of semis and terraces.
- Mainly two storey properties with occasional three storey buildings
- Vehicular access directly onto the street with some private parking to the front and side of properties and garages.
- Predominantly pitched roofs with ridges running parallel to the street with some projecting gables
- Simple pitched roofs with predominantly slate roof tiles

3. Character of the site

The site comprises two arable fields to the west of Sampford Peverell. The land is elevated above the historic sunken lane of Higher Town and the main 'B' road from Tiverton to Sampford Peverell (Turnpike).

The site is contained on two sides by existing built development along Turnpike to the south and Paulett and Higher Town to the east. On the western and northern boundaries, further sporadic built form includes the property at Crossways Close, the Barns and associated outbuildings accessed off Higher Town and the residential property of 48 Higher Town.

The site is contained by a combination of hedge banks, stone walling and domestic style hedges and fencing.

The character of the site is influenced by a number of key factors:

- The location of the site, influenced by both open countryside and existing residential uses
- The existing field boundaries and landscape features
- The topography of the site
- The relationship of the sites northern and southern boundaries which are elevated from the existing highway
- The relationship to the Listed Building
- The relationship to the Conservation Area

Landscape Character

At a national scale in accordance with the Landscape Character Areas set out by Natural England, the Site lies wholly within Character Area 148 'Devon Redlands'. Key characteristics associated with the character area which apply to the site including:

- 'Hilly landscape of villages, hamlets, farmsteads, hedgebanks and winding sunken lanes, rising in height towards the fringes of the NCA. Steep sided but flat bottomed river valleys cut through the hills, opening onto wide flood plains which are important for winter wildfowl near the coast.
- Mixed farming predominates; Fields tend to be small and irregular with dense hedgerows on top of earth banks in the transitional areas, while there is a larger, more open field pattern elsewhere.
- Cob, red sandstone and thatch buildings are distinctive of the area.'

At a county scale, the site is covered by the Devon Character Areas 'Stage 3 Assessment' 2012. The Site lies within the 'Culm Valley Lowlands' character area, the key characteristics of which are:

'The colourful patchwork of fields, thick hedgerows and distinctive red soils visible in this area combine to form a quintessential 'Devon' scene. The area is the 'gateway' into Devon when viewed from the major transport corridors (road and rail) which pass through it. Its sense of history as a transport corridor is apparent in the Grand Western Canal, which flows serenely through the area, crossed by distinctive bridges'.

The area surrounding the Site is described as 'Relatively densely settled with towns and large villages along the rivers (Cullompton, Willand, Uffculme, Sampford, Peverell) and near Tiverton; smaller nucleated villages and scattered farms throughout. This settled character demonstrates that the proposed development would have the opportunity to fit within the local landscape.

At a local scale the area surrounding the site has been further broken down into Landscape Character Types (LCT). The 2011 Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment defines a number of these character types. The Site is wholly located within LCT 3E Lowland Plains. The key characteristics of which include:

- Level to gently sloping or rolling plain
- Mixed farmland with other land uses, possibly extractive industry or commercial development.
- Orchards sometimes common
- Settlement pattern varies according to location, from sparsely to densely settled, with a mixed pattern of villages and hamlets
- Regular or irregular medium to large scale field pattern
- Local dominance of stone as building material, but great variety of materials and styles throughout
- Variable woodland pattern, sometimes with small discrete woodlands, large plantations, hilltop beech clumps or linear amenity planting.
- Roadside hedges. Hedgerow trees may be sparse or dominant
- Variable highway network from sparse to major roads
- Long views variable in quality, sometimes marred

The overall strategy for this area contained within the published 2011 Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment is to:

- Protect tranquillity of views by locating development away from either plateau edges, ridgelines or prominent slopes where it will interrupt the character of undeveloped skylines.
- Plan to restore areas of relict traditional orchards and explore opportunities for the creation of new ones, including community orchards to promote local food and drink production.
- Protect the existing settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, small clustered hamlets and nucleated villages, resisting anything other than small-scale development.
- Plan for a network of green spaces and green infrastructure links to support future population growth in existing settlements
- Manage and enhance species diversity and wildlife interest of the farmed landscape through the creation of species-rich grass buffers around field edges which also serve to reduce water run-off.
- Protect wildlife habitats and plan for the creation of new habitat networks and corridors to strengthen resilience to climate change.
- Plan to replant tree loss due to 'Sudden Oak death' with resistant broad leaved tree species.
- Plan to extend areas of mixed and broadleaved woodland to create effective ecological corridors and increase local biodiversity.
- Manage maintenance of earth banks, ditches & verges and plan creation of new earth banks and hedgerows to ensure their continued contribution to the ecological network.
- Manage beech hedges and tree rows by planting up gaps, replacing individual hedgerow trees to maintain local prominence and continuity whilst encouraging the planting of locally indigenous multi-species hedges.
- Protect and manage the existing Public Rights of Way network including signage and plan to improve accessibility through creation of more foot paths.
- Plan for improved woodland access and for new footpaths where appropriate
- Plan for climate change through the planting of tree species more tolerant to dry conditions to ensure longevity

4. Does the proposed allocation have sufficient regard to the character and appearance of the area?

In response to the characteristics of the site identified in sections 2 and 3, it is considered that the proposed allocation has sufficient regard to the character and appearance of the area for the following reasons:

- The provision of a significant amount of green infrastructure on the northern and eastern boundaries of the site as shown on the inset map provides sufficient land to contain the development and provide a suitable transition between the open countryside and built environment of the village
- The low density development which would be created by the residential element of the allocation (circa 3.5ha of development area to provide 60 dwellings = 17 dph) will allow scope for development which reflects the character of the surrounding area and the village as a whole.
- The development of the site allows for the retention of all existing field boundaries and landscape features within the site. Furthermore, the large areas of green infrastructure provided and low density form of development will allow for additional landscape planting which softens the development in landscape terms
- The topography of the site is appropriate to provide development without the need to remodel the land significantly
- The low density development and Green Infrastructure will allow for development which respects the character and setting of both the Listed Building adjacent to the site and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its setting
- The relationship of the site to the surrounding roads will retain the character of the rural / semi rural approaches into the village with the green infrastructure on the northern boundary retaining the character of Higher Town and potential for development to be set back into the site from the southern edge to reflect the character of Turnpike.

From a Landscape perspective the scheme has been designed to accord where possible with the overall landscape strategy for the character type in which the site is located. This is achieved through the following initiatives and designed elements incorporated within the scheme.

- Open views have been retained from the key areas of public open space created on the site. Views from adjacent properties to the north of the site have also been retained through the positioning of the area of public open space.
- The form of the development doesn't extend beyond the linear belt of development, along Turnpike and as such when viewed from a distance would appear to consolidate the disparate properties located on the western fringe of Sampford Peverell.
- Extensive areas of green infrastructure have been retained and enhanced along the northern edge of the site. This will not only enhance visual amenity but has been designed to enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity with the wider landscape.
- Significant areas of broad leaf plantings and new hedgerows have been allowed for onsite to increase species diversity and resilience to climate change as well as helping to integrate the development into its landscape setting and to provide amenity / ecological benefits.
- New public access routes have been allowed for to the north east south east north west and northern boundaries of the site improving access to the wider countryside and the existing amenity spaces such as the Grand Weston Canal Country Park, located to the south of the site.