



Land adjacent to St Nicholas,
Vale of Glamorgan:

Landscape & Visual Appraisal

Prepared by Catherine Etchell Associates Ltd
for Redrow Homes

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Landscape Strategy Drawing No. 880.03B

Design & Access Statement March 2015, Harmers

Tree Survey February 2015, Treescene Arboricultural Consultants

Ecological Assessment November 2014, Ecology Solutions Ltd

Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment March 2012, Anthony Jellard Associates

Land adjacent to St Nicholas, Vale of Glamorgan: Landscape & Visual Assessment

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Catherine Etchell Associates has been commissioned to prepare a Landscape & Visual Appraisal (LVA) for a proposed housing site adjacent to the village of St Nicholas in the Vale of Glamorgan. The area is under consideration as an allocated housing site in the Glamorgan Local Development (LDP) Draft Deposit Plan November 2013.
- 1.2. This LVA is submitted in support of a planning application for which a proposed layout has been prepared by Redrow Homes for 96no. dwellings. This document should be read with the Design & Access Statement prepared by Harmers Ltd.
- 1.3. This LVA follows on from a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) prepared by Anthony Jellard Associates. That document was prepared in March 2012 for Allocated Sites to be included in the draft LDP, but covered a slightly different area from that which is currently under consideration.
- 1.4. The site allocation which is to be included in the draft LDP comprises the area considered by the LVIA, together with additional fields to the north. The current application omits the easternmost field and includes a new site access (0.13 ha).
- 1.5. This LVA examines the proposal in the light of this revised site boundary. It does not repeat information already presented in the LVIA but considers specifically the visual impact of the development. This document:
 - Identifies how the amended boundary of the site may affect views of the development;
 - Examines the visual impact of the proposed development from additional viewpoints, as requested by the Vale of Glamorgan's Landscape Architect. In particular, consideration is paid to views from St Nicholas Conservation Area, from Public Rights of Way and from the A48;
 - Describes measures to avoid, reduce, remedy or compensate for identified effects, and proposes landscape design objectives;
 - Presents a site specific Landscape Appraisal (Drawing No. 880.02B) which illustrates site constraints and opportunities, and reflects how the current proposed layout for 96no. plots may best respond to reduction and amelioration of adverse

potential visual impacts, from which a Landscape Strategy can follow.

2. Qualifications & Experience

- 2.1. This report has been carried out on behalf of Catherine Etchell Associates by Catherine Etchell BSc MA Dip(Landscape Design) CMLI. Catherine is a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute and her qualifications include a Masters Degree and Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from The University of Sheffield.

- 2.2. Catherine has been working in urban and rural development since 1989 initially in the Public Sector (Planning) and more recently as Director of Catherine Etchell Associates. Over this period she has undertaken many projects relevant to this study including landscape design, planning and landscape & visual assessment, acting as expert witness for both public and private sector. She has lectured on Landscape Design at the University of Wales, Cardiff.

3. Methodology

- 3.1. This report follows the Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition), produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. The methodology has been applied using desktop study, field assessment and photographic site survey.
- 3.2. Site context in terms of location, landscape, ecology and planning designations are described in **Section 4**.
- 3.3. Anthony Jellard Associates' LVIA describes how the Glamorgan Local Development (LDP) Draft Deposit Plan November 2013 and other planning policies relate to the proposed site. The impact of the development is described and discussed in detail in the LVIA.
- 3.4. Using field assessment and analysis, **Section 5** of this document reconsiders potential visual effects arising from the proposed development, in the light of the amended site boundary, and considers additional viewpoints. This document makes an analysis of the significance of these effects with respect to their nature, duration, magnitude, and sensitivity of receptors (i.e. types of viewers or valued landscapes affected).
- 3.5. At the request of Emma Hancock, Vale of Glamorgan Landscape Architect, particular attention has been paid to views from Public Rights of Way, and views from the A48. Distant views as well as near views were to be considered.
- 3.6. The Site was visited on 25 January 2015 and 4 March 2015. On both occasions, weather conditions were clear and sunny and visibility was good. Visiting the site at this time of year and in good visibility is an advantage and recommended by the Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, since there are clear views with limited screening from natural vegetation. This gives an accurate impression of the 'worse-case scenario' visual effects of the development.
- 3.7. Initially, key potential viewpoints were selected to include views from valued landscapes (i.e. St Nicholas Conservation Area), and also by looking outwards from the site. Walking and driving around the site confirmed these viewpoints and determined the general extent of visibility.
- 3.8. Photographs were taken with a Canon EOS 100 digital SLR cropped frame camera at 31.25mm. This is the equivalent of a 50mm full frame digital SLR.
- 3.9. Conclusions of the Visual Appraisal are given in **Section 6**.

3.10. **Section 7** describes a mitigation and design philosophy summarised in the Landscape Appraisal Drawing No. 880.02B which relates to the proposed Redrow layout. This has been used to inform the Landscape Strategy Drawing No. 880.03B

4. Site Context

Site Location

- 4.1. The Site is located to the west of Cardiff City Centre and consists of 4no. fields adjacent to the attractive village of St Nicholas and the busy A48. The site is adjacent to and outside the St Nicholas settlement boundary, as defined in the Vale of Glamorgan Unitary Development Plan 1997–2011.
- 4.2. The total area of the site is 3.65 hectares, including the site access. The access is proposed direct from the A48, on an area currently occupied by a bungalow which is within the Conservation Area, fronting onto the A48. The site is relatively flat but rises very gently towards the northern boundary. The land forms an east - west ridge which drops away to the north and to the south.

Landscape & Ecology

- 4.3. The site consists of grazed fields enclosed by mature hedgerows. Where the site forms a boundary with St Nicholas, the hedges are low garden hedges which include non-native species and are gappy or non-existent in places. One field boundary on the north-eastern site boundary consists solely of stock proof fencing. Elsewhere the hedges are substantial and include many trees. (Refer to Tree Survey Report February 2015, Treescene Arboricultural Consultants)

The hedges and trees provide bat flight lines and habitat. (Refer to Ecological Assessment November 2014, Ecology Solutions Ltd)

- 4.4. There are several ponds are outside the site boundary, some of which provide Great Crested Newt habitat. (Refer to Ecological Assessment November 2014, Ecology Solutions Ltd)
- 4.5. Existing views in and around the site are somewhat limited by the flat topography and tall hedgerows. The tower of St Nicholas' Church in the centre of the Conservation Area, to the west of the site, provides the most prominent feature in the landscape, apart from a double row of pylons which run to the east of the site.
- 4.6. Views are explored in more detail in Sections 5 & 6 below.

Planning Context

4.7. Planning designations which affect the site are as follows:

- The site is included in the Ely Valley Ridge Slopes Special Landscape Area (SLA). The landscape and visual impact on the SLA is explored in Anthony Jellard Associates' LVIA and concludes that there will be no significant impact on the SLA;
- The site is adjacent to the St Nicholas Conservation Area. The proximity of the site to the Conservation Area and its significance is discussed in the Views Appraisal below;
- Several Public Rights of Way pass in close proximity to, but outside, the site, including the Millenium Heritage Trail, a national long distance route. Views of the proposed site from these footpaths are considered below;
- The Ecological Assessment has identified the presence of protected species in or around the site. Protection is afforded to Great Crested Newts and bats under Section 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the species are also included on Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

5. Views Appraisal: Photographs

- 5.1. The Views Appraisal assesses the visual effect of the development through consideration of representative viewpoints. These are selected as described in Section 3 Methodology above.
- 5.2. The Appraisal describes visibility of the site, describing the change in character of views resulting from the proposed development, and the changes in visual amenity of the visual receptors (i.e. viewers).
- 5.3. It considers:
 - the extent of the view that would be occupied by the development (i.e. full, partial, glimpse);
 - the proportion of the site visible;
 - the distance of the viewpoint from the development and its proportion of the total view; and
 - whether the view is transient or one of a sequence of views (e.g. from a moving vehicle or footpath).
- 5.4. Views are representative of typical views and are categorised according to their distance from the site as follows:
Near – 0-0.5 kilometres
Medium – 0.5-1.0 kilometres
Distant – 1.0+ kilometres
- 5.5. Viewpoint locations are shown on the plan below.
- 5.6. All viewpoints were seen on clear days in January/early March. Such optimal viewing conditions, with good visibility and trees lacking foliage, illustrate the 'worst case' scenario.



**Plan showing Viewpoint Locations
VP1 – VP6**

- 5.7. From this assessment and consideration of the receptors, i.e. types of viewers, from the five representative viewpoints, a calculation is made of their significance. It is considered for example that, as a valued landscape, views from the Conservation Area will carry more significance than views from Public Rights of Way.
- 5.8. **Viewpoint 1** shows the near view from the footway along the south side of the A48. This is a view of short duration on the approach to St Nicholas when travelling west. Although transient, this approach to St Nicholas is considered important since the road passes through countryside before entering the village. The site is set back from the A48 behind the existing houses fronting onto the road, and is also behind a substantial hedgerow which will be reinforced with new tree planting. It is therefore considered that this view is of **low significance**. There are no other significant views from the A48; any glimpses between existing houses are towards trees either outside or on the site boundary. **There is no view when travelling eastwards on the A48.**
- 5.9. **Viewpoint 2** shows the near view from the 'Three Saints Way' Public Right of Way. Walking from the north there are no views of the site until the ridge is reached. From this point, for a distance of 500m, the footpath has views towards the proposed site as it approaches St Nicholas. Viewpoint 2 shows the Church Tower to be just visible. The route passes close to the eastern site boundary before reaching the busy A48 and the existing settlement boundary. This is the closest view of the proposed development from any of the surrounding Public Rights of Way. However, it is separated from the development by a substantial hedgerow which will offer substantial screening and softening benefits. The development will only become visible as the countryside is left behind, and the proximity of the existing settlement and the busy A48 becomes more obvious. It is therefore considered that this view is only of **low significance**.
- 5.10. **Viewpoint 3** is a near view from the Millenium Heritage Trail. Due to presence of tall trees and hedgerows along the Trail, and the topography, any views of the site will be glimpses of short duration, will be behind existing farm buildings, and will not be visible when there is leaf cover. This view is therefore considered of **no significance**.
- 5.11. **Viewpoint 4** is a short range view looking from the Public Right of Way towards the north west boundary of the site. This footpath has occasional views towards the proposed development site all the way from the top of the ridge to St Nicholas. The development will be hardly visible in these views since it will be seen behind mature hedgerows and Ger y Llan. St Nicholas Church Tower will remain visible. Since the view of the site will be behind existing houses, it will therefore be in keeping with the character of the settlement area. It is therefore considered that this view is only of **low significance**.

- 5.12. **Viewpoint 5** is a distant view from the 'Haunted Fields' Walk, a Public Right of Way. Due to the distance away from the site, it is difficult to make out the settlement of St Nicholas, and the Church Tower is barely visible. It is therefore considered that this view is only of **low significance**.
- 5.13. **Viewpoint 6** has been selected due to the importance afforded to any views from the core of the Conservation Area. However, there is **no view of the proposed site from this viewpoint**, since the site is screened by Ger y Llan and houses along Well Lane. Two photos illustrate the views from the War Memorial and from outside the Church porch. This shows that it is just possible to glimpse through in between the houses on Well Lane from isolated points at specific angles in between the existing houses. But even then, the site is not visible. This view therefore has **no significance**.

6. Views Appraisal: Conclusions

- 6.1. The site is relatively flat but falls slightly from the ridgeline in the north towards the A48 in the south. Due to this topography, any **near views of the site are likely to be limited to the houses at the outside edges** of the development, rather than further inside the site. **Most views of the site are short range**, and the closer the viewer to the site, the more this will be the effect. This makes the **boundary field patterns more important, particularly the trees and hedges along the outside edges of the site**, which are able to screen and visually soften the development. Any significant structural trees planted within the site would also be eventually visible from outside the site and would serve to soften the views in.
- 6.2. The site is surrounded on the north and east sides by fields, and on the west and south sides by existing houses. Ger y Llan to the west is not part of St Nicholas Conservation Area, and lies between the site and Well Lane which is on the edge of the Conservation Area. Due to the buffering effect of Ger y Llan, **views towards the site from the core of the Conservation Area are very restricted and limited to glimpses which fall in between the houses of Well Lane towards Ger y Llan**. There may be views from the upstairs rooms of existing houses along Well Lane, but views from private residential properties are not normally a consideration for an LVA.
- 6.3. The Conservation Area directly borders the south side of the site, but this eastern section of the Conservation Area does not contain any of the core buildings for which the area was designated. The existing hedgerow along this site boundary is weak and gappy, and it will be important to improve this key boundary through provision of a more substantial hedgerow. However **the houses in this part of the Conservation Area front onto the A48 and themselves provide a substantial screen to the proposed development**.
- 6.4. The Millennium Heritage Trail is a long distance route which crosses the Vale of Glamorgan, but views of the development are only distant and will be **small glimpses of short duration**, and these will **only be visible in winter** when there is no leaf cover.
- 6.5. The Three Saints Trail is the Public Right of Way which passes closest to the development, and views from the path will inevitably be **affected for a short duration**, before the path overtops the ridge to the north.
- 6.6. The Public Right of Way to the south east of St Nicholas which forms part of the 'Haunted Field' walk, drops away with distance from the site. There are no views of the site from the footpath until it reaches higher ground, by which time the site forms a **small part of a distant view**, and even the tower of St Nicholas Church becomes indistinct.
- 6.7. St Nicholas Church presents the only significant architectural feature in the landscape due to the height of the tower. But even this is **barely visible from most locations** and is insignificant when

compared to the rows of pylons and overhead lines which run on a north/ south alignment across the fields to the east of St Nicholas. Distant views of the proposed site are extremely limited due to:

- The relatively flat topography which does not permit many vantage points;
- The presence in the landscape around St Nicholas of many small copses, mature trees and hedgerows; and
- Minor roads which are sunken lanes with high hedges.

6.8. Effectively, with a small amount of additional tree planting, **the site will be largely screened from all angles: the central core of the Conservation Area to the west, the A48 to the south, and the 'Three Saints Trail' to the east** by:

- the houses in Ger y Llan to the west,
- the houses along the A48 to the south; and
- the tall hedgerow to the eastern boundary of the site.

Views from the north are not possible except from private farmland.

6.9. When compared to the site area considered in the 2012 LVIA, and as a result of the amended site boundary, it can be seen that

- The **increase in field area to the north has little effect on views**, since there is virtually no visibility from the north of the site. The only view to be affected would be from the 'Three Saints' trail. However, overall, **the extent and duration of this view would be improved**, since this easternmost field is omitted from the application;
- The omitted eastern field is sited adjacent to the A48 and the easternmost extent of the Conservation Area. **The existing proposal does not include this part of the LDP allocation**, which would have been more visible when travelling along the A48 on the approach into St Nicholas.

6.10. The proposed access into the site will allow **a view from the A48 directly into the site**. However:

- the view will be fleeting, for a **localised short section** of the A48;
- the view is deemed less significant due to being **within the existing settlement boundary**;
- There will be a **wide verge which gives scope for tree and hedge planting** to screen and soften the views in.

6.11. **It can be concluded that views of the proposed site are, and will be, very limited and of short duration. The proposed development will not result in significant detrimental changes to near, medium or distant views from the surrounding area. In particular, the setting of the church and village green and other core elements of the Conservation Area would be unaffected by the proposed development.**

7. Mitigation & Design Philosophy

7.1. The previous LVIA, Local Plan Policy and the Conservation Area Appraisal all emphasise the need to **maintain the rural character of St Nicholas**. In order to achieve this aim, **it is recommended that the design of the proposed development achieves the following objectives:**

- Retain existing field patterns, tree and hedgerow enclosure together with new grouped trees;
- Reinforce boundary planting in particular where views into the site are most significant;
- Provide large gardens;
- Plant large structural tree species which reflect the character of the village;
- Omit closeboard fencing or reduce its presence in more visible areas;
- Promote biodiversity and design wildlife corridors to link the development with the surrounding countryside;
- Use sympathetic construction materials, detailing, and roof pitches; and
- Allow pedestrian permeability and good links to the local Public Rights of Way.

7.2. The proposal which forms part of the current application is for 96 dwellings with associated access roads, gardens and public open space.

7.3. The site rises slightly from south to north, but the dwellings along the northern boundary will be cut into these higher ground levels by approximately 1.5m which will reduce the potential visual effect of the development.

7.4. The existing trees and hedges will be retained to provide a landscape infrastructure to the site. Some trees will be removed for safety reasons; and sections of hedge will be removed to accommodate access roads. Where trees are removed, new trees are to be planted.

7.5. Existing hedges will be reinforced, and a new native hedge planted along the existing stock proof fence on the north-eastern boundary.

7.6. Groups of native trees are proposed along the boundaries;

7.7. 2no. principal Public Open Spaces are proposed, and these provide wildlife links with the existing hedgerows and new gardens. The larger POS contains a LEAP overlying SUDS provision, the smaller POS a LAP. A significant strip of open space alongside the access road is used for SUDS and provides a green link into the site. Other incidental areas of planting based around the existing

retained hedgerows all make a contribution towards the landscape setting and biodiversity.

- 7.8. Garden hedges are proposed along street frontages, to provide traditional garden boundaries.
- 7.9. Proposed planting will balance the aesthetics and practicality of planting with biodiversity interest. The planting plan will contain native wild flower, native hedge species and ornamental garden species which provide scent and colour as well as butterfly/bee interest.
- 7.10. A selection of evergreen trees typical of the area such as cedar will be proposed in Public Open Spaces to provide structure to the site and integration with the village of St Nicholas.
- 7.11. The proposed gardens, hedges and open space areas will link into the existing landscape infrastructure to provide enriched wildlife corridors which promote visual and ecological benefit to the development. This enhanced connectivity will provide foraging and commuting opportunities for birds, bats and Great Crested Newts as well as other reptiles and mammals.