

STEPHENSON  
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ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING • LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



ASCENDANT: THE ELIZABETH  
LANDMARK

COLD LAW, RAY ESTATE,  
NORTHUMBERLAND

L VIA REVIEW

May 2019

STEPHENSON  
HALLIDAY

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING · LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



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# LVIA REVIEW

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This note has been prepared by Stephenson Halliday Ltd, an independent landscape planning consultancy, in May 2019.
- 1.2 Stephenson Halliday has been appointed by Northumberland County Council to review the validity and conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) that was submitted with the application for Ascendant: the Elizabeth Landmark, Cold Law, Ray Estate, Northumberland (19/00247/FUL).
- 1.3 The application is for a contemporary landmark and a viewing area at the summit of Cold Law, a distinctive small hill on the Ray Estate in Northumberland. It will provide a new cultural tourism destination, with a small car park and pathways accessible to walkers and cyclists as well as motorists.
- 1.4 This note is not a full LVIA as would be expected to be provided by an applicant, but rather a review of the submitted LVIA, and consideration of the relevant landscape and visual issues.
- 1.5 The purpose of the note is to assist the Local Planning Authority in considering the application.
- 1.6 This advice is based on desk based review of the application documents, relevant planning policy and adopted landscape documents, and a site visit undertaken in April 2019.
- 1.7 In producing the note the following documents have been referred to:
  - All application documents;
  - Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment, LUC 2010;
  - Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (2013) (GLVIA 3)

## 2 REVIEW OF THE SUBMITTED LVIA

### Overview

- 2.1 The LVIA has been undertaken by Southern Green, an established and reputable practice of chartered landscape architects.

### Methodology

- 2.2 The LVIA methodology is set out clearly and in detail. It appears robust and in line with current best practice guidance including GLVIA 3.

### Baseline Conditions

- 2.3 The study area selected is 5km, sufficient for a development of this nature to be considered any notable impacts of the development.
- 2.4 The LVIA identifies and describes the relevant baseline conditions thoroughly with reference to adopted landscape character documents and relevant policy.
- 2.5 The number and location of selected viewpoints provides comprehensive coverage of the relevant parts of the study area. Southern Green's rationale for adopting the selected viewpoints appears rational and robust.

### Landscape effects

- 2.6 The LVIA identifies effects during construction and at completion.
- 2.7 Construction stage effects are assessed to be low magnitude based on their limited extent and short duration. This is a transparent and reasonable judgement.
- 2.8 With regard to the potential for mitigation, the LVIA states that planting to provide screening would be inappropriate in this landscape. It acknowledges that urban materials and geometric lines should be avoided in this landscape. Materials should reflect the local landscape and forms should be organic in nature. Signage and other visual clutter should be minimised.
- 2.9 This is an appropriate design response to the receiving landscape. High quality design and the use of appropriate finishing materials are the best form of design based mitigation for this development.
- 2.10 Landscape sensitivity for the host landscape character area is assessed as high. The susceptibility and value of the landscape receptor (which inform the judgement on sensitivity) are not explained. A rating of high sensitivity may be over-cautious – medium/high could be more appropriate, however a rating of high sensitivity is certainly worse-case.
- 2.11 Long term landscape impacts are described in detail. The overall magnitude of change is assessed as low.
- 2.12 There can be degree of subjectivity to an assessment for a proposal of this nature. Whether ones response to the proposal is positive or negative is largely influenced by ones individual opinion on the artwork. However, irrespective of this subjectivity the LVIA provides transparent and objective analysis based on best practice guidance.
- 2.13 I am satisfied that the overall level of effect, which has been assessed as moderate/minor, is a robust and reasonable judgement.

#### **Visual effects**

- 2.14 With regard to the potential for mitigation of visual effects, the LVIA acknowledges that parked cars will form a visual detractor, so along with the landscape design points noted above, the LVIA suggests utilising landform when designing the car park levels to help screen parked cars. This is appropriate advice.
- 2.15 The visual assessment is a viewpoint based assessment, rather than a receptor based assessment.
- 2.16 What this means is that only specific points have been considered, rather than whole areas. For example, footpaths are represented by single viewpoints. There is no discussion as to whether these single points are representative of all of the footpath route, or what effects would be like from other parts of the route.
- 2.17 However, based on our site work, and the extensive number of viewpoints, we do not believe this approach invalidates any of the conclusions.
- 2.18 Views to and from the Northumberland National Park have been considered, and the context of the site including multiple wind farms has been considered.

### **3 CONCLUSIONS AND PROFESSIONAL OPINION**

- 3.1 I have reviewed the applicants LVIA, undertaken my own desktop review of the proposal and undertaken site work.
- 3.2 Overall, I find the LVIA to be a robust assessment which reaches reasonable conclusions.

- 3.3 Whilst there can be degree of subjectivity to an assessment for a proposal of this nature, influenced by ones individual opinion on the artwork, the LVIA provides transparent and objective analysis based on best practice guidance.
- 3.4 The dichotomy between the proposal being intended to be a visual landmark (and hence highly visible), and the desire for it to appear sensitively in views across the landscape and not result in any significant impacts has been well considered. This is done with reference to the materials and overall design, the nature of visibility, and the surrounding landscape context.
- 3.5 Finally, it is my professional opinion that it would be difficult to sustain an objection on landscape grounds at appeal, if the scheme were refused.