

# LAND NORTH OF CAMBRIDGE NORTH STATION

**Summary of Evidence of Jeremy Smith BSc (Hons),  
Dip LA, CMLI on Landscape and Visual Matters  
Prepared for: Brookgate Land Limited (on behalf of  
the Chesterton Partnership)  
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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Qualifications and Experience

1. I am Jeremy Smith, Director with SLR Consulting Limited (SLR). I am the founder member of SLR's landscape architecture practice, which now has over 120 landscape and masterplanning staff across the UK, Australia, New Zealand and USA.
2. I am a chartered landscape architect with 32 years of professional experience. I have a first class degree in geography from the University of Nottingham and a post-graduate diploma in landscape architecture from Sheffield University.

### 1.2 Planning Context

3. The appeal site is not within or adjacent to any national or local landscape designations, nor does it contain any landscape-related designations.
4. The Green Belt is just over 40 metres to the east of the appeal site at its closest point, and the site is separated from this designation by the existing railway line. Fen Ditton and Riverside and Stourbridge Common Conservation Areas are approximately 500 metres from the appeal site boundary.
5. The appeal site is within an area which is allocated for mixed-use development in the adopted Local Plan. Policy SS/4 states that the allocation will *"enable the creation of a revitalised, employment-focused area centred on a new transport interchange"*.
6. Accordingly, the various documents which form the evidence base for the NECAAP recognise that the character of the locality of the appeal site will change. The LCVIA, Townscape Strategy, and the draft AAPs all envisage the introduction of increased height and mass on the appeal site and the wider NECAAP.
7. The LCVIA – the only document that addresses the potential landscape and visual effects of built development within the NECAAP – recognises that development of the NECAAP area will result

in changes to the skyline and that it is therefore important that the development is “*of high architectural quality and sensitive design*”.

8. The LCVIA also concludes that the appeal site could accommodate medium to high buildings.
9. The Townscape Strategy is partly based upon the findings of the LCVIA, but provides different recommendations on building heights in the locality of the appeal site. It recommends that proposed building heights step down towards the River Cam corridor and the residential areas, but it also states that development of the appeal site and its context should provide “*an intense and vibrant urban environment*” which should also “*celebrate the arrival in the NEC area*”. It recognises that tall buildings can be helpful in providing landmark buildings can enhance legibility and distinctiveness.
10. The AAP is not agreed or adopted, and Mr Derbyshire concludes that very little weight can be attached to it.
11. Appendix F of the Local Plan provides guidance on Tall Buildings and the Skyline. It recognises that tall buildings have the potential to act as positive landmarks that aid legibility, particularly at local nodes, key city junctions or in and around principal transport junctions. This guidance also notes that the materials used in tall buildings could provide a positive statement by contrasting with materials used in the site’s context. The guidance also recommends careful attention to the articulation of the elevations, with creation of shadow lines to provide relief and interest.
12. The Officer’s reports for the Novotel and One Cambridge Square both acknowledged that the proposed buildings were higher than adjacent buildings. However, in both cases the landscape officer did not object to the proposals, and Officers concluded that the proposals would be appropriate as they established a “*new urban status*” and resulted in limited visual harm to surrounding viewpoints.

## 1.3 Landscape Design Review of the Proposed Development

13. The design for the appeal proposals has resulted from six years of work by an experienced, multi-disciplinary design team, as well as from consultation with the Council, public and a series of design reviews. The design has changed considerably as result of the assessment and consultation process.
14. It is common ground between the parties that the proposed uses accord with Policy SS/4.
15. The proposed masterplan, and building and landscape designs, would provide a high quality mixed-use scheme for Cambridge, with vibrant and active public realm. The masterplan would provide a coherent and distinctive sense of place within an area that is currently dominated by car parking and waste ground.
16. The height and massing of the development has been carefully conceived, with heights reducing towards the eastern edge and roof heights also varying considerably along both the western and eastern edges. Varying roof heights, diverse and high quality materials, careful articulation in the elevations and landscaping both on the elevations and also within a landscaped margin at the eastern edge of the site would together provide an attractive and distinctive design for the proposed development.

## 1.4 Potential Landscape and Visual Effects of the Appeal Proposals

### 1.4.1 Predicted Landscape Effects

17. Both my own review and the Bidwells LVIA have concluded that the appeal proposals would not result in any significant landscape effects, and the effects on the landscape of the appeal site itself would be beneficial in nature.
18. There would be moderate to moderate/minor negative landscape effects for the Cam River Corridor, the residential area at Chesterton, the mixed-use area at Fen Road and for the Cambridge Skyline in the locality of the site.

19. In my experience, for a development of this scale, these assessments of landscape effect are relatively low.

#### 1.4.2 Predicted Visual Effects

20. I have concluded that the significant visual effects would be limited to two representative viewpoints on higher ground north and east of Fen Ditton. For both of these views, built form is already visible within the view and consequently the proposals are not introducing a new element, but changing the composition of existing elements within views. For all other representative viewpoints visual effects would be moderate or less.
21. In my experience, given the scale of the appeal proposals, this degree of visual effect is at the lower end of the scale.

#### 1.4.3 Consideration of SS/4 and the NECAAP Evidence Base

22. The landscape and visual assessments in the Bidwells LVIA and in my own independent review have been made against the baseline of the existing site condition. But, as section 2.0 of this proof identifies, the appeal site is allocated under Policy SS/4 for a similar type of development to that which is proposed. Furthermore, whilst the NECAAP evidence base presents contradictory approaches to the suggested heights of new buildings on the appeal site, all documents indicate that the appeal site will be developed and building heights will increase.
23. I have therefore concluded that it is important to note that the landscape of the appeal site may change, even in the absence of the appeal proposals, and that the landscape and visual effects of the proposals should be considered in the context of this changing landscape.

#### 1.4.4 Design Considerations

24. It is common ground that it is best practice in LVIA to assess increased prominence of built form in a rural or semi-rural context as causing negative landscape and visual effects. However, it is also common ground that a well-designed building can result in positive landscape and visual effects. The Tall Buildings and the Skyline guidance also makes it clear that tall buildings can have a beneficial effect, particularly when they mark an important location, such as a transport interchange.

25. I have noted that although the proposed development would result in landscape and visual harm when assessed through a standard LVIA approach, it would also create a high quality, visually diverse and distinctive urban edge that would perform the important urban design role of marking an important transport interchange as well as a new urban area and transport hub.
26. The design quality of the proposals thus provides design benefits which should be considered alongside the harm assessed in the LVIA and in my review.

#### 1.4.5 Cambridge Skyline

27. I have concluded that the proposed development would have no effects upon the historic core of Cambridge as identified on figure F.1 of Appendix F to the Cambridge Local Plan.
28. The Bidwells LVIA, and my own landscape and visual review, have concluded that the appeal proposals would have no effect upon any of the Strategic Views identified in Appendix F as being key locations from which the Cambridge skyline is experienced.
29. In my landscape and visual appraisal I have concluded that the proposal would increase the visibility of built form on the skyline, and would therefore result in less than significant adverse effects upon the landscape receptor of the Cambridge Skyline. However, I have also concluded that in design terms the proposals would provide a high quality addition to the skyline, providing varied rooflines, materials and mass, as well as landscaping, and also providing a positive marker of the new urban area and railway station.

#### 1.4.6 Green Belt Effects

30. I have noted that the appeal site is not in the Green Belt, and that it is separated from the designation by the railway line.
31. I have assessed the potential effects of the development upon the openness of the Green Belt in the River Cam corridor. I have concluded that whilst it is true that the proposed development would make the existing settlement edge more visible from the Green Belt, this would only serve to more clearly define the existing urban edge, and would have no effect on the perception of

openness of the designation itself, which would thus continue to provide the open setting to the city.

## 1.5 Response to Reason for Refusal 1.

32. I have concluded that the proposals do not represent a hard, abrupt edge but instead represent a high quality, well-designed edge which accords with the recommendations of the LCVIA.
33. I have acknowledged that the proposals would not entirely “*preserve*” the character of the area. There would be some harm to landscape receptors, including the valued landscape of the Cam River Valley. However, the degree of harm to those landscape receptors has been assessed by two independent LVIAs as being less than significant. In essence, the proposed development would be more visible than existing built form in these landscapes but it would not undermine the fundamental character of these areas.
34. It is also important to note that the beneficial effects of the proposals on the appeal site would *enhance* this part of the landscape.
35. In addition, it should also be noted that any form of development on the appeal site, as envisaged in the evidence base for the NECAAP, is likely to increase the visibility of built form for surrounding landscape and visual receptors. Applying best practice in LVIA, these possible alternatives would also not preserve the character of the area.
36. Additionally, and as I noted at section 4.5 of this proof, any negative landscape and visual effects that result from the development should be considered alongside its design benefits as a well-designed marker in the landscape and townscape, defining the presence of a new, vibrant urban area and important transport interchange.
37. I have concluded that whilst it is true that the proposed development would make the existing settlement edge more visible from the Green Belt, this would only serve to more clearly define the existing urban edge, and would have no effect on the perception of openness of the designation itself, which would thus continue to provide the open setting to the city.





## EUROPEAN OFFICES

### United Kingdom

#### AYLESBURY

T: +44 (0)1844 337380

#### BELFAST

T: +44 (0)28 9073 2493

#### BRADFORD-ON-AVON

T: +44 (0)1225 309400

#### BRISTOL

T: +44 (0)117 906 4280

#### CAMBRIDGE

T: + 44 (0)1223 813805

#### CARDIFF

T: +44 (0)29 2049 1010

#### CHELMSFORD

T: +44 (0)1245 392170

#### EDINBURGH

T: +44 (0)131 335 6830

#### EXETER

T: + 44 (0)1392 490152

#### GLASGOW

T: +44 (0)141 353 5037

#### GUILDFORD

T: +44 (0)1483 889800

#### LONDON

T: +44 (0)203 691 5810

#### MAIDSTONE

T: +44 (0)1622 609242

#### MANCHESTER

T: +44 (0)161 872 7564

#### NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

T: +44 (0)191 261 1966

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T: +44 (0)115 964 7280

#### SHEFFIELD

T: +44 (0)114 2455153

#### SHREWSBURY

T: +44 (0)1743 23 9250

#### STAFFORD

T: +44 (0)1785 241755

#### STIRLING

T: +44 (0)1786 239900

#### WORCESTER

T: +44 (0)1905 751310

### France

#### GRENOBLE

T: +33 (0)4 76 70 93 41

### Ireland

#### DUBLIN

T: + 353 (0)1 296 4667