

LANDSCAPE, VISUAL IMPACT AND TOWNSCAPE

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF
JANE BETTS BA DIPLA MLI
ON BEHALF OF WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO:

WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PLANNING APPLICATION W07.09002
LAND TO THE EAST AND NORTH OF WESTBURY, WILTSHIRE,
DEVELOPMENT: CONSTRUCTION OF A SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY ROAD
WITH CLIMBING LANE OVER PART OF THE ROUTE, ROUNDABOUT
JUNCTIONS, ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE
CALLED IN FOR DETERMINATION BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE,
COMMUNITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SECTION 77 TOWN AND
COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 AS AMENDED)

PINS REFERENCE SW/THM/5021/647

THE WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (A350 WESTBURY BYPASS
CLASSIFIED ROAD) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 200'

THE WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (A350 WESTBURY BYPASS
CLASSIFIED ROAD) SIDE ROAD ORDER 200'



Summary and Conclusions

Summary

Introduction

S.1 My name is Jane Betts and a large part of my work has included landscape and visual assessment of road schemes. My involvement with the Westbury Eastern Bypass started in 2002 with a DMRB Stage 3 landscape and visual assessment of the preferred route. Since then I have been involved with the iterative design of the Scheme culminating in the February 2007 Planning application and Environmental Statement. I attended the public exhibition and have been involved in preparations leading to this Inquiry.

Scope

S.2 In my full evidence I have covered a range of issues including landscape policy context for the project, the methodology for and findings of the landscape and visual assessment and the context of the landscape and townscape character. The design of the Scheme is outlined and the effect on landscape and visual resources assessed. The Secretary of State's call-in letter is addressed. My proof includes maps and photographs taken from the ES together with some new material.

Landscape Policy Context

S.3 Policy which is relevant to landscape and visual effects has been taken into account and I have set out in my full proof the relevant national, regional and local policies to explain the position.

S.4 National policies on important matters were cited as reasons for the call-in and the WHA objection to the scheme refers to national policy relevant to landscape in the form of PPS1 and PPS 7. No other landscape policies were referred to. However, I have also considered other policies in my proof with reference to RPG 10 for South West 2001, The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for South

West 2006-2026, Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan 2016 and West Wiltshire District Plan, First Alteration 2004.

- S.5 One of the key national policies relates to PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development which takes into account the countryside and urban area as a whole. The purpose of PPS 7 is to promote and plan for sustainable development in rural areas using tools such as landscape character assessment.
- S.6 I conclude that the Scheme proposed is in accordance with landscape planning policy in that the Scheme is planned and designed so the distinctive qualities and features of the landscape are maintained. Landscape character studies have been used and measures have been taken to protect the character area. No sites of international or national designation area affected and new landscape features are proposed as part of the Scheme design.

Methodology

- S.7 The assessments that I have undertaken have been based upon best practice guidelines, including the Department of Transport's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Volume 11 and the appraisal methodologies given in the Transport Analysis Guidance. Other guidance including Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment has been referred to.
- S.8 The assessment has involved desk studies and fieldwork to provide clarification of the existing landscape character and to assess impacts from public viewpoints. For the purposes of environmental assessment a clear distinction is made between landscape, visual and townscape assessments.
- S.9 The affected landscape and townscape has been evaluated through a process of assessing landscape 'value', 'condition' and 'capacity' to accept change. The capacity of a particular landscape to accommodate change as been assessed on the basis of Low, Medium or High. To arrive at a measure of the significance of the overall effect I have referred to the 7-point Web TAG scale.

S.10 In assessing the visual effects of the Scheme three stages are considered: during construction, operation phase year 1 and operation phase year 15. A visual envelope map has been prepared to illustrate the likely visibility of the proposals in the wider landscape.

Landscape Character

S.11 The landscape and townscape context is described with reference to landform, land use, vegetation, settlements, landmark features and transport and access.

S.12 Part of the assessment process involved gathering information to understand the character of the existing landscape and townscapes in the study area. A number of previous studies have identified the character of landscapes within the study area. This forms the baseline against which the effects of the Scheme on the landscape were assessed. Part of the Scheme is located within the Salisbury Plain SLA and background relating to the local designation is provided and the change in character to the rural landscape set in context.

S.13 Having established the existing baseline character of the area, it should be noted that landscapes are dynamic and subject to change. The landscape is always changing to accommodate new development and different land uses. The introduction of a new road would automatically change the character of an area. The change in character of the rural landscape must be set in context with the benefits to the townscape that removal of through traffic would have.

Scheme Design

S.14 The development of the Scheme has been an iterative process involving the highway designers and various environmental specialists. The objectives have been to avoid, reduce and/or remedy the adverse impacts as far as possible.

S.15 The essential elements of the overall landscape mitigation strategy for the Scheme are:

- To maintain the attributes of the existing countryside
- Screen properties and other visual receptors
- Maintain and enhance public rights of way
- Enhance and protect biodiversity
- To accommodate spoil in a sustainable manner.

S.16 The landscape design of the Scheme includes the following key features;

- Balancing ponds with planting
- Extensive new hedgerows
- Lengths and blocks of woodland
- Restricted lighting at junctions
- Sympathetic treatment of bridge structures
- Breaking up and planting of surplus areas of the existing A350

S.17 My main proof describes the landscape design of the Scheme by identification of the proposed DMRB landscape elements and notification of their landscape function along the scheme with particular reference to land modelling, planting and treatment of the structures as part of a comprehensive design strategy.

Landscape Assessment

S.18 The landscape evaluation identifies the qualities of the landscape that are considered to be important and valuable. The impact on the landscape is assessed at year 1 after construction and at year 15, taking into account the affect of mitigation. The impact on the relevant character areas is as follows:

Wellhead

Year 15 – Moderate Adverse Landscape Impact

White Horse Vale

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Landscape Impact

Bitham Brook Valley

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Impact

The overall impact of the Scheme on landscape is assessed to be moderate adverse.

Visual Assessment

S.19 To help understand the extent to which the Scheme would be visible a Visual Envelope Map was produced. Within the visual envelope a number of key viewpoints are identified. The visual effect from each viewpoint is described and assessed as follows:

Wellhead Drove

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Visual Impact

Newtown

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Visual Impact

Park Lane

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Visual Impact

Westbury White Horse

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Visual Impact

Wessex Ridgeway

Year 15 – Moderate Adverse Visual Impact

Bridleway W30 Old Dilton

Year 15 – Slight Adverse Visual Impact

Bridleway H14 Heywood

Slight Adverse Visual Impact

S.20 The overall impact of the Scheme on views is assessed to be moderate adverse.

Response to Call-in Letter

S.21 There was a call-in letter dated 11th July 2007 in which matters that the Secretary of State wishes to be informed are identified. Relating to landscape these include:

Policies and Provisions in the RSS (RPG10), Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan and West Wiltshire District Plan.

Policies in PPS1 and

Principles of PPS7

S.22 In accordance with the policies cited the integrity and continuity of the landscape features has been maintained where possible and many new features have been included as an integral part of the Scheme. For example ponds, hedges, woodland and chalk grassland.

S.23 To comply with protection and enhancement of the environment the Scheme does not affect any nationally designated landscape areas and landscape character assessment has been used at the basis for the assessment of the landscape of the Scheme.

S.24 Considerable thought has been given to the mitigation of the Scheme and the landscape proposals are designed to integrate the road and to reinstate, as far as possible, the existing landscape pattern and views within the affected area.

S.25 The landscape design is appropriate and opportunities have been taken to recreate and improve the landscape framework by including woodland, tree and shrub planting and hedgerows. All planting proposed would be using native species appropriate to the area that would contribute to the enhancement of the landscape.

Conclusion

S.26 A number of policy issues arise. The paragraphs in my full proof detail why the proposals are consistent with policy and I confirm my views on various matters as follows:

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- Has a landscape character assessment been undertaken? Yes, reference has been made to published national, regional and district landscape character assessments. A local area-specific assessment was undertaken for the Environmental Statement.
 - Do the proposals damage existing character? No, the landscape has the capacity to absorb the proposed Scheme. It will in places change the position but change does not equate to damage.
 - Do the proposals safeguard important landscape elements that contribute to local distinctiveness? Yes, the Scheme is sited to follow the natural landform, maximise the retention of existing vegetation and maintain the attributes of the existing countryside.
 - Do the proposals minimise any adverse impacts on landscape character? Yes, given that hedgerows have been extended across bridges and that the slope areas around the bridge portals enable planting and sympathetic treatment which is important to integrate the structures with the surrounding landscape.
 - Do the proposals protect, conserve and enhance the quality of the landscape of the SLA? Yes, the scale of change has minimal effect on the wider area of the SLA and the Scheme should be seen in the context of the Greensand Terrace and Rolling Clay Lowland.
 - Do the proposals constitute good design? Yes, the Scheme design responds to its local context. The landscape design forms a sequence of landscape proposals focussed upon the mitigation of landscape and visual effects.
 - Do the proposals include appropriate mitigation? The primary mitigation measures were developed through the iterative design process and secondary measures are designed to specifically address the remaining effects of the final Scheme.

- Do the proposals provide native plant species for soft landscape works? Yes, all planting proposed would be native tree and shrub species and local provenance would be determined.

S.27 The context for the Scheme is the contained landscape of the Greensand and Chalk Terrace and the Rolling Clay Lowland. The proposed Eastern Bypass would become part of this landscape just as the existing A350 is.

S.28 The Scheme will not significantly harm the overall character of the existing landscape, the characteristics of which will be preserved. The proposals would not significantly harm the view from the Westbury White Horse or detract from the scenic quality of the area. Some local residential viewpoints will be affected and there are localised visual affects to the public involved in outdoor recreation.

S.29 The provision of an Eastern Bypass would improve the environment of the centre of Westbury by the removal of through traffic and its associated impacts which has degraded the town. The Scheme would provide a spring board for urban townscape regeneration of the historic centre.

S.30 Having considered all the evidence and for the reasons given above, I conclude that in landscape, visual and townscape terms, overall the proposals for the Westbury Eastern Bypass are acceptable.