TAKELEY STREET ACTION GROUP (TSAG)
REGULATION 25 FORMAL PLANNING REPRESENTATION

OBJECTION - LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

Planning Application: Land North of Taylors Farm

Application Reference: UTT/25/2786/OP

Local Planning Authority: Uttlesford District Council

Submitted by:
Takeley Street Action Group (TSAG)
A local residents' action group representing +650 residents of Takeley and neighbouring towns and villages.

This document forms part of a coordinated set of technical objections submitted by TSAG in response to the above planning application.

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Formal Written Objection

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This representation is made in the public interest and is intended to assist the Local Planning Authority, statutory consultees and members of the Planning Committee in reaching a lawful, informed and sound planning decision.

Contents

Executive Summary

This objection demonstrates that the visual evidence relied upon within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and subsequent Regulation 25 submissions does not provide a reliable basis upon which to assess the true landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

The applicant's principal photomontages are materially misleading. One relies upon vegetation that will need to be removed to facilitate the proposed access road and filter lane, whilst another has been taken from a location that does not represent the residential properties most affected by the development. As a result, the visual impact of the proposal upon nearby residents has not been properly demonstrated.

Furthermore, despite the LVIA acknowledging that residential occupiers are highly sensitive visual receptors, no visualisations, wireframes or photomontages have been provided from the rear gardens, living rooms or first-floor windows of the homes directly adjoining the site. The Council is therefore being asked to assess the impact on those residents most affected by the development without being shown how the proposal would actually appear from their homes.

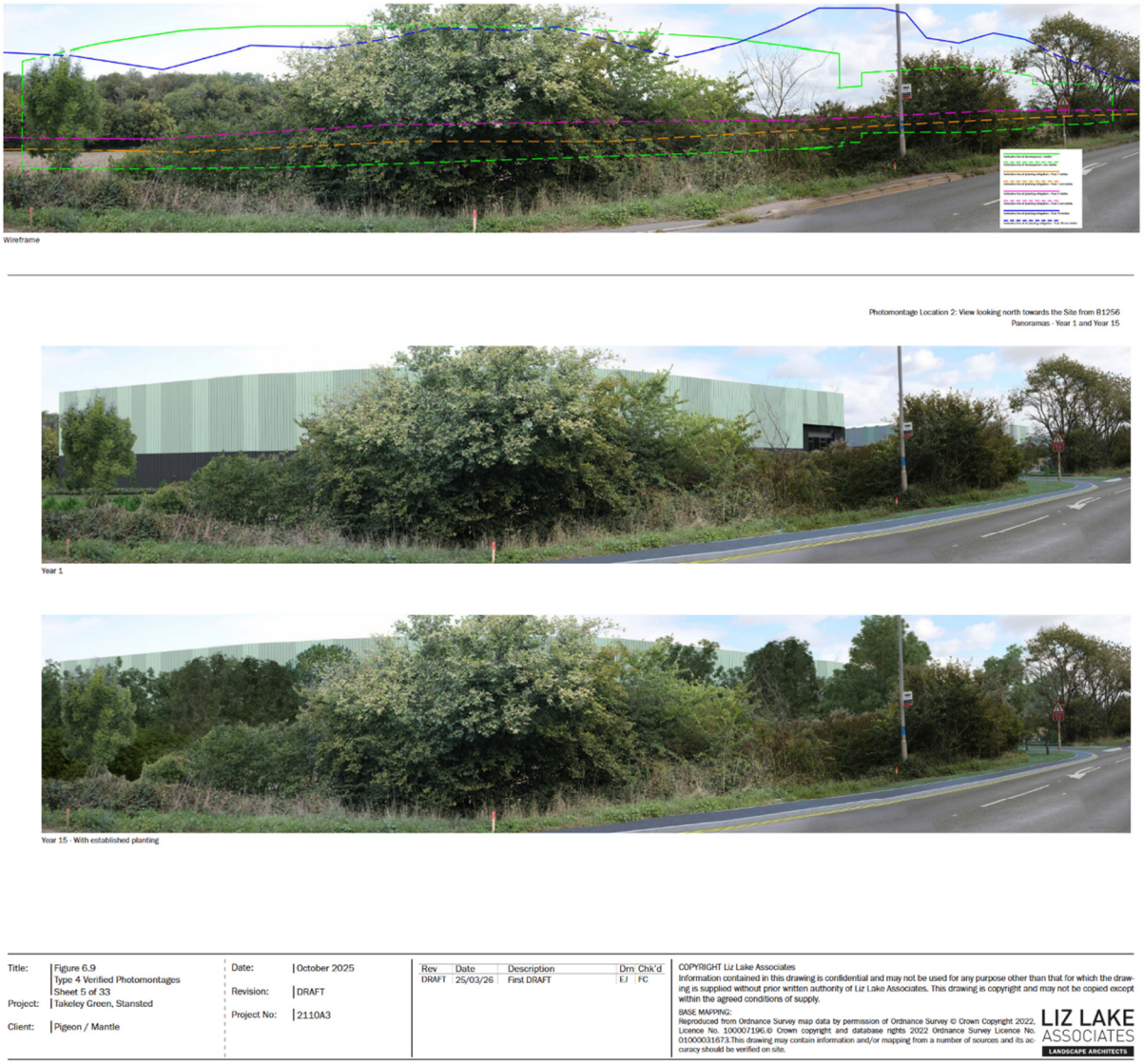
The proposed bunding has now been confirmed as being less than 1 metre in height, yet no evidence has been provided to demonstrate how a bund of this scale would effectively screen warehouse buildings of up to 21 metres in height. The visual evidence also relies heavily upon future tree growth and Year 15 summer visualisations, whilst providing little evidence of the likely visual impact during winter months when the effectiveness of vegetation screening is at its lowest.

For the reasons set out within this representation, the visual evidence submitted by the applicant should be afforded little weight when assessing the landscape and visual effects of the proposal.

Section 1 - Additional Sections.

PHOTOMONTAGE 1 – SCREENING VEGETATION SHOWN WILL BE REMOVED FOR THE PROPOSED FILTER LANE

Pages 4 & 5 of *'EIA - VOL 1A 10 FIG 6.9 - TYPE 4 VISUALISATIONS (WIREFRAME AND RENDERED)'* by Liz Lake Associates contains one of the most important visualisations submitted in support of this application. It is intended to show how the proposed warehouses will appear from Takeley Street after 1 year and after 15 years.



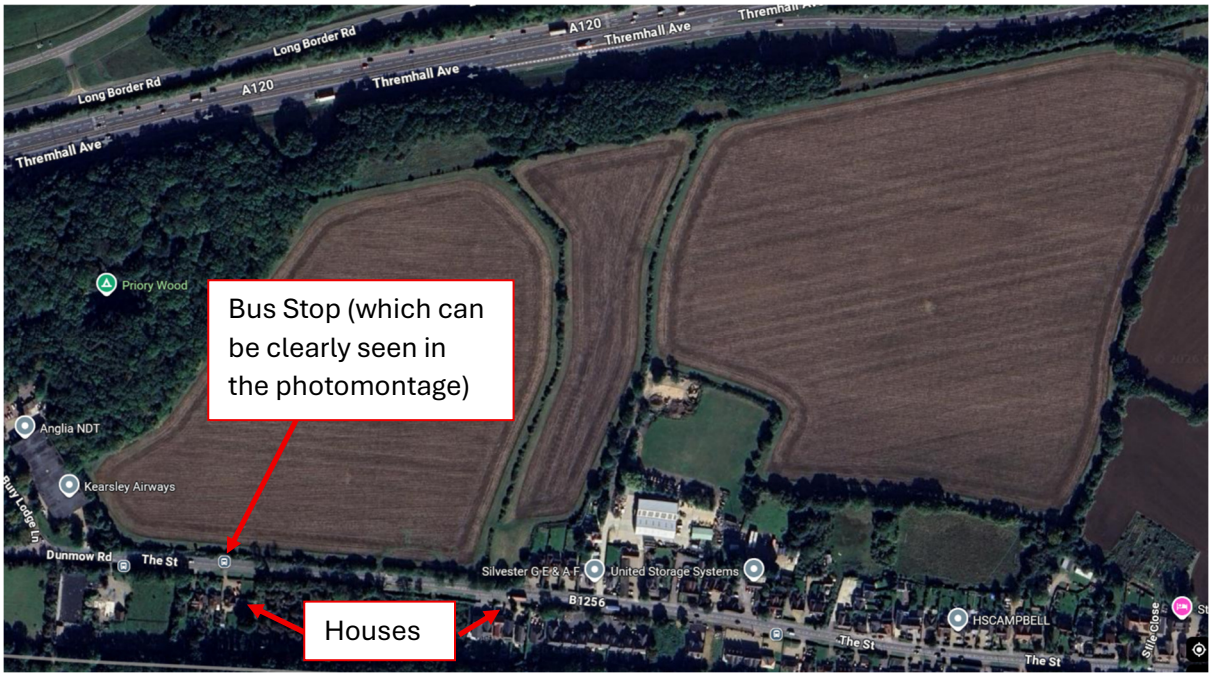
This image is one of the most important visualisations submitted in support of the application, as it is intended to demonstrate the impact of the development on the character of the area and on the residential properties directly opposite the site. The trees in the foreground appear disproportionately large relative to the proposed warehouses, understating the true scale of the development and further undermining the reliability of the visual assessment.

However, both the Year 1 and Year 15 visualisations are materially misleading. The vegetation shown screening the warehouses cannot remain in place because the proposed access road and filter lane are to be constructed through this area. As a result, the photomontages and the wireframes fail to accurately represent the development that is being proposed. The dashed

Green line “Indicative Line of Development – Not Visible” is incorrect. The reality is that the warehouse will be visible in it’s entirety from this viewpoint.

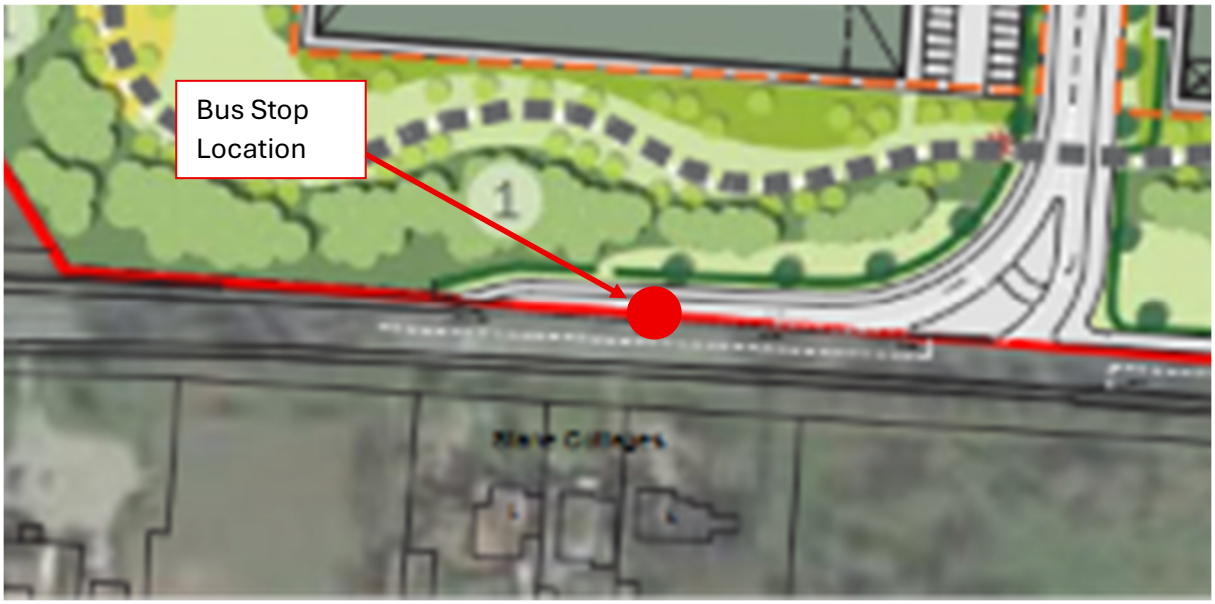
This document clearly demonstrates that the visualisations contained within “EIA - VOL 1A 10 FIG 6.9 - TYPE 4 VISUALISATIONS (WIREFRAME AND RENDERED)” do not provide a reliable basis upon which to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposal and should therefore be afforded little or no weight in the determination of this application.

Using the Bus Stop clearly displayed in the ‘Liz Lake Associates’ picture we can determine the location of the Photomontage vantage point on the aerial image below.



The ‘REVISED DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT’, Page 37, displays an aerial shot of the site. Using the houses directly opposite the bus stop as a marker, we can confirm the location is exactly where the filter lane into the site is to be built.

If we zoom in, we can again determine the location of the Bus Stop in relation to the residential property and the proposed filter lane of the development.



Using Google Street View we can confirm the Bus Stop is located directly opposite the driveway of the residential property.

We can clearly see from the images above that the proposed filter lane starts opposite the group of three houses. As there is insufficient space within the existing public highway, the filter lane must be constructed on the developer's land. As a result, the trees and vegetation shown in the photomontage will have to be removed to make way for the new access road and filter lane.

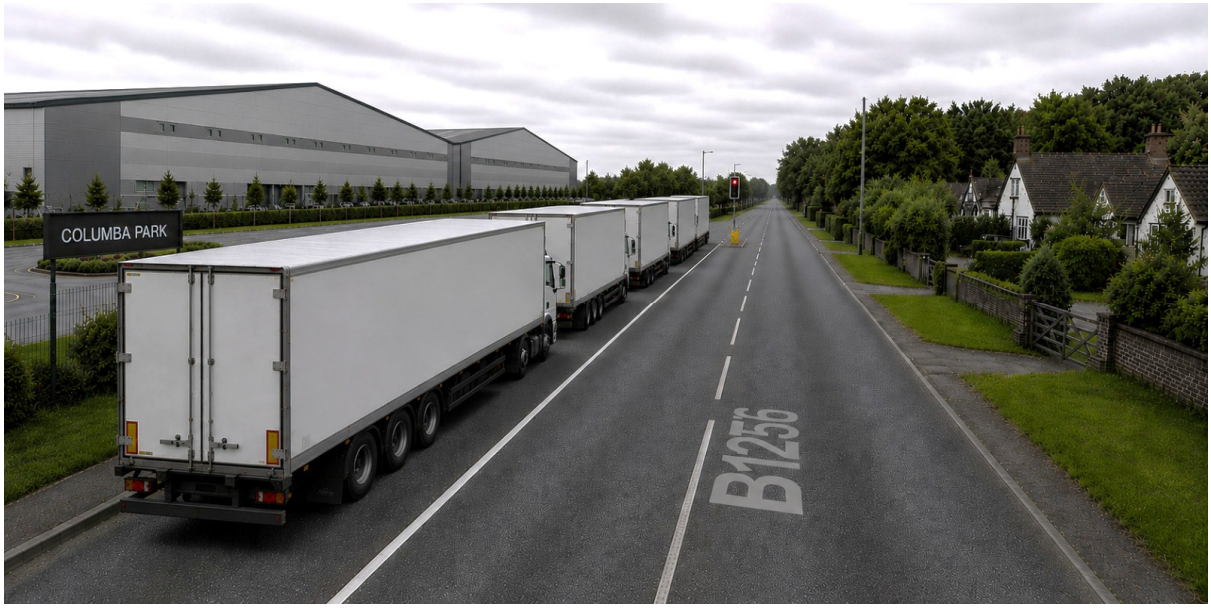
Furthermore, the applicant's assessment makes no reference to the substantial drainage ditch that runs along this section of the site boundary. The ditch is approximately 10–12 feet deep and would require culverting in order to facilitate construction of the proposed filter lane and access works. This further demonstrates that the vegetation and landscape features shown within the

photomontage cannot remain in their current form and that the true extent of the engineering works required has not been properly reflected within the visual assessment.

In the "Year 1 Visualisation" shown above, the existing vegetation provides a substantial amount of screening between the road and the proposed warehouses. However, as demonstrated above, this area of vegetation will need to be removed to accommodate the proposed filter lane and access works. The photomontage therefore relies upon screening that will no longer exist once the development is constructed.

Furthermore, the small single-lane turning shown within the visualisation is not representative of the junction proposed by the applicant. The main access and filter lane are to be constructed further along the road and occupy a significantly larger area than is depicted in the photomontage. As a result, the visualisation understates both the extent of vegetation loss and the visibility of the proposed warehouse development.

The AI illustration below provides a more realistic representation of the proposed filter lane, the resulting loss of roadside vegetation, and the visibility of the warehouse development from both Takeley Street and the homes directly opposite the site.



(AI Illustrative image showing the likely effect of removing the roadside vegetation required for the proposed access road and filter lane. Not to scale)

It is also noted that the baseline photographs used for the visualisations were taken on 16 and 17 September, when trees and hedgerows would still be carrying full leaf cover. The visualisations therefore begin from a baseline that already benefits from a significant degree of natural screening. No equivalent winter photography or winter visualisations have been provided to demonstrate how the development would appear when deciduous vegetation has

lost its leaves. The Council is therefore being asked to assess the development primarily against a late-summer and summer scenario rather than a year-round assessment.

PHOTOMONTAGE 2 – VIEWPOINT DOES NOT REPRESENT THE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES MOST AFFECTED

Page 8 of the Liz Lake document shows the following picture taken from the viewpoint marked with the red dot below:

This viewpoint has been taken in the middle of the sites 2 access roads. It does not reflect the view experienced by those residents opposite the site emergency access road (see blue dot).

The LVIA itself recognises that residents are highly sensitive receptors, yet this visual assessment fails to be representative of the proposed views to be experienced from residential properties directly opposite the proposed emergency access / local access road.

As a result, the visual impact of the development upon the residents most affected by the proposed emergency access road has not been properly demonstrated. The viewpoint selected by Liz Lake Associates avoids the residential receptors directly opposite the access road and instead assesses a location opposite open land.

It is also noted that the residential properties opposite and adjacent to the site remain heavily pixelated within the visualisation. As these dwellings represent some of the most sensitive receptors affected by the proposal, the Council is again being asked to assess the likely visual impact without being provided with a clear view of the properties most affected.

Section 2 – Failure to assess impact on residential visual amenity.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment fails to properly assess the visual impact of the proposed development upon the residential properties that directly back onto the site.

Whilst the applicant has provided visualisations from roads, public viewpoints and Public Rights of Way, no visualisations, wireframes or photomontages have been provided from the homes that will be most affected by the development.

This is a significant omission.

The LVIA itself recognises that residential occupiers are highly sensitive visual receptors. However, the applicant has not provided a single photomontage from the rear gardens, living rooms or first-floor bedroom windows of the properties backing onto the site.

These properties currently enjoy open views across agricultural land which forms an important part of the rural setting and character of this part of Takeley. For many residents, these views are experienced daily from their homes and gardens.

The open farmland, hedgerows and countryside setting are not separate from the village. They form part of the character of Takeley itself. The relationship between the houses, gardens and open countryside is one of the defining characteristics of this section of The Street and contributes significantly to both residential amenity and local landscape character.

The applicant has not demonstrated how these views would change when replaced by warehouse buildings of up to 21 metres in height, service yards, extensive hardstanding, parking areas, lighting columns and associated industrial infrastructure.

No photomontages have been provided from:

• Rear gardens directly adjoining the site boundary;

• Ground-floor living areas facing the site;

• First-floor bedroom windows overlooking the site; or

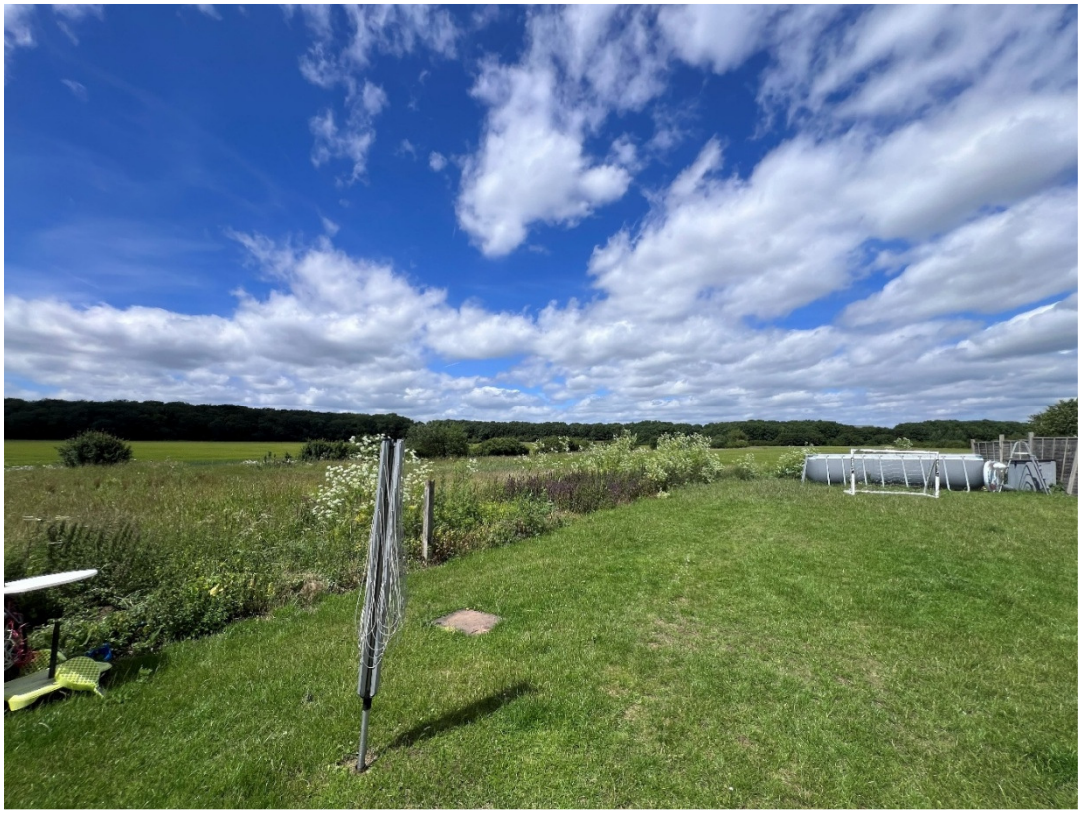
• Representative residential properties experiencing direct views towards the proposed warehouses.

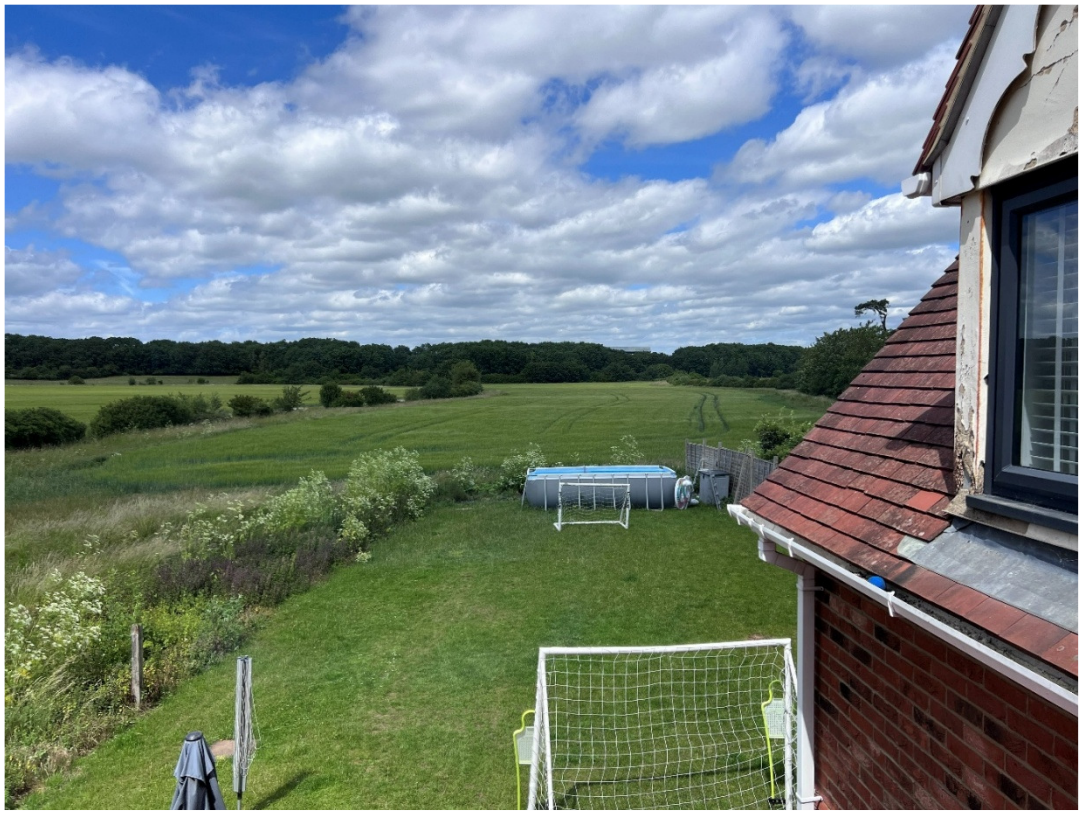
The photographs below illustrate the views currently enjoyed by residents whose homes back onto the site. They demonstrate the open rural character of the landscape and the substantial visual amenity presently experienced from these properties. No equivalent visualisations have been provided by the applicant to demonstrate how these views would appear following construction of the proposed development.

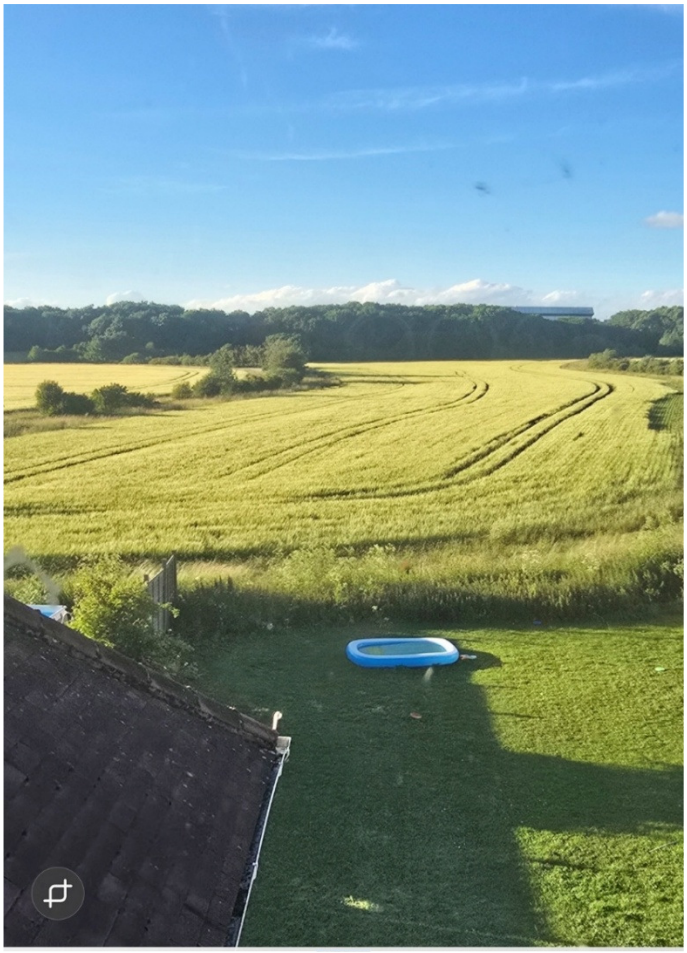
The Council is therefore being asked to assess the visual impact upon dozens of neighbouring households without being shown how the development would actually appear from the homes most affected by it.

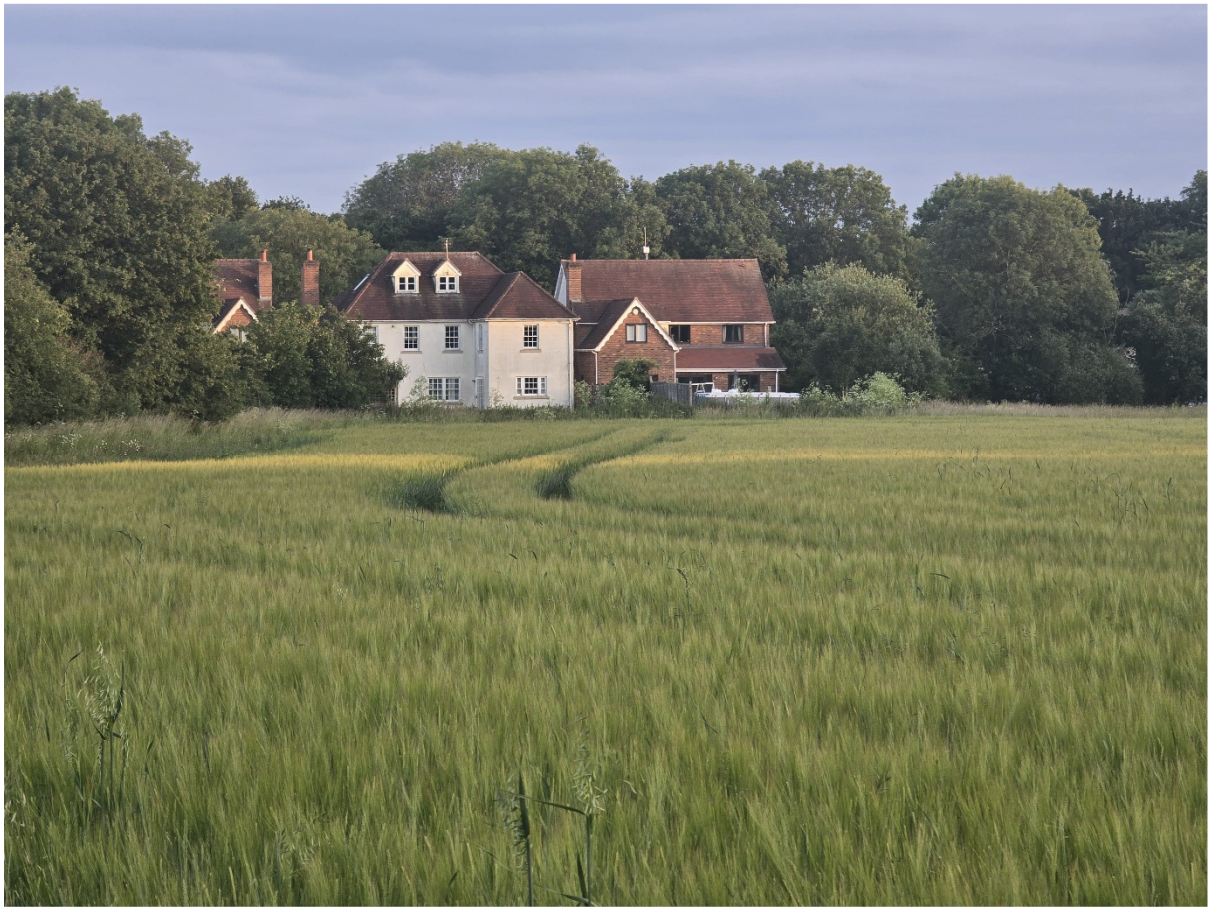
As a result, the Council cannot be satisfied that the likely effects upon residential visual amenity have been properly assessed. The absence of representative residential viewpoints significantly undermines the reliability of the LVIA and its conclusions should therefore be afforded limited weight.

Taken together, the absence of representative residential viewpoints and the deficiencies identified in the submitted photomontages mean that the Council has not been provided with a reliable assessment of the development's likely visual effects upon nearby residents









Section 3 - Confirmation of proposed bund heights and their effectiveness

Whilst a landscape bund formed part of the original Landscape Principles Plan*, it did not specify the height of the proposed bund, referring instead to a "*Proposed bund and woodland buffer – bund height TBC*".*

The *Updated Landscape Principals Plan*** submitted as part of the Regulation 25 submission now confirms that the proposed bund would be less than 1 metre in height**. Whilst this addresses the question of height, the applicant has not demonstrated how a bund of less than 1 metre in height would effectively screen warehouse buildings of up to 21 metres in height.

The visual mitigation illustrated within the submitted sections appears to rely primarily upon woodland planting and future tree growth rather than the bund itself. This is particularly significant given that the effectiveness of such planting is dependent upon many years of growth and establishment.

The Council is therefore being asked to place significant weight on long-term landscape mitigation without being provided with clear evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the proposed bunds themselves. Accordingly, limited weight should be afforded to the claimed effectiveness of the proposed bunding when assessing the landscape and visual impacts of the development.

* https://publicaccess.uttlesford.gov.uk/online-applications/files/1EA4D46B3D5488A4C8B12BABC9A03947/pdf/UTT_25_2786_OP-EIA_-_VOL_1_6_-_LANDSCAPE_AND_VISUAL-4604539.pdf

** https://publicaccess.uttlesford.gov.uk/online-applications/files/C747EEED96A158AFF8950BB80DA7B60C/pdf/UTT_25_2786_OP-EIA_-_VOL_1A_APP_A.6.1_-_UPDATED_LANDSCAPE_PRINCIPLES_PLAN-4723930.pdf

Sections 4 & 5: Visual testing, screening effectiveness and Ancient woodland buffer treatment

Whilst the developer has submitted additional information in response to UDC's request for visual testing of screening effectiveness in the short, medium and long term, the information provided **does not demonstrate** that the proposed screening will be effective.

The visual testing relies heavily upon future tree growth and Year 15 visualisations. No equivalent Year 15 winter visualisations have been provided, despite much of the proposed screening appearing to rely upon deciduous planting which loses its leaves during the winter months. Furthermore, one of the principal visualisations relies upon existing vegetation that will be removed to facilitate the proposed access road and filter lane, whilst no representative visualisation has been provided from the residential properties directly opposite the proposed emergency access road.

The applicant has also identified a 30 metre Ancient Woodland buffer and proposed landscape planting adjacent to Priory Wood. However, the submitted information largely demonstrates the existence of a buffer rather than its effectiveness. The proposed development comprises warehouse buildings of up to 21 metres in height immediately adjacent to the Ancient Woodland buffer. Whilst the submitted plans show woodland planting and landscape treatment, the effectiveness of much of the proposed screening appears to be dependent upon many years of future planting growth and establishment.

The Council is therefore being asked to place significant weight on a best-case summer scenario without being shown the likely year-round visual impact of the development. It is also being asked to assume that proposed planting and buffer areas will provide effective screening in the future without sufficient evidence to demonstrate that this will be the case. As a result, it remains unclear whether the proposed screening and Ancient Woodland buffer treatment would be effective in the short, medium or long term. Limited weight should therefore be afforded to the conclusions drawn from the submitted visual testing and buffer assessment.

Conclusion

The visual evidence submitted by the applicant should be afforded little or no weight in the determination of this application.

The two principal photomontages and wireframes relied upon by Liz Lake Associates do not accurately represent either the development being proposed or the views likely to be experienced by those residents most affected by it. One visualisation relies upon vegetation that will be removed to facilitate the proposed access road and filter lane and gives undue prominence to foreground vegetation, reducing the apparent scale of the proposed warehouses. The other has been taken from a location opposite open land rather than from the residential properties directly opposite the proposed emergency access road. Furthermore, the residential properties shown within the visual assessment remain heavily pixelated, preventing a clear assessment of the relationship between the proposed development and the neighbouring homes. The wireframes solid & dashed green lines are representative of existing trees and hedges, and not of year 1 when the trees will be removed to make way for the site entry filter lane.

As a result, the true visual impact of the development has not been properly demonstrated. This part of Takeley Street is one of the most prominent and heavily used stretches of road within the village and is the location where the warehouses will be most visible to residents, visitors and passing motorists. The photomontages are therefore important not only in assessing the impact upon nearby residents, but also the impact upon the character of Takeley Street and the wider rural character of the area.

The proposed bund has now been confirmed as being less than 1 metre in height, yet no evidence has been provided to demonstrate how a bund of this scale would effectively screen warehouse buildings of up to 21 metres in height. Similarly, the visual testing relies heavily upon future tree growth, Year 15 summer visualisations and landscape planting that may take many years to become effective. No equivalent Year 15 winter visualisations have been provided.

The information submitted largely demonstrates the existence of mitigation measures rather than their effectiveness. The Council is being asked to place significant weight on best-case summer scenarios and long-term assumptions regarding future landscape growth and establishment without sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the proposed screening would be effective in practice.

Furthermore, the applicant has failed to assess the visual effects upon the most sensitive receptors of all – the residents whose homes directly adjoin the site. No photomontages or visualisations have been provided from rear gardens, living rooms or first-floor windows despite these being the locations from which the development will be experienced on a daily basis for decades to come.

For the reasons set out above, the applicant has failed to provide a reliable assessment of the true landscape and visual effects of the proposal. The Council cannot therefore be satisfied that the proposal would preserve the character of Takeley Street, protect the wider character of the area, safeguard the visual amenity of nearby residents and users of Public Rights of Way, or avoid significant adverse landscape and visual impacts. This weighs heavily against the proposal and conflicts with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework which seek to recognise and protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.