



**SUBJECT: Review of Landscape and Visual Appraisal**

**Proposed Replacement Single Dwelling, Gypsy Lane, Caerphilly.**

Planning application Ref 22/0341/FULL- Llwyn Cae Bungalow Gypsy Lane

REPORT BY: Richard Bryan Landscape Architect CMLI

DATE: 9th May 2022

A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been submitted in support of a revised planning application. The purpose of the LVA is to identify and assess the likely landscape and visual effects that would result from the proposed replacement dwelling of on a site at Gypsy Lane Caerphilly, located outside of the settlement boundary.

#### **Review of introduction**

The submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) contains an introduction that details the aspects in which the Landscape consultant disagrees with the observations made on the previous application, rather than detailing the purpose of the landscape and visual appraisal.

#### **Review of methodology**

Except for the introduction the LVA is well structured and broadly follows the guidelines set down in the third edition of "Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment" published jointly by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

#### Study Area

The LVA considers a study area 0.25 kms as appropriate which is considered acceptable in this context.

#### Surveys

The LVA although mentions detailed desktop surveys were carried this did not pick up on the relatively recent clearance of mature vegetation both on the site and within the blue line boundary. Similarly, although field assessment is mentioned of the Site and the wider landscape context, this also failed to pick up on this clearance which is of concern.

#### Assessment Viewpoints

The LVA looks at 6 representative viewpoints for assessment which are considered appropriate to the development.

Landscape Sensitivity (Susceptibility to Change)

There are only three categories of sensitivity described, which means that there is a significant difference between the descriptors of higher, medium, and low with intermediate categories effectively being omitted. A more accurate assessment is achieved when five descriptors ranging from very high, high, medium, low to negligible is used. Therefore, the assessment does not reflect the complexity of this landscape. Five categories are therefore recommended to define sensitivity more accurately.

Sensitivity of Visual Receptors (Susceptibility to Change)

Similarly, there are only three categories of sensitivity described, which means that there is a significant difference between the descriptors of higher, medium, and low with intermediate categories effectively being omitted. A more accurate assessment is achieved when five descriptors ranging from very high, high, medium, low to negligible is used. Therefore, the assessment does not reflect the complexity of this receptors. Five categories are therefore recommended to define visual receptors sensitivity more accurately.

Assessment of Overall Level of Effect

Similarly, table 5 Assessment of Overall Level of Effect doesn't reflect this above range and therefor the complexity of the overall landscape and visual effect sufficiently.

**Review of Baseline Conditions**

The details the site and the sites context including Landscape Character however this too lacks a description of the character of the site and study area with its distinctive mature trees and woodland character with its strong sense of place being of tranquil and intimate character. Instead, the baseline concentrates on the small number of detractors and attempts and under value the existing locally important landscape and its character despite being classified by NRW LANDMAP, see below LANDMAP paragraph, and hence the above average quality of the landscape and hence Special Landscape Designation in the Local Development Plan.

The close board fencing is not accurately described “ *The boundary with the Brambles has a close-boarded fence and tree cover within the Brambles*” however this is an inappropriate boundary and has been recently installed by the applicant, with mature boundary vegetation removed.

The baseline assessment of the site and blueline area also fails to detail the recent removal of woodland, screening native west boundary vegetation and mature trees on the site.

Visuals in the form of photographs are provided from the six viewpoints, including photographs taken during the winter months, but not of the actual site or have any aerial photographs been provided to complement the baseline. Having visited the locality and viewed recent aerial photographs the baseline assessment therefore does not fully reflect the site or landscape in which it sits, as it does not detail the recent mature vegetation removed on site and within the blueline boundary.

Landscape Character LANDMAP

The LVA discusses the existing landscape character referring to LANDMAP and that the site falls into the LDP designated Mynydd Eglwysilan Special Landscape Area (SLA).

I concur that the site is within the LDP designated Mynydd Eglwysilan Special Landscape Area (SLA) NH1.3 and within LANDMAP Visual & Sensory CYNONVS143 with an overall visual and sensory layer has the evaluation of **moderate**, which is classified as **locally important**. The reasons LDP SLA designation was awarded is because of the overall above average LANDMAP evaluations awarded for the five aspect areas, see below, and wider landscape setting in which the development resides. The SLA designation although not designed to preclude development, was awarded to ensure development is appropriate to the sensitive setting and does not undermine the overall qualities of the locally important landscape and its rural character.

LANDMAP five aspect areas for landscape

Cultural Landscape CYNONCL056 - Evaluation **High**

Geology- CYNONGL011 - Evaluation **Moderate**

Historic CYNONHL308 – Evaluation **Outstanding**

Habitats CYNONLH159 – Evaluation **High**

Visual & Sensory CYNONVS143 - Evaluation Moderate – “although scenic quality and integrity are borderline **moderate/high**, therefore **of strong local importance** which is acknowledged.

However, the LVA ends this section with the following statement.

*“3.20 this LVA has considered the careful integration of the development into the local coed cae landscape”*

This statement is not relevant to the existing landscape character.

Overall landscape sensitivity of the site, having visited the locality, I do not concur with the below LVA statement, which is also misplaced within the existing baseline assessment / landscape character . The scale of the proposed development represents a 200% plus increase on the existing modest dwelling and will be out of scale with the site and sensitive setting. Mature vegetation has also been removed reduces the woodland coverage on the site and could has the potential been seen as having been removed to facilitate development.

<p><b>Overall landscape sensitivity of Site</b> in relation to ability to accommodate development of the scale, nature and extent proposed</p>	<p><b>Medium:</b> <i>Reasoning:</i> A sensitive architectural design for the replacement house which will be of appropriate scale and set within a well-designed naturalistic landscape which reinforces the existing distinctive character of the coed cae landscape.</p>
--	--

Visual Receptors

I concur with the receptors described. However, the below statement in the LVA does not accurately reflect that boundary tree cover which has been recently reduced on the applicant’s land, notably adjacent to the Brambles property.

*“Residential receptors: neighbouring property of the Brambles (while properties*

*beyond the coed cae in the general vicinity of the Site will be assessed, there are very unlikely to be any substantial visual effects due to the extent of existing boundary tree cover);”*

### **Review of the Proposed Development**

The LVA incorrectly mentions retention of boundary tree and shrub cover, see below extract, which from site observations is clearly not the case, the proposals therefore do not fully take onboard the current situation on the site. The proposed scale represents over a 200% increase on the existing modest dwelling which sits well within the setting. The proposed increase which is not in line with LDP countryside policy CW20 and is considered out of scale with the site and setting.

*“4.3 Primary Measures for the proposed development include:*

- *The siting of the proposed development on an existing plot, replacing a poor quality bungalow*
- *Retention, reinforcement and management of boundary tree and shrub cover*
- *The layout, scale, form and style of the proposed replacement dwelling will be of high quality and appropriate in scale, form and choice of materials to its setting within the coed cae landscape.”*

### **Review of Magnitude of Effects and of Level of Effects**

From site observation it appears that development has commenced with insensitive clearance works, lack of tree protection and inappropriate conifer planting. Whilst it's acknowledged that construction works may be viewed as temporary no timescale has been given to this nature.

#### Effects on Landscape Character

##### **LANDMAP**

I do not concur that the proposed development to date has or will respect the local landscape character or Special Landscape Area (SLA) NH1.3 MYNYDD EGLWYSILIAN and or reinforce it. This is due to how the site has been poorly managed recently with mature trees and vegetation removed. Furthermore, the proposed large scale dwelling on the site and local setting and character would be overall moderate to high adverse due to scale.

#### Effects on Caerphilly Special Landscape Area

Whilst it's appreciated that the site and development will not be visible from the wider SLA, the management and scale of the proposed development has the potential to adversely effect the character of the SLA. This is not only due to loss of mature vegetation, but also due to the large scale nature of the development on this site, which is likely to be at the expense the character of the SLA context in which it resides.

#### Massing and Scale in the Surrounding Landscape

The mass and scale needs to be considered with the sensitive context in this respect as is out of settlement in an intimate landscape setting, it's considered that the development is not small-scale,

the proposed building is over a 200% increase on the modest existing dwelling, dominating the site therefore out of scale with the site and setting.

### Physical Landscape Effects on Topography

Due to the size of the proposed large dwelling this will impact on topography, no details on level changes or retaining structures have been submitted, which are likely to be required, which are likely to have a moderate adverse magnitude of effect and not be considered negatable adverse.

### Vegetation

The approach described is welcomed, however this does not correspond with the recent management of the site and loss of mature native vegetation from within the blue line boundary. Concern also remains with the indicative proposed soft landscaping, whilst in principle, a landscape-led approach is welcomed, proposed native planting needs significant expansion and detail adding given the sensitive context.

### Overall Significance of Overall Landscape Effects

I do not concur that the 200% plus increase in scale of the development and dwelling is in keeping with the site or SLA setting and has the potential to result in an overall adverse effect due to the proposed large scale on the landscape character.

### Assessment of Visual Effects of Proposed Development

I concur that the neighbouring property the Brambles will potentially experience substantial effects from the proposed development. The existing close board fence is noted in the LVA as providing good visual separation; however, this is a recent and inappropriate boundary feature and would require removal and replacement with a more appropriate boundary, with recently removed vegetated boundary replanted with a densely vegetated native buffer.

### Public Footpaths, Designated Access Land and Public Open Spaces

I concur with assessment of PRoW (Eglwysilan FP68) as minor adverse on PRoW in this respect that once the proposed native planting is fully established there would be negligible adverse impact. I concur with the assessment on the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk and that there would likely be negligible adverse residual effects on views obtainable by users of other parts of the PRoW network.

### Roads

I concur that the likely magnitude of change for road users would therefore be locally moderate adverse during construction, reducing to minor adverse immediately after and negligible adverse when mitigation planting has successfully established.

### **Review of Landscape-related Planning Policy**

This section highlights the aspects of planning policy which are relevant to the landscape appraisal of the proposed development. It also provides commentary on how the proposed development relates to this guidance, except for the below in relation to Policy CW4, CW20 and SPG LDP10 Buildings in the Countryside section 7.3 *Scale* in relation to the proposed dwellings scale, acquiesce that the indicative approach to the landscaping is heading in the right direction but lacks detail and requires significant further expansion to fully represent a landscape-led approach.

### Policy CW4 Natural Heritage Protection

With the exception of scale, I concur that the indicative approach to the landscaping although lacking detail and requires further expansion is in general appropriate to the SLA.

Policy CW20

I do not concur that the proposed dwellings scale with an increase of over 200% meets the requirements of this countryside planning policy. The sites width will be dominated by the development and its hard landscaping at the detriment to the local setting.

SPG LDP10 Buildings in the Countryside

I do not concur that this is brownfield site, and that recent close board is an inappropriate boundary treatment. Existing hedgerow and treed boundaries have not been retained on boundaries and would require considerable native shrub and tree planting to mitigate for this loss with long term management.

**Conclusion**

The LVA in general is well structured and it's appreciated the revised proposals in comparison to the previously submitted application in principle would slightly reduce the impact both visually and on the Landscape Character and SLA to a lesser extent. However, following recent site visit and study of aerial photography has presented concerns in relation to the adverse manor in which the site has recently been managed resulting in the loss of mature vegetation, mature vegetation which contributes to the wider landscape character of the SLA and site context and site. This coupled with the significant size proposed of the new dwelling and noncompliance with Policy CW20 in terms of scale, concerns remain over the proposed development impact on Landscape character. I concur soft landscaping in principle will lessen the impact once the proposed soft native planting has been established, however the indicative proposed soft landscaping is lacking in detail and needs expanding given the loss of vegetation and sensitive SLA context.