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APP: SHLAA Site 2901/GB Parcel LY22

Land East of Crouchley Lane, Lymm

Landscape and Visual Representations on behalf of residents of Higher Lane, Manor Road, Tower Lane and Crouchley Lane in respect of possible removal of land from the Green Belt for residential development.

By Xanthe Quayle BSc (Hons) DipLA CMLI

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**CAMLIN
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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Landscape Matters	3
3.	Visual Matters	8
4.	Green Belt Assessment	10
5.	Conclusion	11

List of Appendices:

1.	Client List
2.	Xanthe Quayle cv

I. INTRODUCTION

- I.1 Camlin Lonsdale were commissioned by the residents of Higher Lane, Manor Road, Tower Lane and Crouchley Lane on 22nd September 2017 to undertake a high level assessment of the landscape and visual matters relating to SHLAA site reference 2901/Green Belt Parcel LY22 aka Land East of Crouchley Lane, Lymm. These residents constitute our client and a full list is provided at Appendix I. This statement considers, from a landscape and visual perspective, the baseline conditions of the site. It then assesses the potential effects of housing development should the site be allocated as part of the Warrington Local Plan Review process. In particular the potential effects on the Green Belt. It has been undertaken with reference to Good Practice including GLVIA 3 and related guidance.
- I.2 Camlin Lonsdale is an established landscape practice (of over 20 years) with a pedigree in regeneration, masterplanning, strategic land planning and design. The studio, based in Slaithwaite, West Yorkshire, comprises a technical and administrative team totaling six in number. Landscape assessment and landscape planning, design, construction and management of development at all scales have been, and continue to be, a major feature of the work of the practice.
- I.3 Xanthe Quayle, the author of this document, is a chartered Landscape Architect and the Managing Director of Camlin Lonsdale Landscape Architects who holds a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Sheffield.
- I.4 Xanthe provides regular expert witness services and has relevant experience with regards to the matters central to this report; that is assessing effects of housing development in the Cheshire landscape, through her involvement , inter alia, in the Hassall Road, Alsager Appeal Hearing (APP/R0660/A/12/2188001) in 2013, a conjoined Appeal Hearing for Land off The Moorings & Land off Goldfinch and Kestrel Close (APP/R0660/A/12/2188604 & APP/R0660/A/12/2188605,) at Congleton, also in 2013, and 92 Macclesfield Road, Holmes Chapel (APP/15/2992C) in 2016. All cases considered the effects of small - medium residential development on landscape character and visual amenity. Her cv with regards to expert witness services is provided at Appendix I of this report.
- I.5 Xanthe visited the site on 22nd September 2017 and on satisfying herself that there was a case to be made against the proposal for development, accepted the commission and

submits this evidence in support of local residents.

- I.6 In accordance with GLVIA 3 Landscape and Visual Assessment is a tool used to identify and assess the importance of effects of change resulting from development in both the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right, and on people's views and visual amenity. The objective is to provide the competent authority with relevant information to enable them to take a site specific decision on development in full knowledge of the scheme's likely effect on the landscape and visual amenity.
- I.7 This report intends to provide a strategic assessment of potential landscape and visual effects arising from housing development at the Land East of Crouchley Lane site to assist with the Local Plan review process.
- I.8 The structure of the report therefore includes the consideration of both landscape and visual matters, from baseline and sensitivity to change, to likely effects of housing development. The report then goes on to consider the findings of the Warrington Green Belt Assessment for SE Lymm and concludes with a balanced assessment of likely effects of the release of the site in question from the Green Belt.
- I.9 Throughout this report reference to the site or Land East of Crouchley Lane means that part of LY22 north of Crouchley Hall Farm and west of 88 Higher Lane or in other words SHLAA site reference 2901 as promoted by Berrys Planning in their submission Project Reference SA22033.
- I.10 The following publications/information sources were consulted as part of this assessment:
- Warrington Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (2007)
 - Cheshire Landscape Character Assessment (2008)
 - Lymm Village Centre Conservation Area Statement
 - Warrington Borough Council Green Belt Assessment (21 October 2016)
 - Warrington Online database (mapping.warrington.gov.uk)
 - MaGlc (<http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/MagicMap.aspx>)

2. LANDSCAPE MATTERS

Baseline

- 2.1 The site does not sit within or near any landscape designations at a national or regional level. However, and with reference to the Warrington Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (WBC LCA) (2007) the site is included in Type 3 Red Sandstone Escarpment Area 3C Lymm where it is identified as having 'a high quality landscape...sensitive to changes in agricultural practices and development'. The site is also influenced by the characteristics of Arley LCA which is within the Lower Farms & Woodland landscape type of the Cheshire LCA (2008).
- 2.2 Type 3 encompasses the entire settlement of Lymm with the exception of the northern extents of the village where the landscape is more closely associated the river plain and the Manchester Ship Canal (Type 5). The description highlights the strong feeling of high landscape quality and distinctive nature of the red sandstone vernacular architecture. The importance of the secondary sandstone ridgeline (from the main red sandstone escarpment) between Broomedge and Lymm at 60-55m is also identified. The south facing slopes of the Land East of Crouchley Lane forms an important part of this natural, prominent feature in the landscape. Urban influences are noted as limited.
- 2.3 Within the character description the LCA identifies the Victorian Villas along Higher Lane – the main Warrington to Altrincham Road – as key cultural elements of the landscape. We would note that whilst key characteristics of 3C Area are generalised as 'its small scale, more intimate rural character, luxuriant vegetation and restricted views' this is not the case in the context of Land East of Crouchley Lane. Here the loss of hedgerow boundary's combined with the sloping ground of the secondary escarpment result in a prominent site in the landscape with an open character and far reaching views towards High Legh and the wider Cheshire Plain.
- 2.4 The Conservation Area Statement for Lymm Village Centre (designated 1971) articulates that 'the settlement of Lymm is situated in an area of unspoilt rural scenery to the east of the Borough in the north of Cheshire with the Manchester Ship Canal lying to the north. The Bridgewater Canal, constructed by James Brindley, passes close to the centre of Lymm and a picturesque lake was created to the south when the Bradley Brook was dammed almost a hundred years ago to allow the Warrington Road to cross the ravine'. Central to the character and appearance of the conservation area is therefore its rural setting. The buffer zone of the designation extends into the site and

its related skyline, which includes St Mary's Parish Church as well as Lymm Water Tower are distinctive features in long views from the Green Belt and on approach to the village from the south.

- 2.5 In the context of the conservation area and settlement threshold/ approach from the south (up the escarpment) the following locally and statutory listed structures combine to form this distinct and historic settlement edge; Church of St Mary Virgin (Grade II) Lymm Water Tower (Grade II) Lymm Baptist Church (LL) 58 Higher Lane (LL) and 64-66 Higher Lane (LL); red brick Victoria Villas along Higher Lane.
- 2.6 These buildings sit 'in the landscape' beyond the crest of the escarpment, screened by it to some degree. As such modern development at Manor Lane has not degraded the settlement edge to any significant degree and the historic buildings, including view to St Mary's parish church are clearly read with its relationship to the rural hinterland.
- 2.7 Review of early OS maps (1849) highlights the longevity of the landscape pattern around the site, that is woodland copses and hedgerow lined lanes associated with Crouchley Lane and (the former) Beechwood Hall. This raises the possibility that these hedgerows may constitute 'historic hedgerows' as determined through the Hedgerow Regulations (1997) and as such should not be lost, although clearly more detailed site assessment work is required to confirm this.
- 2.8 Whilst no national or regional PROWs pass within or adjacent to the site the public footpath linking Crouchley Hall Farm with the Lymm Water Tower has an important 'stepping stone' role for linkage into the wider network to the south, via minor lanes and footpaths, over the M56 to the rural landscapes around High Legh.
- 2.8 In terms of nature conservation assets within the locality the Bradley Brook Valley is significant in terms of deciduous woodland, including ancient semi natural woodland of SBI and SINC status. As such is likely to support protected species as well as habitat. Whilst none of these assets are within or immediately adjacent to the site the importance of linkage for green infrastructure purposes is self evident.
- 2.9 Two Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are associated with the site; a group at Lymm Water Tower and a copse east of 86 Higher Lane.

Sensitivity to change (including value and susceptibility)

- 2.10 The Warrington LCA identifies the 3C character area as being of high landscape quality. In fact the locality was included in the Area of Special County Value up until its recent removal from planning policy.
- 2.11 The locality is also valued for its recreational opportunities; its minor lanes and routeways are well used for a wide variety of users due to easily accessed from the settlement. The landscape value is therefore judged as medium.
- 2.12 In terms of susceptibility to change, and housing development in particular, due to the prominence of the south facing slopes of the escarpment associated with the Land East of Crouchley Lane site, and the distinctive nature of this natural feature, it is assessed as medium to high.
- 2.13 Overall sensitivity is therefore determined as medium - high

Likely Landscape Effects of Housing Development

- 2.14 Effects related to the allocation of this site for development are likely to include:
- Potential loss of vegetation including possible historic hedgerow loss and mature tree cover associated both with Crouchley Lane and related TPOs.
 - The regrading of levels to provide building plots and site access will result in the loss of a distinctive landscape feature
 - The introduction of uncharacteristic elements including access infrastructure, street lighting and mains services; introduction of new residential buildings set within landscaped plots including off road parking; traffic intrusion arising from proposed development; Light intrusion arising from proposed development;
 - Outwith the site confines it is evident that any access works to Crouchley Lane will significantly alter the rural character and historic approach/threshold to the village.
 - Wider indirect effects on landscape character and visual amenity arising from the above (direct) effects including the loss 'of reading' of historic settlement edge and of locally distinctive built and landscape features.
- 2.15 The proposal would result in permanent alteration to the landscape, the size, scale and nature of which is inconsistent with the existing character of the locality. An extensive tract of open arable landscape would be lost, and whilst it may be that it is set against the existing developed edge of settlement, due to the prominence of the site and the distinctive nature of the sandstone escarpment, significant landscape effects are likely to

arise. Furthermore, whilst there would be no direct impact on statutory heritage assets the cultural and historic character to the area would be diminished because the distinctive historic built forms and skyline are likely to be concealed by modern development above the crest of the escarpment.

- 2.16 In summary landscape effects are expected to be moderate - major adverse and are unlikely to be mitigated through design.

3. VISUAL MATTERS

Baseline

- 3.1 The prominence or otherwise of the proposed site within the landscape is a key consideration with regards to any development proposal in the open countryside.
- 3.2 Public views to the site from the north are limited by existing development along Higher Lane.
- 3.3 The key receptor groups determined are therefore; residents both on the settlement edge and associated with scattered farmsteads to the south (Crouchley Hall Farm, Yew Tree Farm) and the wider landscape south of the site.
- 3.4 Users of the local footpath network, namely the footpath running through the site from Lymm Water Tower to the agricultural track, and through Crouchley Lane Farm, will also be affected.
- 3.5 Highway users on the local road network which may include leisure users eg cyclists, horseriders; Crouchley Lane is the primary routeway within the context of the site, although glimpsed views from Higher Lane, Manor Road and Tower Lane may be possible.

Sensitivity to change (including value and susceptibility)

- 3.6 The sensitivity of private residential receptors are low, as determined by Good Practice, however users of the PROW network and minor road users will be high given that the travel speeds are lower (than arterial roads for example) and activity is focused on the enjoyment of the open countryside.
- 3.7 Following balanced assessment overall sensitivity is therefore determined as medium.

Likely Visual Effects of Housing Development

- 3.8 A high number of residents, visitors and users of the area would be directly affected by the visual changes arising by the development of the site. The loss of landscape features and introduction of inappropriate and uncharacteristic elements in close views will be experienced and as such be a significant change from the existing condition.
- 3.9 In particular users of the local footpath and Crouchley Lane, as well as residents of scattered settlement in the landscape to the south, will experience substantial

containment in views and increase of builtform where there is currently very minimal presence arising from the encroachment of settlement across a natural boundary on to the southern slopes of the escarpment. They will also experience the loss of a distinctive landscape feature.

- 3.10 In summary visual effects are expected to be moderate adverse and are unlikely to be mitigated through design.

4. GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

Consideration of the WBC Green Belt Assessment (2016)

4.1 This section considers the site and the findings of the strategic assessment against the Green Belt Assessment undertaken by ARUP; applying ARUP's methodology in relation to the site our comments would be as follows:

- **Green Belt Purpose 1 “to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas”**

N/A

- **Green Belt Purpose 2 “to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another”**

N/A

- **Green Belt Purpose 3 “to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment”**

This assessment has highlighted the prominence of the site and the importance of the sand stone escarpment on the south side of the village as a natural feature which safeguards from encroachment. If breached by development, it is considered that this change would significantly affect the character and openness of countryside within the Green Belt to the south. We therefore fully support the WBC GB assessment in their finding that the site makes a strong contribution to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

- **Green Belt Purpose 4 “to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns”**

The assessment has found that the spires, articulated roofline and distinct building forms on the village edge, which constitutes the northern boundary to the site, are important as visual indicator of the proximity of the historic centre in views from the south (within the GB and on the approach). It has therefore been demonstrated that the open nature of the escarpment (which includes the site) serves to support the preservation of a distinct settlement edge and the special character of the historic village and its setting. Rather than making a weak contribution in this regard, it is our view that the contribution is therefore moderate.

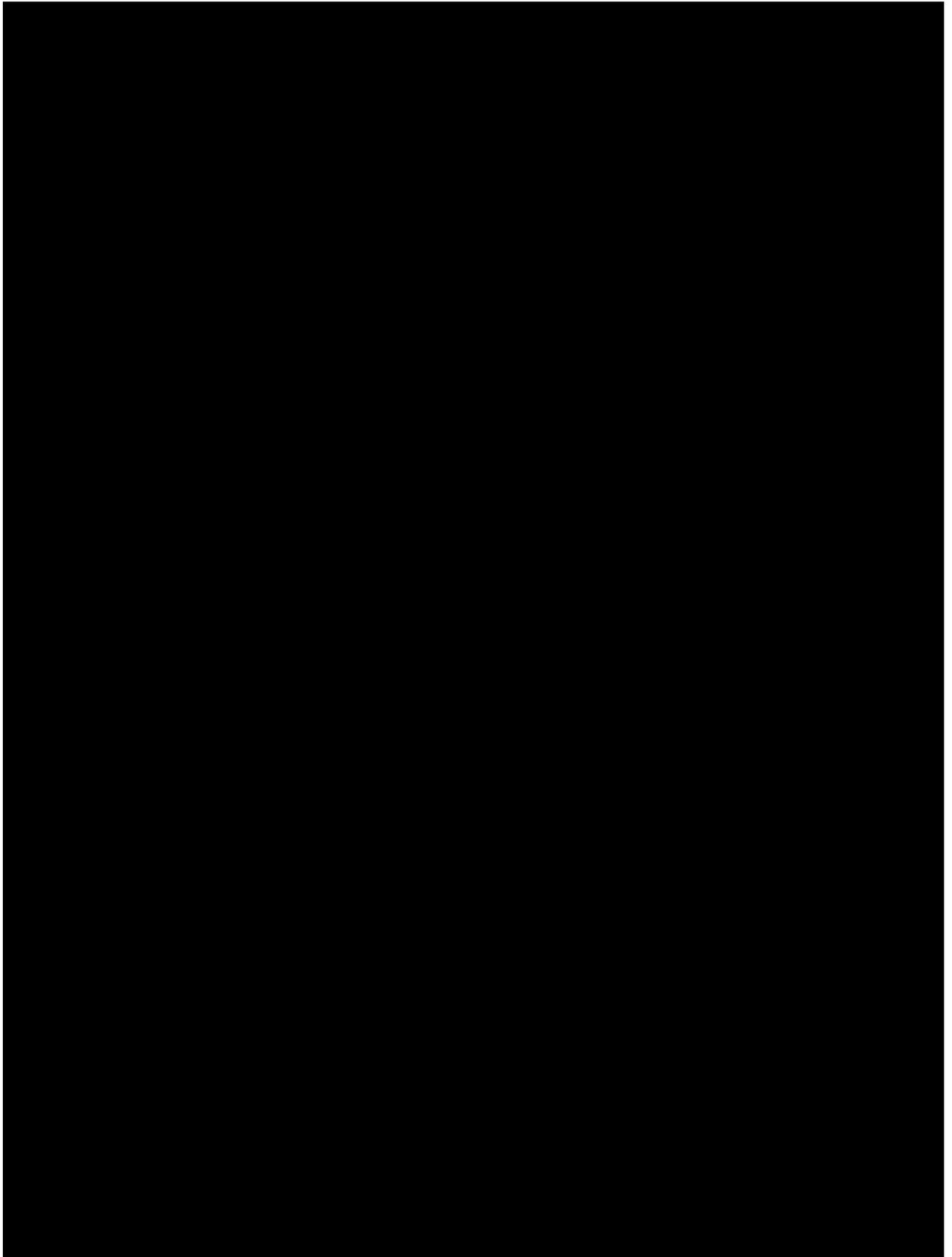
- **Green Belt Purpose 5 “to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict land and other urban land”**

N/A

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This assessment has established that the value and susceptibility of the Land East of Crouchley Lane is vulnerable to the effects of housing development and does not have the capacity to accommodate development of the nature under consideration. Rather than enhancement any potential housing proposal will result in the loss of a distinctive landscape feature and diminution of the historic settlement edge.
- 5.2 In terms of visual amenity the proposals are likely to result in significant visual change from the public highway in the immediate locality. Near views from the public footpath would be fundamentally affected with the introduction of built form in close proximity. In terms of distant views from the landscape to the south; receptors would experience clear views of the development extending down the southern slopes of the sandstone escarpment which is an important rural component in the wider landscape as well as for the setting of the historic village. This change would be fundamentally at odds with the establish interplay between the village and its rural hinterland.
- 5.3 The WBC Green Belt assessment has correctly determined that the Land East of Crouchley Lane is inappropriate for development, and this review establishes further points of relevance in particular the importance of the sandstone escarpment for the distinctive setting of the village on its southern side and the substantial likely impact to this distinctiveness should the development breach this natural feature.
- 5.4 Overall the release of this site from the Green Belt would materially impact the landscape resource and have a significant adverse impact on the overall functionality of remaining land parcels. The site should therefore not be allocated by WBC for release from the Green Belt in this case.

Appendix I:



Appendix 2:

