

LAND EAST OF STREET HILL, WORTH, CRAWLEY

The proposed site is an open grassland & field area separated from the urban sprawl of Crawley to the west by Balcombe Road and Street Hill, to the north by Saxon Road, Maidenbower industrial park to the South and dissected from the Landscape Character Area 8, Worth Forest to the East, by the M23.

Whilst the area is enclosed on all sides by modern urban settlement and associated infrastructure, the characteristics of the area retain those of the rural landscape to the East, with sporadic buildings within large plots, mature trees and established hedging as well as large areas of open grassland, parks and managed woodland.

The area provides a clear visual transition from the urban settlement to the west and the rural countryside to the east and provides setting and context to the designated heritage assets, of St Nicolas Church, the Lych-gate, Street House and Toll House, Worth Conservation Area and the undesignated heritage assets which include two locally designated archaeologically sensitive areas; the moated medieval building to the south of the site and the site of the former Worth Rectory (adjacent to the present Bishop's Lodge) and the undesignated parks and gardens associated with Bishops Lodge which include an area of managed woodland

A heritage appraisal has been submitted providing an assessment of the significance of the heritage assets and the impact of development upon these assets and their setting.

Whilst the document has discussed the significance of the grade I listed Church in some detail, there appears to be less consideration given to its setting and historical context although reference is made to it "*The church was not located within a settlement and served a number of scattered small settlements across a wide area, linked by paths through the forest*".

With regard to the remaining listed buildings within the conservation area and again their setting the document is very brief, merely providing either the listed building written text or an architectural description; in the case of the non-designated heritage assets the reference is merely a record that they make a contribution to the area's character.

The assessment of Worth Conservation Area is also very limited and whilst the principle reason for designation in the first instance was the protection of the setting to the Church of St Nicholas, which was reiterated in the re-appraisal in 2003. The submitted evidence makes no assessment of the character of the area both in terms of the architectural built form and the rural landscape, the topography of the area, its relationship between built form and landscape which informs us of the historical context and setting of the church as a largely isolated building within the forest, accessible only by paths created throughout the woodland.

The existing built form is one of historical change with properties depicting the character and detail of different periods in time and thus reveals / reinforces the designated heritage asset's cultural and natural heritage values; how it is experienced, seen and interacts with

the landscape.

Crawley Borough Council consider the character of this area as rural and that its sense of place is defined by the remaining woodland, woodland pastures, hedgerows and traditional buildings. The assessment that the open space now, because of a lack of distinction as woodland, orchard or defined agricultural land renders them of no “value” is contested. Whilst improvement by means of additional planting of woodland, hedgerows etc. could improve the visual and historical interpretation of the area they are clearly defined as large open spaces of undeveloped land which contributes to the rural feel and sense of place.

The report makes reference to the lack of visibility of the proposed site from the Listed Church, but this should not be a consideration for allocation of housing on the site for a number of reasons. Setting should be considered as both perceived and tangible, whilst the far reaching views are restricted, knowledge of the rural characteristics of the area are sufficient to sustain a sense of place and retain the historical context of the landscape and built form. It could also be argued that the sense of place surrounding the church has always been tangible, its presence only revealed when leaving the wooded paths and arriving in the clearing immediately surrounding the church and thus its historical context has been retained.

It should also be noted that whilst the existing infrastructure and modern urban settlement does have a negative impact upon the setting of the heritage assets (designated and on-designated) this should not be taken as a reason to further impact upon the significance of the heritage assets, both designated and non-designated.

Crawley Borough Council conclude that the appraisal does not correctly articulate the significance of the heritage assets and deem that should the site be allocated for housing it would have a negative impact upon this sense of place and would in terms of perceived and tangible setting, in accordance with English Heritages emerging guidance “Historic Environment Good Practise Guidance advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets” be considered harmful.

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