



Registered Charity No 1201884

Transition Wilmslow objection to application 25/11573/FUL by Bellway Homes for full planning permission for residential development on safeguarded land off Cumber Lane, Wilmslow.

Transition Wilmslow is a charity which works to improve the liveability and sustainability of Wilmslow and its surroundings. Transition Wilmslow is part of the national Transition Towns network. Transition Wilmslow recognises the national need to increase housing provision but we would like to see development in appropriate locations and in a sustainable form. During the examination in public of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy we supported housing land allocations in certain locations around Wilmslow but objected strongly to the removal of land from the Green Belt at Cumber Lane/Upcast Lane (LPS 59) and safeguarding that land for future housing development post 2030. Those objections, which also relate to the current application were:

- 1. The land is remote from Wilmslow town centre and cannot be regarded as a 'sustainable extension' of the built-up area.**
- 2. The land is wholly within the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area. Development will damage the integrity of this important and distinctive landscape.**
- 3. There is a strong likelihood that the site includes peatland soils in whole or in part and, if so, housing development is completely inappropriate on the basis of land capability.**

Notwithstanding these objections, site LPS 59 was removed from the Green Belt and safeguarded for future housing development in the

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy¹. This site was first proposed as safeguarded land in the pre-submission core strategy of the Cheshire East Local Plan in November 2013² with very little in the way of justification. Since then, and the adoption of the Cheshire East Local Plan strategy in 2017, there have been significant changes in the policy environment nationally and locally, for example:

- A Green Future: Our 25 year Plan to Improve the Environment, HM Government 2018,
- Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan, October 2019,
- England Peat Action Plan, UK Government, March 2021,
- Becoming a carbon neutral borough by 2045, Cheshire East Council, October 2021,
- Lindow Moss Landscape Partnership, November 2023,
- National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024,
- Climate Change Committee, Seventh Carbon Budget, February 2025

and new knowledge, for example:

- Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment, March 2018,
- Wilmslow Landscape Character Assessment, October 2019,
- Peatlands of Cheshire East: an Assessment of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Biodiversity, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, June 2021

Most recently the report of the Phase 2 Geoenvironmental Assessment by E3P³ submitted with this application has confirmed the extensive presence of deep peat⁴ on the application site (further details follow below).

¹ Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030, Adopted July 2017

² Cheshire East Local Plan, Pre-submission Core Strategy, November 2013

³ Phase 2 Geoenvironmental Site Assessment, E3P for Bellway, February 2025

⁴ Deep peat refers to peat deposits which are > 40cm deep. Source: Natural England (2010) England's peatlands: carbon storage and greenhouse gases (NE257)

Given these changes in policy and understanding we consider that Cheshire East Council should revisit the allocation of site LPS 59 as safeguarded land and return it to the Green Belt.

We now consider the application as submitted by Bellway Homes to which we have a number of specific objections:

- 1) This application is on land safeguarded for future housing development beyond 2030 in the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy. Safeguarded land is intended to provide for development in the long term with a view to protecting the permanence of Green Belt boundaries. This application is premature and should be refused on that basis.**

In the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS), safeguarded land is defined as land between the urban area and the Green Belt, which ensures the long-term protection of the Green Belt *‘by reserving land which may be required to meet longer-term development needs without the need to alter Green Belt boundaries’*. The NPPF⁵ states that *‘planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development’*. The current local plan is valid to 2030 and so this application on safeguarded land at Cumber lane (Site LPS 59) is premature. If the local planning authority finds itself required to make additional land available for development before 2030, beyond that allocated in the CELPS, because of revised government housing targets, that should be part of a comprehensive review of development opportunities. In the event of such a review this land is very likely to be returned to the Green Belt.

Development of this land before 2030 is not only inappropriate, it would be premature and against the spirit and intention of the CELPS and the NPPF. It should be refused on that basis.

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024

- 2) The land is unstable due to presence of peat and may be subject to ground water flooding; it is unsuitable for development. Mitigation measures could involve peat excavation and removal with multiple lorry movements in the local neighbourhood, whilst pump drainage of groundwater during the building phase could impact the stability of surrounding properties and the Lindow End Local Wildlife Site to the west.**

The NPPF states in para 187(e) that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by *‘preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of...land instability.’* Policy SE12 of the CELPS states that *‘where a proposal may be affected by land instability, at the planning stage, developers will be required to provide a report which investigates the extent of stability issues and the possible effect it may have on the development and its future users, the natural and the built environment.’*

The Phase 1 and 2 Geoenvironmental Assessments⁶ prepared by E3P and submitted in support of the application are very helpful in this respect. The site can be divided into two roughly equal sectors. As the E3P reports show, the north west sector is based on glacial till (sand, clay and gravel) and here *‘the highly variable nature of the superficial drift deposits will require detailed consideration. Foundations should be designed with reinforcement to mitigate differential settlement when spanning variable soil matrices’.*

The Phase 2 report also shows that the majority of the south east sector consists of peat between 0.45 and 0.99m deep. As the Phase 2 report says, this represents *‘a significant geotechnical hazard... due to the unacceptable potential for consolidation/total and differential settlement, and ‘where*

⁶ Phase 1 Geoenvironmental Assessment prepared for Bellway by E3P, January 2025; Phase 2 Report op.cit.

peat is identified this will require removal from beneath all areas of proposed external hard standing, service infrastructure and development’. It is unlikely that the excavated peat can be accommodated on site and this implies substantial lorry movements through the local neighbourhood.

Furthermore, *‘where peat remains beneath external areas and gardens, specialist geotechnical engineering solutions, including settlement modelling and analysis will be required. A specialist geotechnical design report must be prepared to ensure that no unacceptable level of settlement affects the development platforms’.*

Drainage of the site is challenging because of the *‘presence of substantial depths of peat across the site as well as varying drift deposits which are not laterally continuous (and) may result in settlement. Recommended that drain runs are designed using steeper gradients and flexible joints to allow for some differential settlement’.* Furthermore, *‘the site is predominantly underlain by c.1-2m of likely low permeability gravelly clay which would preclude the use of infiltration drainage’.* Rainfall intensity is increasing with climate change and ground water flooding of properties is already an issue within the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area.

Water ingress was encountered in many of the trial holes across the site and *‘this may pose issues when undertaking large excavations during the building phase of the site. If local pumping of groundwater is required ... this could cause dewatering of gravels in the surrounding area with structural damage to building structures.’* This could impact not only nearby buildings but also the designated Local Wildlife Site on deep peat at Lindow End (CE 181) which is close to the south west boundary of the proposed development.

3) The NPPF stresses the need to make effective use of land (NPPF Section 112(a)). Peat deposits, such as those on the application site, contain fossil carbon and their disturbance will increase greenhouse

gas emissions contrary to both national and local policy. The application site also makes an important contribution to local amenity and delivers a variety of ecosystem services. Housing development is inappropriate in this location and should be refused.

The NPPF (Section 11) stresses the need to make effective use of land and para 11(b) states that local planning authorities should recognise that *‘some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, **carbon storage** or food production’*. The government’s 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment⁷ emphasises the need to improve soil health and restore and protect our peatlands. The Peat Action Plan for England⁸ states that peatlands provide a wealth of benefits, including carbon capture:

‘Peatlands capture carbon from the atmosphere and then store it as plants only partially decompose under wet conditions. Conversely, degrading peatlands release carbon into the atmosphere. It is estimated that peatlands in England emit approximately 10 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent per year. Healthy peatlands have a net cooling effect on the climate, contributing to the government’s target to achieve Net Zero by 2050’.

The Climate Change Committee provides statutory advice to government on reaching Net Zero. In their Seventh Carbon Budget⁹ they point out that *‘**functioning peatlands in good ecological condition can accumulate carbon over many millennia, but drainage and disturbance can cause these stocks to be released’***. Lowland peatland soils are more emissions intensive than the uplands and in the lowlands the Climate Change Committee is looking for an increase in the area of restored or near natural

⁷ A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, HM Government, 2018

⁸ England Peat Action Plan, UK Government, May 2021

⁹ Climate Change Committee (26 February, 2025) The Seventh Carbon Budget p.195-196.

peatland from the current 9% to reach 31% by 2040, so producing a 12% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

The England Peat Action Plan wants to ensure that the value of peatlands is taken into account when development is considered and stresses the need for planning policies to *‘reflect the importance of managing peatlands and avoiding detrimental climate, water, and biodiversity impacts from development’*. England Peat Action Plan p.24

The importance of peatlands in Cheshire East for managing greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity has been assessed by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust¹⁰. Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) identify substantial scope for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by restoring damaged peatlands, promoting more sympathetic land use (e.g. switching from intensive to extensive grassland management) and reducing peat shrinkage and oxidation by maintaining a high water table. The Council’s own borough-wide carbon neutrality action plan emphasises that, where possible, planning should ensure that *‘new developments support the environment by avoiding construction on sequestering land e.g. greenbelts and peatland’*¹¹.

Back in the 19th century the aim was to drain peatlands to improve agricultural productivity. The imposing Hetlee Farm built on the edge of the application site in 1907 is testimony to the initial success of the Wilmslow (Drainage) Board’s scheme of 1885. However, over time, as a result of drainage the peatlands of the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area have oxidised and shrunk making drainage increasingly difficult¹².

The Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan recognised the special importance of the peatland landscape at Lindow designating the Lindow Moss Landscape

¹⁰ Peatlands of Cheshire East: An Assessment of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Biodiversity, Cheshire Wildlife Trust for Cheshire East Council, June 2021

¹¹ Cheshire East Council (January 2024) Borough-wide Carbon Neutrality Action Plan: 2025-2030 Actions (p.38)

¹² The peat beside the Wilmslow Board manhole cover in Lindow End Local Wildlife Site has shrunk by 70cm since 1885.

Character Area (LCA) as a ‘Historic and Cultural Landscape’ and advocating a landscape scale partnership to secure its conservation, restoration and interpretation. The Lindow Moss Landscape Partnership was established in November 2023 and one of the key aims set out in its 10-year prospectus is to capture and store carbon¹³. A recent survey of peat resources for the Lindow Moss Landscape Partnership suggests that there is still 1-1.5 million cubic metres of peat within the Lindow Moss LCA offering a major opportunity for carbon storage and habitat restoration, along the lines proposed by CWT, the Climate Change Committee and the government’s Peat Action Plan for England.

This applicant has provided a Peat Assessment Report¹⁴ which suggests that *‘there is no theoretical potential for viable restoration of this site due to its current agricultural use, which has significantly altered the peat’s structure and hydrology.’* This report fails to recognise that the site contains a substantial volume of peat which, although somewhat degraded, is actively storing a significant amount of fossil carbon. As the Phase 2 geoenvironmental assessment shows the site is underpinned by an impermeable clay deposit, it is currently not well drained and water saturation levels in the soil are high. This, together with the extensive nature of the agricultural use will inhibit further peat oxidation and shrinkage. Careful management of the water table could promote even more effective carbon storage and sequestration as advocated by CWT and the Climate Change Committee’s Sixth Carbon Budget which would like to see 25% of the lowland grassland over peat soils rewetted by 2035, rising to half by 2050. England’s Peat Action Plan advocates **‘responsible management’** of peat soils, an approach which is greatly relevant to this

¹³ Lindow Moss landscape Partnership – a landscape in recovery, Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside, November 2023

¹⁴ Peat Assessment Report, E3P, March 17 2025

application site. The Peat Action Plan defines 'responsible management' thus:

'Responsible management is management activity that does not seek to re-establish peat habitats but which significantly reduces the impact of using peatland for that purpose (i.e. agriculture). In lowland agricultural peatlands this is likely to involve changed water management and has the potential to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the loss of soil, whilst offering farmers the opportunity to innovate and explore new markets.'

By contrast, the 'mitigation measures' proposed in the applicant's Peat Assessment Report (p.15-16) involve *'excavation of peat in a controlled manner, ensuring the material is carefully handled to prevent unnecessary degradation. This would involve stripping the overburden, excavating the peat in phases, and transporting it to designated receptor areas where it can be stored and reused in a controlled environment.'*

These actions would expose buried peat to the atmosphere and greatly accelerate oxidation of organic matter and release of carbon dioxide. Furthermore, the peat on this site is particularly vulnerable to structural damage, being moderately to highly decomposed, H5 to H7 on the Von Post Scale (Peat Assessment Report p.10). **The development of this land for housing and the damage this will do to the peatland resource cannot be described as 'effective use of land' as required by the NPPF and on this basis the application should be refused.**

- 4) The application site is wholly within the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area. Development will damage the integrity of this important and distinctive landscape which is designated as a 'historic and cultural landscape' in the Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan (Policy TH2). The NPPF recognises the importance of 'protecting and enhancing valued landscapes' (para. 187(a)) and the**

historic environment (para. 203). The proposed development will damage the character of the landscape and impair its enjoyment by visitors and local people against the spirit and intention of the NPPF. The landscape masterplan does not properly respond to ‘sense of place’ as required by CELPS policy SE1 and the development is detrimental to the landscape (CELPS policy SE4). Accordingly, the application should be refused.

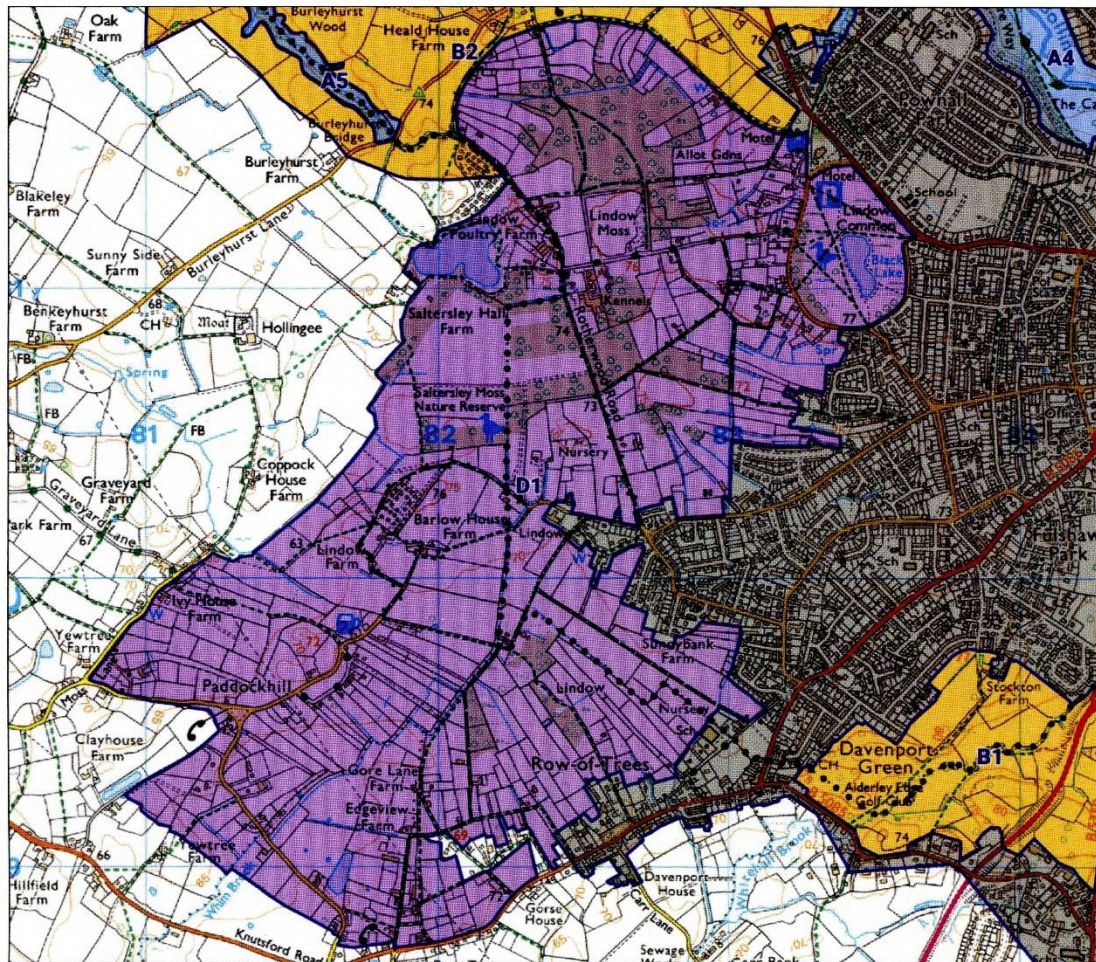
The application site and almost the whole of the safeguarded land (LPS59) is within the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area. The boundary of the Lindow Moss LCA is consistent across three landscape character assessments:

- Cheshire County Council Landscape Character Assessment, November 2008
- Cheshire East Landscape Character Assessment, March 2018
- Wilmslow landscape Character Assessment, August 2018¹⁵

The Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan¹⁶ identifies the Lindow Moss LCA as a ‘historic and cultural landscape’ requiring special protection. Policy TH2 of the Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan states that *‘applications within the Lindow Moss Landscape Character Area should identify, preserve and enhance where possible, the overall historical and cultural significance of his important landscape and not negatively impact on its potential for recreation, education, nature conservation, food production and climate regulation’.* (p.42)

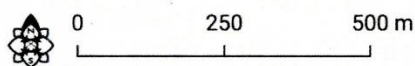
¹⁵ The Wilmslow LCA, prepared in association with Countryside, was published for consultation in August 2018 and formally adopted as part of the Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan in October 2019.

¹⁶ Wilmslow Neighbourhood Plan, Adopted October 10 2019



Wilmslow Landscape Character Assessment

Lindow Moss
Landscape Character Area D1



© Crown Copyright and database right 2017
Ordnance Survey 10003146

Neighbourhood Plan Boundary

Landscape Character Area

Landscape Character Types

Lower Wooded Farmland

Mossland

River Valley

Urban

The

Neighbourhood Plan could not challenge the safeguarding of land at Cumber Lane and the land allocation in the CELPS, but Policy TH2 does state that:

'In advance of any planning permission being granted on the safeguarded land at site LPS59, a full landscape scheme must be drawn up for the site which sets out how development will be sensitively incorporated within the surrounding landscape of Lindow Moss.'(p.42)

The Landscape Impact Assessment submitted with this application recognises the impact of the development on the Lindow Moss LCA and the recreational users of this tranquil landscape (para.4.2, p.3)¹⁷.

A public footpath along Leigh Road (Wilmslow FP1) curves westward to join Clay Lane (Wilmslow FP40). **This footpath is enhanced by a fine avenue of mature Lime trees and it is very pleasing to note that their quality is recognised in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment by Ascerta¹⁸ as ‘prominent feature trees’ and that seven of them will be retained and protected (T20,T23,T24,T25,T26,T27,T29), together with one Horse Chestnut (T19).** Clay Lane continues west into Chorley to become a bridleway (Wilmslow BR 153) which heads south towards Upcast Lane.

The applicant’s Landscape Impact Assessment (Final issue for Planning, April 25; Updated following planning comments, May 2025) recognises the need to strengthen the green infrastructure along the site boundaries, especially alongside the Wilmslow BR 153 bridleway, but the landscape masterplan and proposal maps show little in the way of additional planting or land allocation for green infrastructure along this western boundary. This contrasts with the proposal by Anwyl Homes at the southern end of the safeguarded land which does provide a creative and appropriate landscape treatment for softening the transition from residential development to open countryside. **In fact, the overall scheme by Bellway Homes which pays limited attention to this landscape setting has changed little between the informal consultation in December 2024 and the submitted plans with this application in May 2025. The net effect will be to change a pleasant walk or ride through tranquil countryside into an essentially suburban experience. The application should be refused or substantially redesigned (see Conclusion)**

¹⁷ Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, DEP Landscape Architecture Ltd, May 2025

¹⁸ Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Land Adjacent to Cumber lane, Ascerta, March 2022

5) The application site is remote from Wilmslow town centre and cannot be regarded as a 'sustainable extension' of the built-up area. The application is not compatible with CELPS Policies SD1 and SD2, and should be refused.

The Landscape Impact Assessment refers to the 'fractured edge' of the built-up area and the desire of the planners to tidy this up by removing this land from the Green Belt and allocating it as safeguarded land (LPS 59). The 'fractured edge' actually reflects the fact that this is a peatland landscape with a history of peat extraction going back to the Middle Ages with ground conditions which are inimical to development, and a complex ownership pattern which reflects the apportionment of land for peat working into linear 'moss rooms' which are particularly evident on the early maps at the southern end of LPS 59.

Transition Wilmslow has a particular interest in promoting sustainable development and we welcome the sustainability statement by JSP Sustainability.¹⁹ However, it makes no reference to the transport implications during and after construction which will be damaging to the local area and will increase greenhouse gas emissions. This aspect is covered elsewhere in the application where we suggest that proximity of amenities is significantly over-estimated. This is not a location that is accessible on foot within 15 minutes from main amenities, especially considering the distances to be covered within the estate itself.

Similarly, the sustainability report does not recognise the existence of 'deep peat on the application site and the adverse consequences for greenhouse gas emissions of developing on a peatland site.

¹⁹ Sustainability Statement, Cumber Lane, Wilmslow, JSP Sustainability Ltd, January 2025

Another feature of the development with implications for sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions will be the active drainage and additional water supply. Given the surface flooding risk and inability to incorporate SUDS there will be a material load of water going to an already over-stretched engineered sewage network. On the development site there will be a need for long-term management of pumped controls.

With regard to the energy efficiency of the new houses the proposed walls in particular fall short of what is expected from new house construction. The SAP 10 calculations have been performed based on 2021 regulations (not the 2023 update) and although JSP Sustainability mention the Primary Energy and Fabric Efficiency rates, we note that these are not reported. It is possible that the inclusion of heat pump-based heating (as opposed to gas boilers) would pass the overall Target Emissions criteria, but it is unclear whether the dwellings would meet all the required metrics.

We would expect a feature of any new development that had such a significant impact on the natural environment to contribute towards Cheshire East Council's carbon neutrality plans²⁰. However, in the materials section, the report refers to the BRE's Green Guide to Construction ratings which apparently gives brick and block cavity wall a rating of A+. This is an out-of-date notion: using the RICS approved methodology, our own analysis of semi-detached homes has shown that the upfront embodied carbon (Stages A1-A4) of traditional cavity wall construction is of the order of 3-4 times that of an insulated timber framed dwelling (all other parameters being equal). This is without even considering the carbon storage of timber buildings and end of life (biodegradability).

Given the timing of the proposed development 5 years ahead of its legitimate submission date, the design of the development should reflect expectations for 2030 homes in terms of carbon neutrality and energy

²⁰ Cheshire East Council (January 2024) Borough-wide Carbon Neutrality Action Plan: 2025-2030 Actions (p.20-22)

efficiency, and compensate for the likely emissions from any peat excavation by storing carbon on the site with the use of biogenic construction materials.

Conclusion

Given the special status of safeguarded land, development should not take place within the current local plan period 2010-2030. And if the LPA is mindful to permit development on safeguarded land prior to 2030 this should follow a systematic and comprehensive review of development opportunities across Cheshire East. That would provide an opportunity to revisit the planning status of LPS 59 and to reinstate it in the Green Belt.

If the LPA wishes to approve this application, we suggest it should be subject to significant redesign to protect, so far as possible, areas of deep peat and to strengthen the green infrastructure around the periphery, especially on the western boundary alongside the bridleway (Wilmslow BR 153) where there is scope for a more imaginative design solution. This could, for example, involve wetland creation in the form of a linear Alder Carr woodland alongside the bridleway, rather than an uninspiring attenuation basin, to soften the transition from residential development to open countryside. These measures would have the additional benefit of providing for Biodiversity Net Gain within the application site itself.