

This review has been undertaken by a landscape architect who is a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute. He has undertaken numerous consultancy studies concerned with the balance between development and landscape conservation, including landscape sensitivity and capacity studies undertaken on behalf of local planning authorities to inform emerging development plans. He has substantive experience of preparing LVIA's in accordance with national guidelines and reviewing those prepared by others.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS OF LANDSCAPE REVIEW BY SCARP DATED APRIL 2026

4.1 Plan-led Delivery of Housing

4.1.1 Local housing should be delivered based on an agreed development plan. Ad hoc development proposals can sometimes result in unnecessary harm to local landscapes, as is the case with the Development. The Elmbridge Borough Landscape Sensitivity Study identified three landscape units as having Moderate-Low sensitivity to new residential development and seven units with Moderate sensitivity to new residential development. A finer grain of analysis is required to identify the opportunities and constraints for the delivery of new housing in these areas.

4.1.2 The importance of a finer grain analysis is evidenced by the development proposal on the Former Moore Place Golf Course. The Landscape Review and Heritage Rebuttal have identified significant harm that would result from the Development to a highly sensitive historic landscape and the hugely important contribution that the site makes to local green infrastructure, landscape character and the historic landscape setting of the town. These reports give further weight to the strong objection to the Development from the Save Moore Place Green Belt action group.

4.2 Effects on Site Character

4.2.1 LVIA Para. 5.137 asserts that there would be both beneficial and adverse changes to site character but does not identify the nature of the change to character, as required in a LVIA. The site would acquire an overwhelmingly suburban and developed character, replacing its currently open and greenfield appearance. The semi-natural, recreational character of the site would become a more enclosed residential neighbourhood character. The new housing, roads and car movements would notably reduce site tranquillity. The informal countryside character of PRow 43 would become more formal and developed. The contribution of on-site mature trees to the verdant character of the site would be diminished. Existing visibility of Christ Church spire would be truncated by the new built form and its role as a landmark feature for recreational footpath users would be lost. The Development would transform the site from being a large, semi-natural greenspace to being part of the settlement. The proposed building blocks would be up to 18m above existing ground levels near the site entrance and widespread use of building blocks up to 17m above existing ground levels is proposed elsewhere. The heights of the proposed buildings are fundamentally out of character with the wider settlement, typically no more than 10m in height. The valued lines and groups of mature trees across the site would be subsumed into the urban area.

4.2.2 The LVIA states that effects on site character fall from major adverse (significant) at Year 1 to moderate adverse (significant) at Year 15. There is no sound substance to this assertion - development of up to 206 units of housing and associated roads will

fundamentally change the character of the site irrespective of the greater maturity of proposed vegetation. This review considers that the major adverse significant effect would remain at Year 15. Whilst the LVIA is correct to assess a high magnitude of impact on landscape character at a site level at both Year 1 and Year 15, the assessment has only identified part of the significant harm that would result from the Development.

4.3 Effects on LTCAs

4.3.1 The LVIA baseline description provides a sparse and incomplete description of the LTCAs that it has identified. It lacks depth and does not convey how buildings and greenspaces they relate to each other or contribute to the 'bigger picture' of the town's landscape.

4.3.2 The LVIA states that effects on character of LTCA 7 would fall from major adverse (significant) at Year 1 to moderate adverse (significant) at Year 15. Again, there is no sound substance to this assertion - the overwhelmingly suburban and developed character of the character area would remain. This review considers that the major adverse significant effect would remain at Year 15.

4.3.3 The Development would retain part of the site as green infrastructure but 41.9% of the site would be occupied by new built development. The substantial loss of this undeveloped land would significantly harm the landscape character and setting of the town. It would, as identified in the Heritage Rebuttal, significantly harm (1) a morphological and physical link between Esher Conservation Area and its original parkland setting; (2) the spatial context that allows the woodland belts and other historic landscape features to be understood; (3) a designed view across the Site and (4) an appreciation of the depth and scale of the historic manorial approach to Esher. The Development would also result in the loss of a 'green lung' and a recreational resource for the local community that is both tranquil, scenic and strongly semi-natural in character. The narrow corridors of greenspace proposed amongst the scattered built development areas would not compensate for the loss of an expansive, tranquil and strongly semi-natural greenspace.

4.3.4 The character and quality of this greenspace warranted designation as a Local Green Space and was consequently incorporated into the draft New Local Plan. The withdrawal of the draft New Local Plan does not diminish its importance. The Development would subsume this valued greenspace into the urban area and fragment it with scattered blocks of housing. It is likely to result in the site being less effective as a wildlife corridor and less attractive as a landscape setting for nearby residential properties. It would significantly harm the landscape character and historic landscape setting of the wider town and the open, un-developed character along the A307 approach road into the town.

4.3.5 The Development would represent an enclave of significantly taller buildings than those typically found in the town. The heights of the proposed buildings would be fundamentally out of character with the wider settlement, thereby detracting from the small-scale character of the townscape and eroding its charm. The Development would result in significant and irreversible harm to settlement pattern and the function of green infrastructure in protecting the identity of the town as a separate settlement. It would have a detrimental effect on the town's contribution to deliver green infrastructure in accordance with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework standards.

4.3.6 The significant harm that would be caused by the Development to the site and wider landscape/townscape has not been adequately identified in the LVIA. The issues raised in this review are of critical importance in the determination of the planning application.

4.4 Conflict with Core Strategy Policies CS1, CS14 and CS17

4.4.1 The Development would conflict with Core Strategy Policy CS1 (Spatial Strategy) as it would (1) fundamentally alter the Borough's green infrastructure network to the detriment of settlement pattern and identity, (2) result in significant harm to the landscape character and setting of the town, and (3) result in a lost opportunity for the Council to work with partners to conserve and improve the landscape, biodiversity and public access to the green belt countryside in accordance with the Green Arc Initiative and Core Strategy Policy CS1 (Spatial Strategy). It would not enhance the existing network of accessible multi-functional green infrastructure, as required under Policy CS14 (Green Infrastructure). The Development would also conflict with Policy CS17 (Local Character, Density and Design) as it would not be sensitively integrated with the locally distinctive townscape and landscape.

4.5 Conflict with Elmbridge Design Code SPD

4.5.1 Para. 6.3.1 of the Design Code states that "The height of new developments must relate to the height of surrounding existing buildings and not detract from the local character". The Development would represent an enclave of significantly taller buildings than those typically found in the town. Except for the town centre and two buildings along the north-east edge of the Site, existing buildings in the settlement are less than 10m high. The Development proposes the widespread use of buildings up to 17m above existing ground levels on the site, and buildings up to 18m near the site entrance. These proposed building heights would be fundamentally out of character with the wider townscape, detracting from its small-scale character and eroding its charm. The Development is not in accordance with the requirements of the Design Code based on the above.

The full landscape report is available on the planning portal as part of a 287 page document which includes all the ET appendices.

<https://edocs.elmbridge.gov.uk/IAM/IAMCache/4851938/4851938.pdf>