



Blacker Green Lane, Silkstone

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It is proposed to erect a dwelling of exceptional architectural quality on a site next to Blacker Dam just off Blacker Green Lane, near Silkstone. The site is located within the Green belt in Barnsley District Council's Local Development Plan.
- 1.2 In order to assess how the proposed dwelling would affect the landscape character of the locality and which views, if any, would be affected, CF Landscape were appointed to conduct a Landscape and Visual Appraisal of the scheme.
- 1.3 This appraisal looks at the landscape character in the local context, identifies sensitive receptors and analyses the potential impact the development will have on the local landscape and those who use it. The conclusions of the report have also informed the design to ensure that its impact on its surroundings is minimised and that key elements of the landscape are reflected in the design.
- 1.4 In assessing landscape and visual impact, the area to be studied, the 'study area', generally approximates to the area from which the proposals may be visible. In this case the proposals site is located in the bottom of Lindley Dyke valley, thus it is this valley form that defines the study area. It is limited by Silkstone Common to the south-east and Silkstone to the north-east, with the western boundary towards Hoylandswaine less easily defined but limited by the valley landform and by significant woodland blocks.

This report should be read in conjunction with the following documents all found at the end

- Appendix One –Photographic views
- Landscape Context and Key for Distant Viewpoints. Drawing no PE/S/441/1
- Key for Close Viewpoints . Drawing no PE/S/441/2
- Landscape Sections. Dwg no PE/S/441/3
- Landscape Proposals. Dwg no PE/S/441/4

The main architectural design information can be found in the architect's drawings and Design Statement.

2 THE PROPOSALS

- 2.1.1 Full details of the proposals can be found on the architects drawings, but for ease of reading the proposals are described briefly here. Final details were guided by the results of this report.
- 2.1.2 Essentially the proposal is to create a single dwelling of simple rectangular form that is cantilevered from the top of the bank out over the mill race stream that will help to power the house. The main living quarters will be in the upper storey that will be set at the current ground level resulting in a 3m high, x 23m long x 9m wide visible structure. Below this will be an undercroft, including parking and utilities then a small hydropower plant room beneath the undercroft. The undercroft and plant room are set into the hillside so only the south-west elevation of these lower levels will be visible from the stream bed and possibly glimpsed from the lakeside to the south.
- 2.1.3 The house will be located amongst the existing trees and woodland on site, which will all be retained, and protected during construction.
- 2.1.4 The above ground structure will be clad with corten steel panels. These will be of a 'weathered steel' colour and texture. The south-western elevation overlooking the stream will be mainly glass. A timber board walk will wrap around the south-west and south-east elevation.
- 2.1.5 Access to the property will be from Blacker Green Lane using the existing field gate entrance. All hedgerow trees will be retained. The access road dips down slightly from Blacker Green Lane to the main building, then access to the undercroft is achieved down a steeper ramp. Visitor parking will be located in the undercroft along with access to the garage area. The main pedestrian access will be direct from the roadside gateway beside a water feature that will reflect the historic and current use of channelled water.
- 2.1.6 The magnitude of the proposals will be small, occupying only a small part of an area of old playing field land and car parking that is now largely overgrown with young sycamore saplings. Only the upper storey will be visible above ground level thus the house will be seen as a single storey structure. As parking will be below ground level and the outdoor living space concentrated at the southern end of the building, visible 'domestic clutter' will be minimal. In summary, the scale of the building and

its elevation in relation to current ground levels, render the magnitude of the proposals very low.

3 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

3.1 National context

3.1.1 Natural England has identified a series of National Character Areas for the whole of England and Wales. The site lies within the National Character Area 38, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire Coalfield. This is described as *'A generally low-lying area, with hills and escarpments above wide valleys, the landscape embraces major industrial towns and cities as well as villages and countryside. Over half of the NCA (64 per cent) is currently designated as greenbelt land; this maintains some distinction between settlements and represents areas that are often under pressure for development and changes in land use.'* The study area represents the more rural aspects of this landscape and it forms an *'open area between settlements'* typical of this NCA. Proximity to towns such as Barnsley and smaller settlements such as Silkstone, Hoylandswaine and Penistone are an important influence on the landscape character of the study area although closeness to the more open landscape of the Southern Pennine Fringe National Character Areas to the west also influences the landscape character. The study area is somewhat transitional between the more densely populated areas of the coalfield area to the east and the upland pastures to the west.

3.2 Local context

3.2.1 The site lies within Barnsley Borough Council administrative area. In the Local Development Framework – Preferred Options Oct 2005, the site is located within Green Belt. No other specific designations indicating a particular landscape, ecological or historic value pertain to this site or its immediate surroundings.

3.2.2 From Barnsley Borough Council's Landscape Character Assessment of 2002 the site falls within a landscape character zone identified as 'E1: West Barnsley Settled Wooded Farmland.' The key characteristics identified for this area, described below, are representative of the study area.

- *Gently rolling landform with hills and broad valleys.*
- *Small, medium sized and large woodlands, mainly deciduous and some coniferous.*
- *Substantial areas of intact agricultural land, both in arable and pastoral use.*
- *Irregularly shaped small, medium sized and large fields bounded by hedgerows, stone walls and fences.*
- *Stone farmsteads, often with large modern outbuildings.*

- *Villages and hamlets set in open countryside.*
- *Large stone country houses set within designed parkland landscapes.*
- *Urban encroachment visible to the east, outside the character area.*

3.2.3 The proposals site is located within the valley formed by Lindley Dike flowing from the high ridge to the south west, in a north-easterly direction towards Silkstone then beyond to the River Dearne. The stream has been damned to form a small mill pond known as Blacker Dam. The proposals site is at the north-eastern end of the dam.

3.2.4 The valley is one of several flowing generally to the north-east dividing rolling farmland between them. The farmland consists of medium sized fields of both arable and pasture divided by intact hedgerows. Large blocks of woodland to the west are defining features of the landscape as are the wooded valley bottoms, particularly that enclosing Blacker Dam and extending north-eastwards towards Silkstone. The village of Silkstone Common lies above the steep southern valley slopes whilst the northern slopes are less steep rising towards the farmstead of Warren Royd. Probably due to the gradients, the southern part of the valley is overlain with pastoral fields sometimes crossed by lines of vegetation indicating former mineral rail lines, whilst the northern valley side is one of rich arable farmland. There are numerous horse related features, stables, menages etc., on the less productive land to the south around the edges of Silkstone Common.

3.2.5 To the north, the town of Silkstone is quite well enclosed by woodland along its southern edges, made up mainly of the woodland that follows the A628 along the valley bottom towards Noblethorpe and beyond to the west. As well as woodland, the area between Silkstone and the site is one of mixed residential and agricultural land-uses. The old farmstead of Woolley Manor Farm with its large modern farm buildings is typical of the wider landscape character, but in addition to this conglomeration of agricultural buildings are houses, usually with extensive gardens, spread out along Blacker Green Lane. This an incursion of the domestic urban form into the rural area although it is quite well mitigated by the woodland.

3.3 Site Landscape Character.

3.3.1 The proposals site is a level area of made-up land above the mill race on the northern edge of Blacker Dam. This area is annotated as a 'playing field' on maps up until 1978 and it is likely it was built up to provide a level playing surface and a small car parking area for fishermen or sportsmen. Whilst some of the site is grassland or old stone surfacing, bramble and young trees are encroaching from the

perimeter which, if left to natural regeneration, will lead to the site becoming encompassed by the larger woodland of the valley bottom. Some mounds of rubble or waste stone are evident on site. The roadside boundary is part of the hedgerow boundary along Blacker Green Lane, much overgrown. There are mature road side trees of good stature in this hedgerow.

- 3.3.2 The character of the site is strongly determined by the proximity to Blacker Dam, both the fishing pond and the structures built to retain the water and use it for power generation. The water outfall from the dam (the mill race, previously used to power a wheel), is on its northern edge where it flows eastwards, across the face of the dam, to re-join the natural stream in its gentle wooded valley flowing towards the north-east. The mill race ran within a constructed stone channel. Only parts of the stone channel remain but where it has disappeared a very steep sided valley confines the stream.
- 3.3.3 Being part of the woodland of the valley bottom and Blacker Dam, the site has a strong woodland character. Its character is also influenced by the historical water features of the dam and associated stone built structures. However the mounds of waste material and, to a lesser extent, the density of the young saplings confer a slight air of neglect on the site.

3.4 Landscape quality and sensitivity

The quality of the landscape of the study area is influenced positively by the intact and cohesive nature of the agricultural fields and woodland that form a strong, well maintained rural gap between small towns and villages. The potential negative impact of urban features such as roads and new housing is generally well contained by woodland and landform. There are indications of a degenerating interface between settlement and open countryside in the form of extensive new housing and equestrian land uses on the edge of Silkstone Common and to a lesser extent the spread of housing outward from Silkstone (and large farm development) along Blacker Green Lane. Overall the landscape quality is good.

Due to its value as a rural hinterland to towns and villages, the landscape will be sensitive to changes of an urban nature, or any that dilute the integrity of the landscape pattern of fields and woodlands. However developments of a similar type and scale to those that are already represented in the landscape could be accommodated with little effect on landscape character. Despite being of rural character the landscape is relatively enclosed by the combination of landform and woodland, so there are few long views. Thus new developments sited within or

against woodland or those at low points of the landscape could be accommodated without impairment to the landscape, due to their low visibility.

Although the landscape is generally of a medium sensitivity to change, particular that of an urban nature, it would have a low sensitivity to small scale changes, well sited within woodland or at low points.

4 VISIBILITY

4.1 General

- 4.1.1 The area was visited on 21st Jan 2016 to assess visibility of the proposals from publically accessible areas. As this is a winter assessment it represents a 'worst case' scenario. The views will change in the summer when the significant levels of woodland will provide more screening.
- 4.1.2 Due to the valley bottom position, nestled amongst woodland, the visibility of the proposed building is low. Potential views from the more open land higher up the valley sides have been investigated but views of the site were obscured by woodland, minor variations in landform or features such as hedgerows in the foreground. (See Views 8, 9, 10, 11). There is a potential view from the footpath near Royd Hill Farm (View 9), where the bridge over the mill race is visible, but it is unlikely the proposed building of muted colours will be discernible.
- 4.1.3 There are close views of the proposed building from Blacker Green Lane and from the footpath around Blacker Dam. These are analysed below.

4.2 From Blacker Green Lane

- 4.2.1 Blacker Green Lane is used for vehicular access to a scattering of farms and properties, fishermen, and by walkers accessing the dense network of public footpaths in the area, including a bridleway link to the Trans Pennine Trail. Whilst vehicle users will not be very sensitive to changes in the views, walkers will be highly sensitive to changes as appreciation of the views is a major part of their reason for walking. For fishermen, appreciation of views is important but is not their main reason for their activity, thus they are moderately sensitive to changes
- 4.2.2 Blacker Green Lane is bounded by hedgerows and hedgerow trees forming a visually enclosed lane. It opens out at the fisherman's access car park about 100m south of the site but is otherwise tree or woodland lined. The mature hedgerow trees are important features of the views with the somewhat overgrown thorn and holly hedge plants. In the summer it is likely views of the site will be obstructed completely with the exception of through the gateway, but the hedgerow has become leggy and there will be limited views through the gaps in winter from the road. (View 1)

4.2.3 From the gateway the view will be of a single storey building, extended by a perforated metal screen, set within grassland. The metal screen will prevent views of access to the undercroft beyond. There will be no visible residential features other than the upper storey of the building itself and the access road. The access and visible surroundings to the building will be of reinforced grassland, thus the building will appear to be set on a grassland clearing, extending towards woodland in the background. Some of the grassland will wear where vehicles run most frequently to expose some crushed stone surfacing creating an informal track towards the undercroft entrance. A gate is proposed at the entrance that will reflect the simplicity and materials of the building, but also the agricultural or country estate type gates of the locality. This will limit the views in, but not prevent them.. As this is a very close view the proposals will occupy a large proportion of the view thus will result in a substantial change. The partially derelict quality of the current view will be removed and replaced with a bold, simple structure. This will add a dominant feature of visual interest. Whilst it will introduce a built form to a natural, woodland view, the colours and textures of the proposed building should complement those of the surrounding woodland and the structure itself will provide a sculptural feature of interest improving the quality of the view. (View 2)

4.2.4 A similar situation will occur with views from Blacker Green Lane to the north of the site but only glimpses of the building will be afforded through gaps in the hedgerows. The access road, cars or other domestic features will not be visible. Thus, although the introduction of a building will be a substantial change due to its proximity to the viewer the effect on the view will be much reduced by the hedgerow in the foreground. (View 3)

4.2.5 From Blacker Green Lane to the south of the site partial views of the building may be obtained. The woodland trees between the viewer and the site will be unaffected by the proposals and thus will screen the building, possibly entirely in the summer months but allowing glimpses of it throughout the winter. Once the building is complete the trees will remain the dominant feature of the view but the regular form will be glimpsed through them. This will represent only a minor change to the view. Although the form of the building will be at odds with the current woodland view, the colours and textures of the building will be complementary to the woodland colours and the partial views behind trees will provide a feature of interest. (View 4)

4.3 From footpath around Blacker Dam.

4.3.1 Blacker Dam is in private ownership and is used by members of Leeds Fishing Club. There is a footpath around the Dam for use of fishermen, but this is not a public right of way. As it is not publically accessible it should not be given as much weight as

views from public footpaths, roads or residential properties. People using this footpath are fishermen for whom enjoyment of views is important but is not the main reason for their visit. Thus they are less sensitive to changes in the view than people for whom enjoyment of the views is the main reason for their activity.

4.3.2 From the middle and upper (south-western) parts of the lake the house will be unimportant in views due to distance and screening by foreground or other intervening trees. Thus only on the northern part of the footpath will the proposed house have an effect on views, although even on this part of the path there are substantial groups of rhododendron that will screen views years round.

4.3.3 The proposed structure will be visible through the trees from closer viewpoints on the footpath. (Views 5, 5a, 6 and 7). It will be a solid regular feature in an otherwise fluid view of trees, thus will introduce an incongruous form to the view, but of one of similar colours and textures to the woodland that dominates these views. The sharp contrast between the form of the building and that of the woodland will present an eye-catching feature made subtle by colours and textures. The closer the viewpoint the more dominant the house will be in the view but although the effect will be quite strong, its sculptural form of a structure 'floating' on the land will add interest to the view in a unique manner.

4.3.4 Thus the effect of the proposals on these views will be moderate increasing to major at closer viewpoints and through gaps in the tree cover. The introduction of an interesting sculptural form increases the appeal and quality of the views thus the effect will be beneficial. Overall there will be a beneficial, moderate to major effect on these views.

5 EFFECT ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND VISUAL AMENITY

- 5.1 In broad terms the character of this wooded farmland landscape will not be affected by the proposals. The scale of the development is insignificant when compared with the broad scale of the wider landscape.
- 5.2 The landscape is of good quality and of low sensitivity to small changes well sited amongst woodland or at low points within the landscape.
- 5.3 On a local scale the proposals will contribute in a very minor way to the on-going extension of the urban edge of Silkstone along Blacker Green Lane, adding to the residential features, but their positioning within woodland, behind hedgerows and largely below ground level will result in a much lower effect than the current houses on Blacker Green Lane.
- 5.4 Due to the small scale, and low visibility amongst woodland, the effect on landscape character is mainly restricted to the part of Blacker Green Lane adjacent to the site and the footpath around Blacker Dam. The distinctive structure will have a very localised effect on landscape character within this area but its scale, positioning of living areas and use of materials render its effect very minor.
- 5.5 The proposals are for a single dwelling, but one of exceptional design. The potential physical impact of the dwelling is significantly reduced by being built into the landform presenting only a single visible storey. In addition, all car parking is set below ground level, leaving a 'clutter-free' area around the building. The solid and regular form of the proposed dwelling will contrast strongly with the woodland, but the subdued colours and texture will reflect those of its surroundings. It will introduce a strongly defined feature into the imprecise interface between the woodland edge and roads or buildings.
- 5.6 The simplicity of the design of the area surrounding the building reflects the building form, but also utilises the natural elements of the locality; the building will appear to float on a simple wildflower grassland surrounded by woodland. The proposed strengthening of hedgerows and young self-set woodland will also reinforce the natural character and structure of the site. The grass, stone, woodland and hedgerows used externally will reflect the natural features of the site and its surroundings. In addition the limited use of stone and water around the building will reference the industrial heritage. Thus the proposals are entirely appropriate for the area, utilising and

enhancing the defining features of the wooded valley with historic water power character.

- 5.7 The proposals will only be visible from very close viewpoints, where the building will play a significant role in views. The building will form a juxtaposition with the surrounding natural forms and as such will be a feature of significant focal interest. The bold degree of contrast between the solid, simple shape with the shifting, feathery foliage of the woodland will provide a unique sculptural feature of interest that will enhance views. From some viewpoints it will appear to be floating amongst the trees.
- 5.8 Artwork designed with reference to a particular landscape and carefully located within that landscape can increase the viewer's enjoyment of both the sculpture and the landscape, as evidenced by art installations at Yorkshire Sculpture Park and similar outdoor art venues, as well as more intimate or urban spaces exhibiting art within the public realm generally. In a similar fashion the sculptural form of the proposed building will enhance the local landscape character, and the enclosed woodland, mill race and valley form will provide a landscape setting that will enhance the building.
- 5.9 Apart from the direct view from the Blacker Green Lane access, views will be limited by trees with only glimpses obtained from the footpath around the lake. The scale of the effect on close views will be moderate to major, due to proximity. However the building will provide a unique sculptural feature of interest that will enhance the viewer's experience, thus will be a positive addition to the views.

APPENDIX ONE - PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEWS

View 1. *Blacker Green Lane looking south.*



View 2. Site through gateway.

Approx outline of building shown in dark green



View 3. *Site from Blacker Green Lane- north.*

Some glimpses of proposed building through gaps in hedge.



View 4. *From Blacker Green Lane, south*

Approx outline of building



View 5. From Lake footpath, on bridge near fishermen's car park.



Approx house outline

View 5a. From Lake footpath, north

Approx house outline



View 6. *From Lake footpath, north-east.*



Approx house outline

View 7. *From Lake footpath, south-east.*

Approx house outline shown in green



View 8. *From Above Royd Hill Farm on track (PROW).*



View 9. From footpath north of Royd Hill Farm (PROW).



View 10. *From northern edge of Silkstone Common*

Site hidden by woodland



View 11. *From footpath near Warren Royd Farm*

Site hidden by woodland

