

Review of Proposed development on Land West of Market Street Edenfield

1.0 Introduction

This review has been undertaken by Penny Bennett Landscape Architects on behalf of Rossendale Borough Council. I initially carried out a review of this site as part of the New Lives New Landscapes Study for Rossendale in 2014. The whole of this site H66 has now been allocated for housing and this will inevitable change the village character of Edenfield, and have a wider impact on the Irwell Valley South landscape character area.

I have considered the landscape proposals prepared by Pegasus Group and the accompanying LVIA. The following documents have also been referred to:

- Levels Strategy
- Ecological Survey and Assessment
- Heritage Assessment
- Design and Access Statement
- Comments from GMEU
- Boundary proposals

2.0 Landscape Proposals

2.1 Lack of detailed proposals within the development

Detailed landscape design proposals are shown on six sheets and show comprehensive landscape proposals for the western and northern periphery of the site, and the section of the site fronting onto Market Street. Proposals are also shown for the landscaping of footpath 126 which crosses the site east to west, and a new pedestrian route running north - south connecting the public open space to the south of the proposals.

Appropriate consideration has been made for the incorporation of native species in terms of trees, hedge, shrub and grass mixes which will be appropriate in this rural location.

There is no detail given for any landscape proposals within the new residential area despite the Design and Access Statement referring to “*Verdant tree lined avenues*” and this is a major omission which needs to be addressed. This is an application for full planning permission and detailed landscape proposals need to be shown for the whole extent of the site and not just its periphery.

The large scale of this development for 238 homes means that tree planting and hedge planting within the housing layout will be essential to:

- Reduce the visual impact of the development from Edenfield and the footpaths in the immediate vicinity of the village, and from the west, by breaking up the mass of the built up area where there are panoramic views from the B6235, Helmshore Road and the footpaths crisscrossing the east facing slopes above and below the B6235;
- Provide visual amenity, shading, climate mitigation etc to residents within the development;
- Reinforce the local green infrastructure: the Ecological Assessment states that trees should be used within the development as ecological stepping stones¹.

¹ Para 5.2.1 Ecological Survey and Assessment ERAP

- Provide screening to existing properties on Market Street, Alder Grove and Pilgrim Gardens.

Omitting the detailed design of the landscaping within these proposals means that there is no commitment made to creating a well considered landscape framework. There is a danger that if any additional planting takes place, it will proceed in a piecemeal and ineffective way, and the opportunity to create a strong design of high quality will be lost.

In Section 5.4 the DAS states the importance of green infrastructure *as a key organising element of the masterplan*, this is illustrated on the plans in the DAS but this is not part of the detailed landscape design, so it is impossible to review this, nor is it possible to understand how the intent to develop a network of new small scale spaces within the housing layout would work.

The omission of any detailed information about what landscaping is proposed within the residential area is backed up by the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations which appear not include any tree planting within the residential area. The numbers quoted in the BNG Assessment² below equate closely with the numbers of trees shown on the detailed landscape design drawings. One wonders why has this opportunity to add further biodiversity net gain by including potentially significant numbers of trees within the residential areas not been taken? The consultation comments from GMEU³ point out that there are errors in the calculation of BNG such that there would in GMEU's estimation a loss of 38.22% of biodiversity. It would seem then to be in the developers interest to incorporate a comprehensive landscape scheme within the housing development, as there would be an opportunity to achieve additional BNG.

Habitat 20 Urban trees	Medium size urban trees x 205*	Urban – Urban Tree	Good	7.50
Habitat 21 Urban trees	Medium size urban trees x 56*	Urban – Urban Tree	Medium	2.05

Fig 1 excerpt from ERAP's BNG report.

2.2 Review of detailed landscape proposals

The landscape proposals to the periphery of the site incorporating a hierarchy of open space are largely well considered and appear to have evolved from the results of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Efforts have been made to retain some existing features such as the stone wall separating the northern and southern parts of the site.

The proposals provide a strong frontage to the public realm meaning open spaces are over looked and become an important part of the setting for many of the proposed homes.

Detailed comments are:

2.2.1 Site entrance: The landscape proposals recognise the importance of retaining the open space at the site entrance where there are important long views across the Irwell Valley towards Musbury Heights and Musden Head Moor. This entrance area should be kept as open and as green as possible, the incorporation of on street carparking here increases the requirement for paving and is considered detrimental to the overall design. The DAS states in section 5.3 *'that carparking should be designed to be as unobtrusive to the street scene as possible'* Given the high profile of this frontage I consider that this is an instance where this objective should be adhered to. Native

² Assessment of Biodiversity Net Gain for Land off Market St Edenfield ERAP

³ Consultation comments from David Dutton GMEU

hedging rather than ornamental hedging would be more appropriate here to emphasise the rural and village context of this development.

2.2.2 The proposed attenuation pond appears engineered and unnatural, the contouring is rigid and would appear artificial, a more naturalistic and more visually pleasing form could be achieved on a similar footprint. Slope profiles could be varied, and the edges softened, these would allow the pattern of vegetation to be more naturalistic too. This new feature could be seen as a potential enhancement to the site, improving the visual amenity and more could be done here to achieve this.

2.2.3 There are no proposals shown to provide any screening to existing properties on the eastern boundary of the site, and this should be considered and included.

Soft landscaping

2.2.5 The very well used footpath 126 is retained across the site as a dedicated green route. At present this has a very rural feel, particularly for pedestrians walking east to west, and the long views north south and west dominate the scene. The character of this footpath will inevitably change with the development of housing on either side of it, however the suburban character is reinforced by use of ornamental planting along the footpath spine, with ornamental species such as lavender, Mexican orange blossom and Californian lilac which are inappropriate in a rural setting. The tree species choice is acceptable here and it would be good to see these underplanted with native woodland species, which would emphasize the difference between this rural corridor and the suburban development either side.

2.2.6 Planting design could be used to reinforce the street hierarchy, and where the DAS proposes the use of soft landscaping alongside lower category roads, subtle differentiation in planting types could help orientate the users of the space and highlight different zones. At present there is no indication at all as to how planting will be designed within the housing area.

2.2.7 *Juniperus communis* juniper has been included in the native shrub mix, this is a very rare plant in this locality, the use of *Ulex europaeus* gorse and *Cytisus scoparius*, broom would be more appropriate unless there is a clear ecological reason for introducing juniper. If this is the case it should be used as a single species and not mixed with other native shrubs.

2.2.8 In section 5.11 the DAS makes reference to the incorporation of fruit trees *for community foraging opportunities*, apart from the native crab apple and hazel trees, there are no other fruit trees shown on the proposals.

Hard landscaping

2.2.9 There is an inconsistency between the boundary treatment plan and the supporting details, where the boundary treatment plan identifies 1.8 high masonry piers with timber infill, but the submitted detail describes the same boundary as brick piers with timber infill. The stone masonry would be an appropriate detail in Edenfield while the brick would not.

2.2.10 While not hard landscaping, hedges should be identified on the boundary plan too, as they are a form of boundary treatment.

2.2.11 There is no boundary treatment shown along the boundary with Market Street. Is the existing wall to be retained and made good where the proposed access will cut through? The existing stone wall with its recognisable triangular coping appears repeatedly in the supporting documentation and is a strong feature of Market Street, setting the context for the views of the South Pennine hills beyond. See image from the Design and Access Statement (DAS) below.



Image from DAS showing boundary wall on Market Street with very recognisable triangular coping - the type of feature which reinforces the local distinctiveness.

2.2.12 The boundary treatment plan doesn't make it clear that the existing stone wall along the southern boundary adjacent to the existing playing field, which is a significant landscape feature, is to be retained. This should be clarified.

2.2.13 The use of brick retaining walls some of which are proposed to be at least 3 metres high would be visually extremely inappropriate, these structures should be faced in stone or reconstituted stone as a minimum. A clear commitment needs to be made by the developer on this as there are a great many retaining walls proposed throughout the development.

2.2.14 A very bland and budget selection of hard paving materials have been chosen which do not relate to the local area. Black tarmac or black hot rolled asphalt is used throughout, including private drives, apart from the raised tables at road junctions which are block paved. This seems at odds with the claim that this is a high-quality development. It would be good to see a few materials representative of the local area used to highlight features of importance within the scheme.

3.0 Review of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

3.1.1. An LVIA has been prepared by Pegasus which considers the landscape and visual impact assessment of the proposed housing development. I have carried out a brief review of this document and I am satisfied that it is a succinct well written document mostly following the best practice set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (GLVIA) 3rd edition. Visual receptors have been adequately identified and appropriate viewpoints selected.

3.1.2 The document has been developed in an iterative way to inform the development of the landscape design shown around the periphery of the proposed development. The landscape proposals should be an integral part of the LVIA in order to reinforce this.

3.1.3 Mitigation has been well considered to the periphery of the site with the proposals to create large areas of public open space, and the interface between that and the new housing proposals is good, but the proposals do not respect the natural east west fall of the land, nor the predominant settlement pattern of Settled Valley landscape type which follows the contours rather than crosses them. Opportunities to create new vistas towards nearby landmarks such as Peel Tower have been missed. The orientation of the main streets east west across the site mean that substantial retaining works are required between many properties which are costly and unsightly when on such an extensive scale. The current layout does allow views through the streetscape to the western hills, and any change in layout would need to retain these vistas.

3.1.4 No consideration has been given to the need for high quality hard landscaping to retain the character of the local area within the new proposals, and mitigation recommendations could put a strong case for this.. Some areas need further work to take account of levels and roof lines, e.g. the entrance area, to ensure the very best design solution has been proposed.

3.1.5 This is a new development being imposed within a rural area, and the rural character of the site is not recognised sufficiently. This seems to manifest itself in inappropriate design decisions such as the use of ornamental planting along footpath 126.

3.1.6 There are a few points where I consider omissions have been made or additional information could be given:

- There is no consideration of the sense of openness, which should be considered from Market Street and from the two footpaths across the site. This should be included as the proposals would have a large impact on the sense of openness.
- Designations: The South Pennines Park, which is a collaboration led by the South Pennines Park organisation: www.southpenninespark.org.uk , between public, private and third sector organisations should be considered in this assessment in relation to landscape value. This is a recognised area of regional importance, and the Landscape Institute's TGN 02/21 states that community-based evidence should be taken account of where it is practical to do so⁴. The whole of Rossendale lies within the Park.
- In the landscape assessment, Landscape Character Area 4a Trawden has been wrongly included. The paragraph that relates to this can be omitted, as the relevant information is covered in the assessment of 4b Rossendale Moorland Fringe.
- The scale of the proposed development is such that the proposed mitigation to the periphery of the site is not sufficient to counteract the impact of the proposed housing, and mitigation must include a commitment to creating a framework of trees within the development. I cover this in greater detail earlier in para 2.1 above.
- Cumulative effects are not included within the LVIA. For example I consider that there would be noticeable cumulative effects caused by the development of this parcel of land, 'Edenfield Core' and 'Edenfield North' where proposed development would result in important views westwards being blocked or partially blocked. This would result in no clear views being available looking west from Market Street, which is the spine and main thoroughfare through the village of Edenfield.
- There is no consideration of the height of the proposed development, particularly in views from Market Street. Although the proposed homes are located on the lower edge of the 'entrance area', next to the boundary with Mushroom House, it is not clear where the roof lines of these properties will sit in relationship to Mushroom House and the tops of the hills opposite. In viewpoint 10, the gable end of Mushroom House is clearly below the horizon and much less prominent in the landscape than the new properties on Pilgrim Gardens for example, which are prominent, rising well above the horizon and blocking views to the southwest towards Peel Tower. These views are important as they set Edenfield in its South Pennine context, a key part of the village's local distinctiveness. Further information and description of the effects of the development from viewpoint 10 would be helpful and could help inform the scale and extent of any development on the area of land immediately adjacent to the entrance.

⁴ <https://southpenninespark.org/about-us/>

- In the assessment of footpath 126 paras 7.54 – 7.37 it is not stated that the walker on the path will experience a change from walking along an overwhelmingly rural footpath to one that is much more suburban in character.

3.1.7 I disagree with the following judgements:

- In para 6.11 it is stated that *'As the site is allocated for housing in the local plan for housing it reduces its susceptibility to development'*. Susceptibility is about the - in this case - landscape receptor / defined landscape's ability to be accommodated within the proposed development without undue negative consequences, and I consider this does not change just because a planning decision has been made which changes its planning status.
- In para 7.93 I do not agree that the susceptibility of users of Market Street would be judged as 'low' since this should include pedestrians as well as motorists and their passengers, it will be predominantly members of the local community who would be using Market Street as pedestrians, and I would judge that the visual impact on members of the local community using Market Street would be greater than 'low'.
- I disagree with the conclusions which state that the *'Landscape and visual effects are relatively localised and limited in extent and nature and are also capable of being mitigated to further limit potential effects'*.
- The conclusions state that the proposals relate well to the surrounding landscape, but I consider they do not go far enough, and the LVIA could make a much stronger case for enhancing the character of Edenfield through the use of appropriate materials and responding much more to the site's topography.

4.0 Conclusions

Neither the LVIA nor the Design and Access Statement acknowledge that this new development will be introduced into an overwhelmingly rural area on the edge of the village of Edenfield, and it will be of a scale which will undoubtedly change the character of Edenfield permanently.

The DAS refers to the high quality of the design repeatedly but has omitted to show the landscape design for the housing areas on the landscape proposals and has proposed a budget range of uninspiring hard materials, brick is proposed extensively yet is not a common material within Edenfield village.

However the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment does identify many of the key issues and does go some way to mitigating these with the creation of new areas of public open space which are generally well considered. It falls short in failing to highlight the need for well considered hard landscaping design, and the failure to recognise that the urban grain of Settled Valley landscape type traditionally runs along the contours.

A great concern must be the absence of any detailed landscaping proposals within the development given the very great impact this scheme will have on the village of Edenfield and I consider this application is incomplete without a fully detailed set of landscape proposals for the areas inside the housing development, to fulfil the many promises made in the DAS, and create a really special place to be that respects the rural location and the local landscape character.

The Site Specific Policy (SSP) for this site states that *'The area is very open in character and allows views of the surrounding hills and moors and will require a well-designed scheme that responds to the site's context.'* This scheme does not yet meet that criterion.