



Appeal on Behalf of Lifestorey

Site of The Rise And Three Neighbouring

Properties, Stanford Hill, Lymington

Townscape Rebuttal Note

LPA Ref: 20/10481

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DE462_RN_001A

Introduction

1. This rebuttal note is in response to a number of points raised by Warren Lever in his proof of evidence, and is prepared to assist the planning inquiry.
2. The points I address below are focused on the townscape related aspects of Mr Lever's proof of evidence, other rebuttal points are made by Mr Clemons in regard to Heritage matters and Mr Marlow in respect of Architecture and Design matters.
3. I set out below a number of key themes, identifying the proposition of Mr Lever, followed by my response.

Townscape Methodology and Scope

4. Mr Lever first explains the scope and purpose of his evidence in regard to townscape at 4.0, by stating:

"This section of the proof addresses the design reason for refusal and undertakes an urban design appraisal of the townscape context for the site proposal."

5. With respect this scope is not correct in providing evidence to the reason for refusal. The scope should assess the townscape in which the proposed change will be perceived. It should objectively assess the sensitivity of the townscape to receive the change being proposed, measure the magnitude of the change and assess overall significance. This is the methodological basis for objectively assessing townscape effects. Instead it states to appraise the townscape context, although it more accurately discusses the SPD and describes how the site relates to it, followed by a critique of the scheme design. The scope of Mr Level's evidence is therefore not the scope that addresses the reason for refusal, and is not followed by the evidence provided. It lacks a proven methodology, resulting in a lack of objectivity and robustness.
6. Mr Lever's evidence is structured in the following way:
 - a. *Describes the townscape context at his 4.1;*
 - b. *Describes the scheme using the National Design Guide structure described at 4.2.*
 - c. *Discusses Bucklers Court at 4.3.*
 - d. *Provides a summary at 4.4.*

7. This structure lacks rationale and objectivity and in the main is a description of why Mr Lever doesn't appreciate the scheme's design (a subject which Mr Marlow addresses in his rebuttal).
8. Mr Lever goes on to explain that key elements of the NPPF is used (with summary statements appearing below) and then states that the design assessment is carried out using the National Design Guide. In respect of the latter, Mr Lever relies on the structure of layout, form and scape, appearance, landscape, materials and details to carry out an assessment of the proposed scheme. Whilst these subjects are appropriate for describing a scheme, they are not the ten characteristics of a well design place the National Design Guide promotes, instead they are simply logical ways of describing or critiquing a scheme design (not assessing townscape effects).
9. This methodological approach has consequences. For example, it is vital to understand objectively the baseline of the townscape that might be affected by a proposed change and to understand and measure the consequences of a proposed change upon it. This is a fundamental principle of townscape assessment, but it does not exist in Mr Lever's evidence (simply relying on Area 6 as a baseline). An informed study area has not been established within which the effects are experienced (either directly or in sequence), this is considered to be step 1 of the townscape assessment process to be able to judge how, and how far, the townscape effects will be felt. Mr Lever has not measured the geographic extent of the change experienced; how the proposed change is experienced by whom and in what way has not been assessed. These are all features of a structured and objective townscape assessment that follows the well-established structure of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (which includes for townscape assessment) – key extracts of the guide are included at CD 7.2.

Townscape Receptors

10. Mr Lever considers the 'Townscape Context, Local Distinctiveness and Design Issues' at his section 4.1. During this section, the site is identified as being within Area 6 and Mr Lever at regular points in his proof of evidence stresses how different Area 6 is from its surroundings, and in particular the town centre (his paragraphs 4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.1.4. 4.1.7).
11. However, Mr Lever recognises (on his map at page 38) that the site is located at a point where Area 1, 6 and 7 meet. It is striking that Mr Lever does not consider how the site relates to Area 1 and 7, or that parts of these Areas could form part of the context which the appeal scheme is perceived as being a part of (not necessarily in character terms but

as a context for the assessment – precise boundaries on plan are unlikely to be identified by people moving through and experiencing the change proposed).

12. The focus on trying to draw such a strong distinction between the appeal site and its immediate context is forced, and results in mistakes. For example, the claim that the town centre is part of a perimeter block layout but the appeal site is not (paragraph 4.1.5). Bucklers Court is only in part a perimeter block, with backland development accessed via a mews. The appeal site is set within a complete perimeter block, defined by Stamford Hill and Belmore Road, with all buildings facing outward from the perimeter block, and all private space being within the block. Moreover, Mr Lever goes on to state that Area 1 contains imposing gateway buildings (4.1.4), and that Bucklers Court creates a definitive full stop (4.1.10). This language is quite different from that use within the SPD (paragraph 4.1.18) which identifies the 'successful transition' function Bucklers Court provides between Highfield buildings to the smaller traditional dwellings – thus identifying that these townscape elements inter-relate and should not simply be forced apart for assessment purposes.
13. This attempt to isolate the appeal scheme within Area 6 is not without reason or consequence. It seeks to compare the proposed scheme with the lower density, detached character of that area, without recognising how this very far corner of Area 6 interacts with and has a role alongside, other townscape characteristics – such as that recognised by the SPD. This approach paints a false picture of the townscape baseline of the appeal scheme, and this illuminates the failings of a townscape assessment that does not begin with a robust analysis of the study area within which townscape and visual effects would be felt.

Townscape Analysis

14. Mr Lever's analysis of the appeal scheme is contained within his section 4.2, broken down into the sub headings of layout, form, appearance, landscape materials and details.
15. Under the title of layout, Mr Lever again claims that Bucklers Court creates a full stop to the town centre (and not a transition) at the 2nd paragraph on page 41. He also claims that the appeal scheme floor plan is at odds with the layout of buildings in the character area, but makes no reference to how this relates to Bucklers Court (despite it being immediately adjacent). This appears the clear rationale for assessing the appeal scheme only against Area 6, and not against the townscape in which it is perceived.
16. Mr Lever goes on at 4.2.2 to address form, and provides an extended critique of why the

appeal scheme does not accord with the sub-urban form of Area 6. The appeal scheme clearly differs from the detached dwellings it replaces. The assessment should assess what harm this change manifests to the townscape and visual baseline of the study area in which the appeal scheme is experienced. This methodological premise lies at the heart of every compliant townscape and visual impact assessment, but Mr Lever's evidence does not reflect this approach, instead it predominantly describes how different the appeal scheme is to the existing.

17. When considering scale at his 4.2.3, Mr Lever again refers to the difference between Area 6 and Area 1 at the 4th paragraph under this title *"more dispersed nature...in contrast to the built form in the adjacent town centre"*. Mr Lever goes on to state that this character (or Area 6) would be eroded by the appeal scheme (5th paragraph) and be at odds with the prevailing character traits. This approach echos the same point – the appeal scheme differs from the sub-urban detached buildings it replaces. This is understood, but does not answer the key question of what townscape effects does that change have. Without an objective approach, the effect cannot be reasonably measured and placed into the planning balance. The role of townscape evidence is to inform and objectively answer the question of what are the consequences of this change to the existing townscape.
18. Mr Lever goes on to state *"when the scale of buildings is at odds with their surrounding context"* at the top of the final paragraph of page 46, it further extends the position of considering the appeal schemes context to only be Area 6. This is inaccurate, Bucklers Court is a clear and striking part of the appeal scheme's context and the appeal scheme is not out of scale with it. Mr Lever goes on to refer to the prevailing grain, scale, plot size, mass, footprint and height. He does not refer to the key elements as set out in the SPD (such as plot width, building line, build up, set-back, front boundary, building format) all of which I consider at my proof of evidence at section 3 and Figures 2/3 comparing existing and proposed.
19. Mr Lever consider appearance at his 4.2.4 and claims *"a failure to respond to the prevailing urban grain and plot principles of Lymington"* in the third paragraph of this section. This is incorrect, Mr Lever presumably is referring again to Area 6, but by ignoring Area 1 (and specifically Bucklers Court) this evidence is forced to turn a blind eye to a key part of the townscape context, leading to a distorted analysis. This point is continued in this paragraph, claiming an *"architectural treatment which is at odds with the local character and appearance of the site and its surroundings"*. Mr Marlow addresses the further claims in this section of Mr Lever's evidence regarding appearance.

20. Mr Lever goes on to consider landscape at his 4.2.5, raising the role of the ratio between open space and built form in Area 6 (again no mention of adjacent townscape) highlighting the role gaps between properties have. Mr Lever states, at his third paragraph on page 49, that the appeal scheme *"would not have the same sense of spaciousness and spaces between buildings would be lost and the imposition of the height, scale and depth of the proposal would be visible both from Stanford Hill, the courtyard to Bucklers Court and the views between buildings along Belmore Road."*
21. This evidence does not consider the visibility of the existing frontage vegetation and its replacement, it does not objectively assess the change to the views identified and as a result the visual effects arising from this change are not objectively assessed. I consider the visibility of the scheme at my 4.4 and the visual effects at 4.5, with reference to a visual envelope map and verified visualisations (my Appendix B and C).
22. I also consider the views between buildings to vegetation to the rear of the building as being very infrequent, and at best a secondary visual feature. The majority of views experienced along this streets are oblique in nature and don't see beyond the existing building line to vegetation beyond, only views directly opposite the entrance driveways (perpendicular to the line of movement) start to experience these views.
23. Mr Lever goes on to address detailing at his paragraph 4.2.7 and (in combination with his paragraph 4.2.4) criticises the scheme design and in particular how it relates to period features. Mr Marlow addresses this in his proof of evidence and rebuttal and makes clear the scheme design does not try to copy or become a Georgian pastiche, instead it responds to its contextual influences.

Reference to Highfield and Bucklers Court

24. Mr Lever considers Bucklers Court at his paragraph 4.3. It is clear out that Mr Lever does not consider Bucklers Court as being part of the baseline townscape in his assessment, but provides two paragraphs on this building immediately following it. The first paragraph claims that Bucklers Court is a more accomplished design than the appeal scheme and goes on to describe Bucklers Court. The second paragraph criticises the scheme design approach.
25. I do not consider Bucklers Court to be particularly successful as a design – in my view it has a number of individual building blocks that lack refinement or detail, and are almost entirely symmetrical with crude linking built elements. This can be appreciated by the photograph on Mr Levers page 48, or my Appendix B at pages 11 and 13 and is addressed

in my proof of evidence (at 3.2.1, 3.2.6, 4.2.6). However, as recognised by the SPD, it does enable a successful transition to the town centre through its massing. Mr Lever does not appear to recognise this virtue in his evidence, preferring to refer to it as a full stop (at 3.7.1.5, 4.1.10 and the 2nd paragraph of page 41) and does not therefore consider how Bucklers Court might influence the appeal scheme design, or how the appeal scheme may contribute to this transition.

Conclusion

26. Mr Lever summarises at his paragraph 4.4 the townscape and design evidence, initially explaining how contextual aspects are experienced as one moves through an urban area. Mr Lever has not, however assessed the change to the townscape in this way. His methodology does not enable an appreciation of how townscape is experienced, as it is artificially drawn to the boundaries of Area 6. It would appear that Mr Lever is only considering "moving through an urban area" only when viewing the appeal scheme. This should instead appreciate the whole townscape experience when moving through the area and measure the townscape effects arising from the proposed change to it. This is a fundamental methodological problem, as Mr Lever is using townscape to critique the scheme and not to judge how the proposed change will be experienced in the wider townscape context and the effects it will give rise to.
27. The main point underlining my rebuttal statement is the very numerous problematic examples of a lack of a proven and robust methodology that leads to a lack of balance and objectivity.