

1.0 Introduction and my role as witness in this appeal

1.1 My name is Rachel Ann Booth. I hold a BSc (Hons) degree in Environmental Science and Environmental Geography from Bradford University, an MSc in Historic Conservation from Oxford-Brookes University and a postgraduate certificate in Archaeology from Leicester University. I shall be completing an MSc in Applied Landscape Archaeology with Oxford University in Summer 2009. I am a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation.

1.2 I am currently employed at Daventry District Council as Conservation Officer. My duties include assessing and determining applications for Listed Building Consent, Conservation Area Consent and works to protected trees and countryside hedgerows. I am a consultee for all planning applications affecting listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments, or their setting. I provide specialist advice to Council officers and members, architects, agents and members of the public on conservation and design issues relating to historic buildings, areas and landscapes.

1.3 I have been employed at Daventry for 4 years. Prior to holding this post, I held posts as Conservation Officer and Environmental Planning Officer, at East Northamptonshire Council and Rugby Borough Council respectively.

1.4 This proof provides specialist conservation evidence relating to the impact of the proposed development on the setting of Borough Hill, a nationally important Scheduled Ancient Monument. It also considers the impact on the character, appearance and setting of the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area and the Daventry Country Park and Reservoir (a proposed conservation area).

2.0 Planning Policy

2.1 The main policy considerations are similar to those set out in Section 2 of my Danetree proof of evidence and are not repeated here. In addition, the following specific policies and guidance documents are relevant to the Monksmoor appeal application:

- 2.2 Saved Daventry District Local Plan (Core Document CD3.1) Policy GN2: criteria E seeks to ensure that development will not adversely affect a conservation area. Saved Policy EN2 seeks to ensure that development within a conservation area preserves or enhances the character of the area and does not intrude into the setting of important buildings.
- 2.3 The Grand Union/Oxford Canal Conservation Area document (Appendix DDC14 Vol. I), produced by Daventry District Council in September 1995, contains map extracts for the entire length of the designated conservation area within the district. It also includes a written statement, which describes the character and appearance of the conservation area and the reasons for designation.
- 2.4 The Daventry Country Park Character Appraisal (Core Document CD3.21), produced on behalf of Daventry District Council in November 2008, is an analysis of the character and appearance of the Daventry Country Park/Reservoir area in order to consider whether it has special architectural or historic interest that would merit designation as a conservation area.

3.0 The appeal site and surrounding landscape

- 3.1 The appeal site lies within predominantly agricultural land in a valley to the north east of the town of Daventry. It is defined to the north by a strong linear belt of trees on the embankment of the Grand Union Canal, a designated conservation area, which sits at a lower level to the site for most of its length. To the south is Daventry Reservoir - the town's Country Park, which carries a number of designations (including Local Nature Reserve and County Wildlife Site) and has been proposed for conservation area status. It is separated from the appeal site by a major embankment. The reservoir is associated with the canal and is linked via a feeder channel, which runs along the eastern boundary of the appeal site. Borough Hill, a nationally important Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), lies to the south east. The western boundary is defined by Welton Lane, which retains its character as a rural lane. There are no listed buildings or conservation areas within the appeal site. However, the historic market town of

Daventry, to the south east, is a conservation area containing many listed buildings. The most visually prominent of which is Holy Cross Church (grade II* listed), which occupies an elevated position and is an important landmark building visible on the approach to Daventry from many directions.

4.0 The proposed development

4.1 The proposed development is described in detail in Mr Ellis' proof. An outline application was submitted to WNDC for an urban extension comprising 1,000 dwellings with associated infrastructure, education, public open space, community, education, retail, employment, recreational and medical facilities.

4.2 All matters were reserved (except access), but the Environmental Statement (Core Document CD9.6) set key parameters. Three specific character areas were defined:

- The Canal Zone (in the north) - guided by references to the form and character of the canal;
- The Square – a mixed-use centre at the heart of the development;
- The Village Park (in the south) – joins and relates directly to the Country Park.

4.3 New information submitted in November 2008 establishes typical block layouts, illustrative sections, building parameters, built form, architectural and landscape treatment, etc. for each of the three character areas. The central character area, previously known as The Square, is now referred to as The Central/Square.

5.0 Description and Character of Borough Hill SAM

5.1 The monument on Borough Hill, comprising the remains of two Iron Age hillforts and other archaeological remains within the interior of the site, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (ref. NN17145). A full description of the character and significance of the monument was presented in section 4 of my Danetree proof.

6.0 Impact of proposals on the setting of Borough Hill

- 6.1 Regional Spatial Strategy Policy 27 (Core Document CD1.1) seeks to ensure that sustainable development protects, appropriately manages and enhances the region's natural and cultural assets (including Scheduled Ancient Monuments) and their setting. Saved Local Plan Policy GN2: criteria F (Core Document CD3.1) seeks to ensure that development will not adversely affect sites of archaeological importance or the settings of archaeological sites. Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning (Core Document CD1.23) advises that there should be a presumption in favour of preservation of nationally important archaeological remains and their settings, and that this is a material planning consideration.
- 6.2 The application documentation recognises the importance of views from the appeal site towards Borough Hill. However, it makes little reference to, or assessment of, views from Borough Hill towards the site.
- 6.3 The appeal site is situated in the shallow Welton valley between the village of Welton to the north west and Borough Hill to the south east. It is separated from Borough Hill by an extensive wedge of agricultural land. Given its less direct physical relationship to Borough Hill, and its relatively limited size and extent, I do not consider the issues regarding setting of the SAM to be as substantial as those considered in respect of the Danetree site. I therefore have not applied the same detailed assessment as was set out in section 8 of my Danetree proof.
- 6.4 Views out over the appeal site from the top of Borough Hill are restricted by the existence of a belt of trees and hedgerows around part of its circumference. Where the site is visible, it is within the urban context of the Lang Farm residential site directly behind it. In light of this, I consider that further development in the relatively contained Monksmoor site would not significantly alter views from Borough Hill. The eastern edge of the site, which would define the extent of Daventry's built development and the interface with the open countryside beyond, would require sympathetic design and detailing. The proposed soft landscaping treatment around

the “dam burst” area to the east would help to soften the impact of development, especially when viewed in relation to the strong green eastern edge of Daventry Reservoir. The comments above relate to the Monksmoor site only. Another major urban extension is proposed on the Churchfields site immediately to the north and east of the Country Park. If this scheme were to be approved, the eastern edge of Monksmoor would be contained within the built form, which would be more extensive in views from Borough Hill.

- 6.5 The revised layout of the development incorporates a substantial landscape corridor which affords views towards Borough Hill from within the site. From the west, the appeal site in the valley bottom would be seen against the backdrop of rising agricultural land to the east, with Borough Hill remaining as the dominant landscape and visual element behind.
- 6.6 I conclude that, with appropriate design and detailing of built form and landscape mitigation at the reserved matters stage, the revised scheme would not adversely affect the setting of Borough Hill SAM.

7.0 The Character of the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area

- 7.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as Conservation Areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.
- 7.2 The canal conservation area was designated in 1995. The conservation area document, produced at the time, describes the canal and its salient features. Relevant extracts from this document are attached at Appendix DDC14 Vol. I. The canal network dates from the late 18th century. The Grand Union is the largest proportion of the network in Daventry District with a connection to the Oxford Canal at Braunston Junction. That part of the canal conservation area that is affected by the proposed development is shown on the map extracts attached at Appendix DDC14 Vol. I. The canal conservation area is a narrow, linear channel for much of its length,

incorporating associated cuttings, tunnels and embankments, bridges, locks and canal-side buildings. Woodlands, tree belts and hedgerows are included where they directly adjoin the canal and contribute to the amenity and character of the canal.

7.3 The character of the canal conservation area as it relates to the appeal site is described at paragraph 4.5.10 of the conservation area document. It passes through open countryside with few other influences, and predominately agricultural surroundings. The canal forms the northern boundary of the appeal site. There is a steep bank rising up from the canal tow path to the site for the most part. The top and sides of the slopes are generally well wooded, giving a strong sense of enclosure to the canal. Towards the north east edge of the appeal site the slope lessens and the land comes level with the canal. To the north of the canal beyond the appeal site there are extensive views of the Northamptonshire countryside.

7.4 Views into the canal conservation area from the north and east are of a strongly rural landscape, characterised by gently rolling agricultural fields and hedgerows. The canal is a strong linear tree-lined feature, which is easily distinguishable in this landscape.

8.0 Impact of the proposal on the character, appearance and setting of the Canal Conservation Area

8.1 Section 72 of the Act requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Paragraph 4.14 of PPG15 (Core Document CD1.23) advises that this should be a material consideration in the planning authority's handling of development proposals which are outside the conservation area, but which would affect its setting, or views into or out of the area.

8.2 The original scheme failed to appreciate the character of the canal as a simple linear transport corridor running through an otherwise rural landscape. Rather than maintaining its quiet, secluded and enclosed character, the proposals sought to relate development directly to the canal by locating high density built form and associated urban green spaces right up to its banks to create a strong interface with the canal. A

number of new pedestrian routes were proposed along the embankment to open up views and provide direct access from the development to the canal.

8.3 Do the Regulation 19 information and scheme amendments address these concerns?

8.3.1 The Conservation and Heritage Statement submitted by the Appellant in November 2008 describes numerous proposed scheme changes in response to the local planning authorities' concerns regarding impact on the setting of the Canal Conservation Area. The key changes may be summarised as follows:

- Re-siting the northern edge of development to create a separation of 40 metres between the housing and the boundary of the site. This creates a distance of 56 metres from the edge of the canal;
- New buffer zone will provide additional linear open space provision within the scheme;
- Retention of existing vegetation on the slope of the canal and introduction of additional new native planting to supplement this;
- Restrict new openings onto the canal - access limited to just one point at the north east end;
- Reduce density and building heights adjacent to the canal

8.3.2 I consider that the impact of development on the setting of the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area will be reduced as a result of the proposed scheme changes. The proposed buffer zone, in conjunction with the existing difference in levels between the canal and development site, will help to protect the character of the canal as a secluded and quiet linear corridor. The proposed linear open space provision is compatible with the character and setting of the canal.

8.3.3 At the north eastern edge of the site the land gradually slopes down to the level of the canal. The tree cover is not so dense in this area. The visual impact of the development, in terms of built form, access roads, lighting and noise, etc. on this part of the canal would be greater. However, I consider that this impact could be

mitigated by sympathetic detailed design of layout; building form, density and height; infrastructure and services; and landscaping, etc.

8.3.4 The proposal to retain and enhance the existing vegetation along the edge of the canal, and introduce a new secondary zone of planting behind in the area open space, would maintain the character of views both in and out of the canal conservation area. New planting should take the form of a linear belt rather than blocks or fingers extending into the site, in order to maintain the strong linear character of the canal.

8.3.5 In light of the proposed scheme changes and mitigation measures, and subject to appropriate conditions, I conclude that the character, appearance and setting of the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area would not be adversely affected by the development.

9.0 The Character of Daventry Reservoir (proposed conservation area) within the Country Park

9.1 Formal consultation on the proposal to designate a conservation area based on the Country Park reservoir and associated spillway expired on 15 December 2008. It is currently anticipated that the results of the exercise will be reported to Strategy Group in January 2009. Thereafter, any decision to formally designate the conservation area would be taken at the February meeting of full Council.

9.2 The reservoir is a large body of water within an area of significant open space that is designated as a Country Park. It is an important break in the built-up urban area of Daventry, which has extended out to the north and east as a result of recent residential development.

9.3 The draft Character Appraisal for the proposed conservation area (Core Document CD3.21) summarises the character and special interest of the reservoir. Daventry Reservoir and its feeder channel were built between 1796 and 1804 to supply water to the canal network and thus maintain constant water levels for navigation. It is of special historic interest due to its links with the Grand Union Canal. In recognition of

this, it is proposed to designate the reservoir as an extension to the canal conservation area.

9.4 The proposed conservation area stands within a rural landscape, which provides an attractive setting to the reservoir and adjoining Grand Union Canal. Views into, and out of, the Country Park are key components of its character. An earth embankment forms the northern edge of the reservoir and a circular footpath route, popular with walkers and cyclists, follows the reservoir along the top of the bank. Where the landscape drops away at the end of the reservoir down to the spillway and feeder channel, there are extensive views across unspoilt Northamptonshire countryside. The existing native tree cover at the north and eastern boundaries of the proposed conservation area is good, but because of the levels difference between the reservoir and the adjoining land they do not provide a substantial visual screen. It is also important to note that the views across the site vary with the seasons. During the winter months views are far more extensive.

10.0 Impact of the proposals on the character, appearance and setting of Daventry Reservoir (proposed conservation area) within the Country Park

10.1 The Country Park is an important amenity and landscape feature for the residents of Daventry. Views into and out of the site should be preserved and, where appropriate, enhanced. As illustrated above, the appeal site is an integral part of its setting, and special consideration must be given to the interface between the proposed development and the northern boundary of the reservoir. Development on the appeal site would substantially and permanently change the relationship of the reservoir to the landscape beyond. Whether the reservoir is ultimately designated as a conservation area or not, its setting is still very susceptible to damage from unsympathetic and incongruous development and change.

10.2 I identified a number of concerns in relation to the impact of the original scheme on the character and setting of the Country Park. In particular, the proximity of built form to the northern boundary of the reservoir. The indicative layouts showed residential development sitting right up against the existing tree belt at the bottom of the bank of the reservoir. The interface between buildings and the reservoir was not

clear, especially given the substantial difference in levels between the reservoir walk and the appeal site. I was also concerned about the proposed density of development and the impact of the roofscape on views from the reservoir.

10.3 Do the Regulation 19 information and scheme amendments address these concerns?

10.3.1 A number of scheme changes have been made in response to the local planning authorities' concerns regarding the impact on the Country Park. They are summarised below:

- Approximately 30metre green infrastructure corridor between the built edge of development and the centre of the reservoir footpath.
- Restriction to 2 storeys at southern edge of development and lower density housing.
- Existing landscape buffer retained – currently 'filtered' views into the site from the reservoir walk as a result of mature deciduous trees, and enhanced with proposed native tree and shrub planting.
- More organic structural form and street pattern, with 'green links' in the Village Park character area, intended to better reflect its rural setting.

10.3.2 Despite the proposed scheme changes, my concerns regarding the impact of the development on the character, appearance and setting of the Country Park/Reservoir (proposed conservation area) remain.

10.3.3 It is my opinion that the proposed sections through the site included in the November 2008 Design and Access Statement are inaccurate and do not properly represent the existing site conditions. Page 25 of this document - Section A: The Southern Edge (Appendix DDC14 Vol. II) is of particular concern. It shows a section through the reservoir walk embankment. It is my impression, from my inspections on site, that the height and gradient of the existing bank are much greater in this area than what is shown on the drawing. The section shown does not appear to be representative of the height of the bank along the entire southern boundary. Therefore, the impact of the

development in terms of views in and out, and the potential for existing and proposed vegetation to provide effective screening, etc. is not fully demonstrated.

10.3.4 An email received from Allen Pyke Associates, on behalf of the Appellants, on 11 December 2008 (Appendix DDC14 Vol. III) attempts to address these concerns. The email states *'The section that has been provided is at the eastern end of the proposed development and therefore shows the most sensitive relationship between the site and the country park in terms of levels and the footpath in the Country Park is beginning to rise above the levels of the site...We have therefore shown a worse case.'* I would argue that, for much of its length along the northern boundary of the reservoir, the footpath is at significantly higher levels than the appeal site. I maintain that the drawing submitted is not representative.

10.3.5 The drawing on page 25 of the Design and Access Statement also indicates the creation of a 45metre green infrastructure corridor between the built edge and the reservoir. I would question the accuracy of the drawing. From careful consideration of the plans the area indicated does not appear to be 45 metres but is probably more likely 30 metres between the edge of the vehicular access/drive and the footpath on the top of the reservoir dam. The 45metre buffer quoted would extend well into the reservoir itself. The various master plans and layouts that are shown in the revised Design and Access Statement and other supporting documents do not appear to respect that buffer zone. Although only indicative, several plans show development encroaching into the buffer zone and sitting nearer to the edge of the reservoir boundary.

10.3.6 The email at Appendix DDC14 Vol. III seeks to provide clarification on this matter. It confirms that the width of planting between the access to the housing and the footpath in the Country Park is some 35metres, and considers that this is more than adequate to create a dense planted screen. I do not agree that this has been adequately demonstrated and I therefore conclude that the physical proximity of built form and its visual relationship to the edge of the reservoir remains a fundamental concern.

10.3.7 The proposed scheme changes include the introduction of new footpath/cycle links from the reservoir into the southern part of the appeal site. Given the existing

substantial change in levels between the reservoir walk and the appeal site it is not clear how this could be achieved without major re-grading and visual impact on the character of the walk. It is apparent from the email at Appendix DDC14 Vol. III that this matter has not been fully considered. The levels of the site have yet to be checked to establish the viability of introducing new accessible routes between the reservoir and the appeal site. My concerns relating to the potential physical and visual impact of this aspect of the scheme remain.

10.3.8 At the time of writing, I am not aware that the information contained in the email referred to above has been formally accepted as part of the amended proposals before the Inquiry. I reserve the right to comment further as necessary.

10.4 **Summary of impacts**

10.4 My primary concern relating to the proposed development remains the potentially intrusive visual impact of the development on views from the reservoir to the north. The reservoir walk is elevated above the surrounding land and commands classic Northamptonshire countryside views looking into the near and long distance. The existing tree coverage is good, but will not provide a substantial visual screen, especially in the winter when the leaf coverage is sparse. The proposed changes to the scheme seek to reduce the density and height of built form in the most sensitive zones and improve the landscape buffer along the southern boundary of the site. However, this is not considered sufficient to overcome the fundamental concerns about the impact of the development on the special character, setting and views from the reservoir, which is an integral part of the Country Park – an important amenity and landscape feature for Daventry.

10.5 In addition, if the conservation area is designated, I consider that the development would be visually intrusive and would not preserve or enhance the character, appearance or setting of the historic reservoir. As such, it is my opinion that, if the conservation area were designated, the proposal would be contrary to Saved Daventry District Local Plan Policies GN2 (criteria E) and EN2, and the advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance 15.