

**LAND SOUTH OF ROOKERY LANE AND NORTH OF PASTURE LANE, RAINFORD****HERITAGE TECHNICAL NOTE****1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Barton Willmore has been instructed by Miller Homes to advise on the heritage constraints relating to land south of Rookery Lane and north of Pasture Lane (site reference GBS\_080) ('the Site') in relation to the St Helen's Council Local Plan Examination. This Technical Note seeks to address the heritage objections to the allocation of the Site.
- 1.2 This Technical Note has been informed by a desk-top review and site visit undertaken on 13 May 2021.

**2. Policy Context***National Planning Policy*

- 2.1 Paragraph 185 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2019 (NPPF) guides that plan-making should set out a positive strategy for the conservation of the historic environment, recognising 'the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits' conservation can bring as well as the 'opportunities the contribution the historic environment can make to the character of a place'.
- 2.2 Paragraph 189 of the NPPF (in the case of an application for planning permission) requires applicants to describe the significance of those assets potentially affected by a proposed development. This assessment should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposed development on that significance. That is the purpose of this Technical Note.

*Heritage Background Paper, 2020*

- 2.3 The Site was originally proposed to be removed from the Green Belt and allocated as Safeguarded Land for future residential development in the Council's Local Plan Preferred Options stage in December 2016. The Site's Safeguarded Land allocation was, however, removed from the draft version of Local Plan in 2018, which was partly justified by the Council on grounds of impact on the historic environment.
- 2.4 During the Local Plan Preferred Options (LPPO) Consultation, comments were received from Historic England which stated:  
  
*"...close to Conservation Areas. The (...) distances to them is considered relevant, which is to a degree, but the assessment fails to articulate the extent to which these Conservation Areas rely if at all upon the proposed site allocations for their significance, or how it might be impacted upon."*
- 2.5 The Council's Heritage Background Paper (SD023, April 2020) considers that open views across the site 'contribute positively to the setting of the conservation area' and that the site provided a 'much needed visual buffer between the village and the nearby industrial estate'. The Background Paper concludes that the Site *"...should not be released from the Green Belt and designated for potential development"*.

### **3. Heritage Designations**

- 3.1 For the purposes of this note, a study area of 500m has been considered. A desk-top review identified only one designated heritage asset with potential to experience an impact through development of the Site, which is the Rainford South Conservation Area.
- 3.2 The scope of this briefing note does not consider the known or unknown archaeological potential of the Site.
- 3.3 The Council's Heritage Background Paper and Green Belt Assessment of the Site noted a landscape and visual sensitivity. The Site is located outside the boundary of the Conservation Area and therefore any harm would arise through a change in character of the Site.

### **4. Heritage Significance**

- 4.1 The first record of a settlement at Rainford is in 1086 when it appears in the Domesday Book. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rainford was a small settlement and there are a number of properties that survive from this time, including Guild Hall and Reeds Brown and Hydes Brow.
- 4.2 In 1876 the village was depicted as having two centres, to the north around the Eagle and Child Inn and the church, and to the south around the Star Inn. The settlement grew throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the industrial revolution and the clay pipe industry. The discovery of coal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the arrival of the railway had a significant impact on the development of the settlement. However, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coal mining in the area was in decline and the settlement became more focussed on agriculture.
- 4.3 Historically the settlement was linear in nature, with development focussed along 'Ormskirk Road' and 'Church Road'. It was not until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the settlement grew substantially with areas of modern development extending east and west of the principal streets. The development at Rookery Drive appears on the 1967 OS map of the area to the north of the railway line. At this time, the area now occupied by the industrial estate to the northeast of the Site, is occupied by a Rainford Pottery and associated works.

#### *Rainford South Conservation Area*

- 4.4 The original Rainford Conservation Area was designated in 1976, a review was undertaken in 2008 which included a review of the conservation area boundary. The amended boundaries and Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) were adopted in July 2008. The Conservation Areas in Rainford are identified within the appraisal as 'Conservation Area I' and 'Conservation Area 2', to the north and south of the village, respectively.
- 4.5 The CAA sets out the special character of the conservation areas. A summary of which is provided here:
  - The siting with flat land and the ground gently rising, guarantees good views towards the surrounding countryside;
  - The area's early agricultural activities and industrial past;
  - The strong architectural character dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century combined with a number of key buildings;
  - The use of traditional building materials, including red brick, sandstone and slate roofs;
  - Trees, hedges and landscaping are a key characteristic, particularly in relation to front gardens.
- 4.6 The CAA identifies a number of key views within the conservation areas, which relate primarily to the key entrance points into the village. The principal views are identified as being 'along Church Road and Mossbrough Road' and the CAA states (section 5.2):

*"Views along Church Road are as diverse as they are interesting. Along Church Road, most of them are deflected by the twists and turns of the road and serve to define the area's townscape with open countryside on the left as one approaches the church. This illustrates the rural feel of Rainford as well as creating a sense of enclosure and anticipation as the village unfolds, contributing to the area's townscape."*

- 4.7 The Site is currently open land and features a central coppice of trees known as 'Mill Plantation' with a strong planted boundary to the southeast. There is very limited intervisibility between the Site and the conservation area. Views from the public footpath to the north and northeast of the Site are long-distance and are defined by the 20<sup>th</sup> century development that forms this boundary of the settlement. There are limited views from King George's Field looking southwest across the Site, however these views are from outside the conservation area boundary. Views to the south-east across the Site are only possible from within the Field and these are interrupted by 'Mill Plantation', and dominance of the industrial estate, with no sense of the wider open countryside.



*Photograph 1: View looking southeast from King George's Field across the Site*

- 4.8 From the site visit and desk-top research it does not appear that the Site has had any clear association with the conservation area historically. This combined with the lack of any strong visual links, the Site is considered to make a minimal contribution to the significance of the Rainford Conservation Area.

## **5. Heritage Impact Assessment**

- 5.1 It is important to note that whilst there is no statutory requirement for LPAs to have special regard to the setting of conservation areas in the 1990 Act, paragraph 189 of the NPPF requires applicants (in the case of an application for planning permission) to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution to made by their setting. This is most commonly considered through the assessment of views into, out of and across conservation areas, however it is not limited to these considerations.

- 5.2 Guidance recognises that open spaces within or immediately outside the boundary of a conservation area can add to the character of a place. Paragraph 194 of the NPPF goes on to state that *"Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification."*
- 5.3 As noted previously, the Site was proposed for safeguarding for future residential development in the Council's Preferred Options Local Plan in 2016. However, it was later removed for consideration on landscape and heritage grounds. From the site visit and detailed desk-top analysis, the Site does not appear to have close associations with the conservation area and there is no evidence to suggest that the field historically formed part of the land associated any of the nearby designated heritage assets within the conservation area boundary.
- 5.4 The Site forms part of the agricultural landscape that surrounds the conservation area. The conservation area boundary is drawn tightly around the historic core of the settlement. To the south Church Road, the settlement is defined by 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development. Immediately to the east of the conservation area is a row of semi-detached properties that date from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the exception of 177 Church Road. To the north along Rookery Lane, opposite the northern boundary of the Site, is a mix of modern and traditional properties. For the most part the edge of the conservation area within closest proximity to the Site is defined by 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development.
- 5.5 The Council's Heritage Background Paper acknowledges that the historic core of the settlement is 'buffered by the subsequent residential expansion of the village'. However, the Council considers that the settlement retains a rural character and that the 'retention of opportunistic views over the countryside' make a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area, such that the development of the Site would cause harm to the setting of the conservation area.
- 5.6 The views referenced in the Council's Heritage Background Paper are not identified as key views within the adopted CAA. As noted in the CAA the settlement has a 'sense of enclosure' which suggests that views outwards are limited and are generally restricted to the area along Church Road immediately south of All Saint's Church. The Site does not form part of any identified key views into or out of the conservation area and there are no views outwards across the Site, other than from within the private garden to Nos. 169 and 167 Church Road. As such, there will be no change to the views identified by the Council to be of greatest importance in the adopted CAA.
- 5.7 Views towards the conservation area are available from Pasture Lane and the public footpath adjacent to the industrial estate. However, it should be noted that visibility does not automatically equate to harm. These views are heavily filtered by existing planting and mature vegetation, with the 20<sup>th</sup> century housing visible in the distance. From these views 'Mill Plantation' appears as the prominent feature along with the settlement edge containing modern development; there is no sense of the historic core which forms the conservation area from this distance.



*Photograph 2: View looking from Pasture Lane north towards the settlement edge*



*Photograph 3: View looking northwest from boundary of the industrial estate towards the settlement edge*

- 5.8 Notwithstanding the above, it is acknowledged that setting attributes are both visual and non-visual, and the development of the Site has the potential to alter the wider landscape setting of the conservation area. However, the Site is bounded on two sides by development; the settlement to the north and the industrial estate to the northeast and east. It is also noted that the Site will become bound by further modern development to the east in the form of employment allocation 9EA. The by-pass to the southwest (A570) creates a physical and visual separation of the Site from the wider countryside. These features have resulted in the erosion of the rural character of the land to the south of the settlement.
- 5.9 The Site is a small part of a much larger agricultural landscape that surrounds the Rainford Conservation Area. It is acknowledged that the introduction of development will result in a material change to this element of the conservation area's setting. However, the Site is located within proximity to existing residential and industrial development, such that the proposals will appear as an extension to the existing built form to the north of the Site. The change to the character of the Site is considered to result in a low level of harm to the significance of the conservation area through the introduction of built form within its immediate setting, which will be visible in medium and long-distance views from the southeast and southwest.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 Any impact from development of the Site for housing would arise through the introduction of built form within the setting of the Rainford Conservation Area. The proposed development will not be visible from Church Lane, within the conservation area, but will appear in long-distance views towards the conservation area from the southwest and southeast.
- 6.2 At this stage there is no formalised development proposals, however a Development Framework has been prepared which includes an indicative layout, which sets out the deliverable area of the Site. The plan demonstrates one way in which development could be brought forward on the Site, taking account of the surrounding context and nearby conservation area.
- 6.3 Whilst the Site forms part of the wider rural setting of Rainford Conservation Area, it has not been identified to make any notable contribution to its significance, nor is it considered to be integral to the sense of rural, open countryside within the wider landscape. Much of the land surrounding the conservation areas, has been developed throughout the 20th century and the development of the Site in the manner suggested, would continue the residential expansion of Rainford to the south of the existing settlement, maintain the historic linear pattern of expansion. The remaining open, rural landscape which surrounds the conservation area, and is identified within the CAA, will be unaffected by the proposals, as such the proposals are not considered to materially change the contribution that the setting makes as a whole to the significance of the conservation area, or our ability to appreciate said significance.
- 6.4 In principle, it is considered that the Site could be developed, subject to detailed design and landscaping proposals, with minimal harm being caused to the setting of the conservation area, such that it is considered possible for the Site to be developed in a manner which would meet the legislative tests set out in the 1990 Act and the principles set out within the NPPF.
- 6.5 It is therefore not considered that the heritage assets detailed within this Technical Note would preclude the allocation of the Site for residential development.

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