

Richard Alderton
Development Director
Ashford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Tannery Lane
Ashford
TN23 1PL

06 July 2017
Ref: SS/Let/P1429

Dear Mr Alderton

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Request for Screening Opinion for Requirement for EIA in relation to residential development of Land at Lenacre Hall Farm, Sandyhurst Lane, Ashford.

We are writing to you on behalf of our clients, Millwood Designer Homes, to make a formal request for a Screening Opinion under Regulation 5 of the Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England & Wales) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

We include the following information:

- a) A plan identifying the land;
- b) A brief description of the nature and purpose of the development and of its possible effects on the environment.

As set out within this letter, it is our view that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would not be required to accompany a planning application for development on the site. However, we are formally writing to the Council to request that the proposal is screened for completeness.

Directors

Chris Barker MATP MRTPI **Managing Director**
Huw James MRTPI
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The Proposal

The proposed redevelopment seeks planning permission for up to 99 dwellings with associated access, infrastructure and landscaping, including 40% affordable housing.

The proposals would provide for a mix of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 bedroom properties. These properties will be predominantly houses with a small number of apartments.

Development will be predominantly in the form of two storey properties with some two and half and three storey units. The development will be of high architectural quality, reflecting and respecting the local vernacular and will consist of terraced, semi-detached and detached properties.

The proposals would include significant areas of public open space, ecological buffers to areas of ancient woodland and further ecological enhancement areas such as green corridors.

Environmental Issues and Impacts

Ecology - There are no identified significant ecological designations within or close to the application site although the local Lodge Wood Wildlife Site is located to the west with an area of Ancient Woodland within the southern part of the site.

The Ancient Woodland is intended to have a semi-natural landscape buffer of at least 15m (as recommended under Natural England standing advice). A sensitive lighting scheme is also to be put in place around this buffer and through the masterplan design and layout rear gardens of properties will not back onto the buffer to avoid encroachment onto this zone. The creation of a green corridor linking the two compartments of ancient woodland is also to be incorporated.

Initial ecological assessment work has been carried out on site and is summarised as follows:

Reptiles - The majority of the developable area of the site would relate to the grazed areas of shorter grassland which is largely unsuitable for reptiles; it is considered that overall there would be no negative impacts upon reptiles as a result of the proposals. Any clearance of taller vegetation is to be done so in a sensitive manner, this would reduce the chances of injuring or killing any reptiles on site to an acceptable level.

The site does support some grass snakes and therefore considerations are made within the masterplan to mitigate. Recommended ecological enhancements for reptiles include the retention and enhancement of existing boundary features. Also the enhancement of existing water bodies on site in addition to the creation of additional ponds or water bodies (including proposed SUDs ponds).

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Dormice - No dormice have been identified within habitats on-site although surveys are still on-going. Should dormice be found during the remaining surveys however, the proposals largely involve the retention and improvement of existing boundaries with any appropriate mitigation where necessary. Should any access road provision result in fragmentation it is considered that creating a single lane 'pinch point' through the hedgerow could reduce any loss of vegetation, allow planting over the top to create a green bridge as a suitable approach to retain connectivity for dormice across the site.

The potential for indirect impacts caused by cat predation could be reduced through a thorny buffer planting along boundary hedgerows and woodland. A sensitive lighting buffer would also be recommended along the boundary features as well as the improvement of hedgerows through planting of additional species of value to dormice. It is considered that should any presence be identified, with the adoption of the above, the conservation status of dormice in the local area would not be adversely affected.

Bats – Phase 1 Surveys have been undertaken where any bat activity has been limited to the boundary features of the site. It is considered that provided these are retained and buffered with a sensitive lighting scheme then there would be impact to bats foraging and commuting within the habitats found on-site. No rare species have been identified on-site, although surveys are on-going.

A number of trees with features considered to have potential to support roosting bats were identified during the initial Phase 1 survey. Provided these are retained and buffered from any direct light source, it is considered there would be no impact upon roosting bats under the proposals.

Great Crested Newts (GCN) - eDNA results indicate the likely absence of GCN from the water bodies on site, therefore it is considered the proposals would result in no impact to the conservation status of this species.

Breeding Birds - No ground nesting birds have been identified and therefore the development of dwellings within the grazed grassland is not considered to result in any negative impacts. Furthermore, the vast majority of the boundary features are to be retained, resulting in no significant loss of nesting habitats. Buildings can incorporate nesting features and additional nest boxes can be put up across the site to facilitate birds post-development.

General Enhancements – Iterative ecological advice is feeding into the initial masterplanning of the site and large areas of semi-improved grassland are to remain free of development, particularly along the northwest boundary. There is good potential to enhance the ecological value of these areas through planting of native wildflower, shrub and tree species to create a species rich and structurally diverse habitat. There are also opportunities for newly created SUDs ponds to be managed as wildlife ponds with layered structure and planting of wildflower species within ponds and around edges.

Landscape - In terms of landscape designation, the site is located outside of but in proximity to the Kent Downs AONB. The boundary of the AONB runs along Lenacre Street and is separated from the north eastern boundary of the site by the residential properties on the western side of this road.

The site is located within The Stour Gap Landscape Character Area of Ashford Borough Council's Landscape Character SPD (April 2011).

In terms of potential landscape and visual impact of the development proposals, a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) will be undertaken in accordance with the relevant 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment', 3rd (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment). In line with GLVIA we are producing a Landscape and Visual Appraisal rather than an LVIA on the basis that, overall, landscape and visual impacts/effects are considered not to be Significant.

The LVA will include baseline studies of an appropriately sized study area and a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) diagram produced to inform a selection of assessment viewpoints towards the Proposed Development. It is proposed that these are submitted to the local authority for comment, prior to any assessment being undertaken so that views can be 'scoped out' of further assessment, or included as appropriate.

An assessment of impacts on Landscape Character will be undertaken in relation to Ashford Borough Council's Landscape Character SPD. Impacts on landscape character are anticipated to be limited to a site / local scale and detailed consideration has been given through the design and layout of the proposed scheme to include appropriate mitigation within the design (as primary mitigation) to limit as far as possible, the effect on landscape character and seek out additional opportunities to enhance existing landscape features, with a coordinated approach to ecology, architectural design and the surface water strategy for the site. The same approach will be taken towards minimising effects on visual amenity, through primary mitigation embodied within the development proposal.

Heritage – A Grade II listed building, Lenacre Hall is located outside of, and to the south east of the application site along Sandyhurst Lane. There are additional listed buildings in the vicinity although unaffected by development at this site. Eastwell Park a registered park and non-designated heritage asset is also in the vicinity of the application site but unaffected. There are no known archaeological resources in the site or immediately surrounding area.

Detailed Archaeological and Heritage Assessment work is being carried out that have iteratively informed the proposed development. The proposed residential development would be set away from the listed Lenacre Hall building to ensure there are no detrimental impacts on the heritage asset and its setting, in accordance with planning policy and the relevant Acts. The building and its curtilage lie outside of the site and the site layout and design has fully considered the heritage asset through careful buffering and retention of open space around it. The overall development will be designed to be in-keeping with the character of the surrounding area whilst also being mindful of the nearby heritage assets.

Highways and Access - Access roads would serve the development from Sandyhurst Lane from both the north eastern and southern extremes of the site. The proposed site is to be accessed off Sandyhurst Lane, which runs between the A251 Faversham Road and the A20 Maidstone Road.

A Transport Assessment is being undertaken to assess the likely impact of the development on the local road network, however there are no reports of existing traffic congestion and initial assessments indicate that the road network has ample capacity. A Travel Plan is also under preparation to identify measures to mitigate the impact of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development, and to encourage more environmentally sensitive travel patterns.

Car and cycle parking will be provided in accordance with the vehicle parking standards for Kent, to ensure that the existing road network is not adversely affected by on-street parking.

Flood Risk and Surface/Foul Water Drainage – The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (Low Probability) and detailed assessment of the site is being carried out within a Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy (FRADS) which will accompany the application.

The existing surface water features, which include ponds and ditches would be integrated within the proposed development. The development would have a strong focus on Sustainable Drainage (SuDS), designed to manage surface water runoff in a sustainable manner, which would minimise the impact from the development on the quantity/quality of runoff and maximise amenity and biodiversity opportunities. SuDS techniques considered appropriate for this development are;

- Ponds
- Swales
- Permeable Pavements

Foul flows from the proposed development will connect to an appropriate system. Foul water drainage will be designed and built to adoptable standards. Consent will be obtained from the appropriate key stakeholders to make any physical connections to their infrastructure.

EIA Development

The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended) provide clarity on which applications should be accompanied by an EIA. The first step is to determine whether the application is a Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 form of development.

In this regard, the proposed development does not fall within the description of development as set out within Schedule 1 of the Regulations. For a proposal to be considered EIA development with respects to Schedule 2, it must:

- a) be located wholly or part in a 'sensitive area' as identified in Regulation 2(1); or

b) meet one of the relevant criteria, or exceeds on the relevant thresholds listed in the second column of the Table in Schedule 2.

Firstly the site is not located within a 'sensitive area' as defined by article 2 (1) of the Regulations.

In relation to b) above, the application proposal falls within 10 (b) 'urban development projects' of Schedule 2. The second column of that table stipulates the applicable thresholds and criteria which need to be met for the development to be considered EIA development as follows:

(i) The development includes more than 1 hectare of urban development which is not dwellinghouse development; or

(ii) the development includes more than 150 dwellings; or

(iii) the overall area of the development exceeds 5 hectares

In this regard, the proposed development would meet the thresholds under part iii since the total site area exceeds 5 hectares. Whilst this is the case, the total area proposed for residential use and road infrastructure is circa 4ha with the remaining area proposed for retained or enhanced landscape and ecological areas and / or public open space over an area of circa 8ha.

Schedule 3 includes criteria against which to assess whether a proposal is likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking into account the characteristics of development, location of development and the characteristics of the potential impact. These have been assessed in relation to the proposed development (described in detail above) and it is considered that in relation to the *characteristics of development* the environmental effects would not be significant given the proposed size of development, cumulative effects of other development, effects on resources or pollutant effects.

In terms of the *location of the development* there are no significant sensitive uses on or surrounding the site and natural environmental resources have been fully considered (including the nearby national landscape designation) and primary mitigation embodied within the proposed development. The proposal would include ecological enhancement, would be sympathetic to sensitive surrounding heritage assets and in all other respects would have limited detrimental impact. In terms of characteristics of the potential impact of the site, and having regard to location and proposed development, the scheme would not in our opinion have any significant effects on the environment that would result in a requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Notwithstanding this point, the proposed development will be accompanied by a comprehensive set of plans, reports, studies and assessments and in addition to any other reports considered necessary by the Local Planning Authority. These reports may include:

Design & Access Statement
Landscape Plans and Lighting Plan / Assessment
Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment

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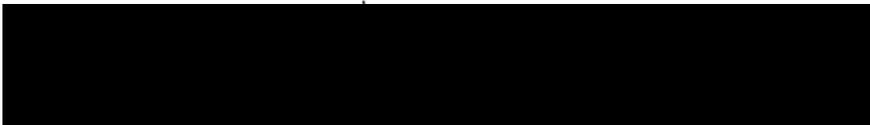
Ecological Surveys
Flood Risk Assessment / Foul and Surface Water Drainage Assessment
Landscape Strategy
Landscape and Visual Assessment
Sustainable Design and Construction Assessment & Renewable Energy Assessment
Historic Environment Assessment
Transport Statement
Transport Statement/Travel Plan
Waste Management Plan

In combination, reports will fully assess any potential impact and further seek to mitigate impact where required.

In conclusion, it is our view that the proposal would not meet the basic criteria for inclusion as EIA development. Furthermore, the proposal is not of a scale, significance or within a sensitive location which would warrant accompaniment of an EIA and it is not considered that there would be any significant environmental effects. Any potential impacts will be minimal and in any event would be diminished through appropriate amelioration and mitigation measures.

If you have any further queries or require further information please contact me on 01903 248777.

Yours sincerely
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Huw James MRTPI
Director